

Draft Betasso Landmark

Boulder County Historic Landmark - Nomination Form 9/96

Instructions: Please fill in the following information as completely as possible. County staff will take this information and copy it into our official form. In order to expedite this process, please provide staff with a copy of this file on a diskette. Alternatively, this file can be E-mailed to crllu@boco.co.gov. Please use as much space as necessary to describe your property. Lastly, the instruction manual that accompanies this form explains each category and provides examples. Manuals are available on-line (<http://boco.co.gov/lu/hppage5.htm>) or by mail. If you've consulted the instruction manual, but still have questions, please feel free to contact our office at (303) 441-3930.

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Betasso Ranch
Other Names: Betasso Preserve. Also Walter Blanchard Homestead/Ronald McDonald Ranch/Arthur Crews Ranch/Lewis Lindemuth Ranch

Historical Narrative:

Ranching on Betasso Preserve began when herdsmen drove small herds of cattle into the Sugarloaf Mountain area. They sold dairy products to local families and miners while the animals grazed on the grasses covering the valleys and hillsides.

Around 1907, Walter Blanchard paid a \$10 filing fee to the U.S. Government and filed a claim to homestead on the desired 160 acres. After making improvements to the ranch for five years, he patented the claim and received a deed to the land in 1912.

Blanchard's "quarter section" was known as a "ranch" rather than a "farm" because he specialized in stock raising. Stephen Betasso, a hard-rock miner from Crisman, purchased the small ranch from Blanchard in 1915 and continued the cattle operation.

Beginning in 1924, Betasso's two youngest sons, Richard and Ernest, began to consolidate adjoining ranches with Betasso (Blanchard) Ranch. As a result, the nominated portion of Betasso Ranch is comprised of four consolidated 160-acre ranches. They were settled by the following ranchers: Walter Blanchard in 1912, Arthur Crews in 1920, and Ronald McDonald and Lewis Lindemuth in 1922. Betasso Ranch needed to be large because acreage was required for winter grazing.

Betasso Ranch remained a working cattle ranch until Ernie Betasso sold portions of it to real estate developers to form the Mountain Meadows, Mountain Pines, and Pride of the West subdivisions. The remaining 773 acres, of Betasso Ranch, were sold to Boulder County as open space from 1976 to 1983.

The Betasso Family and Ranch

Stephen Betasso discovered the rancher's paradise in 1915. Bright green bunch grass carpeted the meadows—and surrounding ponderosa pine forest of the already "proved upon" homestead. Spring runoff filled the streams to their banks, and since the nearby mountain peaks were buried under deep snow in winter, there was plenty of water year-round. The area had yet another appealing feature: the mining activity created outside income opportunities for Betasso and his family.

Steve Betasso immigrated to America from Italy in 1883. After working in the coal mines of Pennsylvania, he opted for a change of scenery. Betasso left to work in the coal mines near Louisville and Marshall, Colorado. Tales of Western adventure prompted him to pack his belongings again and set out for the new mining camp of Crisman, Colorado, in Fourmile Canyon. He quickly found work as a timberman-blacksmith in the Logan No. 2 mine. However, during the Silver Crash of 1893 the mine closed down, and Steve decided to return to Italy.

During his absence, the community of Crisman was almost destroyed by the Flood of 1894. After the mines reopened, Steve returned to the area with his new bride, Mary Pastore Betasso. They made their first home in Packer Gulch. Mary gave birth to three children, Raymond, Julius, and Mabel in this house. Later, she gave birth to two more boys, Richard and Ernest, in their second Crisman home. The Betasso children all attended the Crisman school, District #32. Beginning in 1909, the family moved to Boulder for a short time while the three oldest children attended Boulder High School. Dick and Ernie attended the Silver Spruce School, District #33 (El Vado School), at the base of Magnolia Road, after the family moved to the ranch. During this time, there were about twenty-five kids who attended this school, due to a tungsten mining boom in the area.

Betasso continued to work at the Logan No. 2 mine, where there was an amalgamating mill. He also leased the Yellow Pine mine for a short time and worked at Salina at the Ingram mine for awhile. All three mines boasted high grade ore, and Steve made a lot of money leasing the Yellow Pine for royalties.

In 1915, Betasso had a new venture in mind. His initial interest in hard-rock mining was slowly being displaced by cattle ranching. He found an already "improved" homestead site that he liked. He purchased the Blanchard Homestead in February of that year and brought in about "thirteen head of cows." However, he and his two oldest sons, Ray and Julius, continued to work eight-hour shifts at the Dorothy mine in Millionaire Gulch to help supplement the family's income.

Steve and his family lived in the original Blanchard ranch house on weekends for three years while building a larger, more permanent dwelling and barns for livestock. The entire clan lived in the "homestead cabin" during the winter of 1917-18. Together, they gathered local fieldstone and excavated for the new home's

foundation. The bungalow's stone rubble foundation and red brick walls were laid up by a crew, and contractor Nick Fanti, a Boulder bricklayer, and his carpenters did the framing, roof, and finish carpentry. The handsome Craftsman Style bungalow was completed in 1918. An electric generator house, of matching red brick, was built behind the main house.

A study of the only surviving Betasso Ranch account journals, dating from 1901 to 1922, reveal that Steve Betasso purchased bull services and bought hay and cattle.

Steve and Mary were thrifty planners and literally "lived off the land." They had their own milk cows, and Mary would make cheese, butter, and other milk products for the family to eat. She baked her own bread and always had a big garden, where potatoes were the main crop. Mary kept a pig for sausage making and rendering lard. She did a lot of canning and she even canned beef, although the family had "a lot of meatless days." In the poultry houses, north of the main house, Steve and Mary kept 100-200 chickens for poultry and eggs.

Shopping was a major event. Through the year, Steve and Mary budgeted to buy the family's groceries, winter supplies, and clothing. Even though the Sugarloaf Store was barely two miles away and provided the area with everything from parasols to yard goods, the Betassos preferred to shop Boulder. They made a pilgrimage to the city two or three times a year for supplies. It was a family tradition. There, they purchased things like flour, salt, sausage, ax handles, kerosene, and 20-pound boxes of pasta. They bought "tomitische," pepperoni, and tomato sauce in large quantities. Since the family was Italian, they ate "lots of spaghetti." They bought three or four boxes of pasta at a time. They would also buy 400-500 pounds of flour and several hundred pounds of sugar at a time. They hauled the supplies up to the ranch by team and a wagon.

Dances were the favorite pastimes of the area's hard-working miners, ranchers, and mountain men. They would dance at Sugarloaf one Saturday night, and the next Saturday night they would dance at Wall Street or Salina. The Friday night dances were usually held at Magnolia. Dances were held on Thursday nights at the Templeton Dance Hall in Boulder.

The Sugarloaf dances, a social highlight, became a tradition. The neighbors came in buggies, spring wagons, bobsleds, and horses. The Sugarloaf Sunshine Club, a local women's club that sponsored the dances, crowded homemade pies, cakes, and sandwiches on the dance hall's tables in preparation for a midnight supper. A collection would be taken up to finance a big pot of coffee.

The all-night dance started as soon as somebody picked up an instrument. Sam Craig usually played the fiddle; he was a champion fiddle player. Esther Yates would play the piano, and, sometimes, Dick Betasso would "call a few squares." Square dancing, round dancing, fox trot, two step, and waltzes were the most popular dances.

The entertainment ended when it was light enough to saddle or harness the horses. The Betassos and other guests traveled home just in time to start their morning chores.

World War I had its impact on the Betasso family. After the War ended in 1919, the price of tungsten plummeted, causing the mines to close down. The Betassos now focused all of their energy on running the ranch. Unfortunately, cattle prices also plummeted after the war ended. Family members kept the ranch alive even though the market continued to crumble. They worked ten-hour days, racing through chore lists, as they squeaked out a living on their 160 acres. Their combined efforts added only a few dollars to the family coffers each day.

Dick and Ernie spent their childhood days feeding rabbits and sometimes calves, chopping wood, doing miscellaneous ranch chores, trimming trees with a two-man saw, and splitting wood with a hammer and a wedge. They both learned to harness, drive, and hook up horses at around age 10. For relaxation, the boys went horseback riding and "got into mischief." The two boys were often mistaken for twins.

Tragedy struck the family in 1919 when Julius died from influenza. He was working at the Victoria mine in Summerville when he came home sick on a Sunday. Dr. Farrington came to see him, but had no remedies to break the fever or treat the infection. He died on the next Friday at age 19.

In 1920, Ray, the eldest son, left home to work in the mines near the town of Caribou. Before his departure, Ray purchased a car for the ranch. But, according to Ernie, Ray was the only one who knew how to drive the car, so it sat in the garage for many years. The family used "horse and buggy" or "everyone walked," said Ernie.

The family's work force dwindled further when Mabel married the District U. S. Forest Ranger, Greg Hart, and left home to start a family of her own. Steve Betasso began grooming his two youngest boys to control the operation.

Both Dick and Ernie found it increasingly difficult to run the ranch from behind school desks. So, they both quit school after the eighth grade. They were convinced their time would be better spent on the ranch, because their father was giving them more responsibility. Dick, in particular, was fascinated by the cattle and liked being around the horses. He enthusiastically plunged into the range cattle business. Ernie, however, took on outside work at the Good Friday mine, where he worked as a mucker, helped in the shop, and operated the hoist. He also worked in the Poorman mine, in Fourmile Canyon, and other mines located around Salina, Gold Hill, Boulder Falls, and Sugarloaf.

As adults, Dick and Ernie never let expansion ideas drift far from their thoughts, and with the future in mind, they began purchasing other homesteads that adjoined Betasso Ranch. They bought the McDonald ranch in 1924 from Charlie Weaver for about \$5 per acre. They also purchased a 160-acre parcel from Lewis Lindemuth.

By the 1930s, the brothers had taken over the operation of the family mines and continued to buy ranches. They purchased the Crews ranch in 1944. They also bought out the Wittemeyer family. Through the years, the brothers continued to scrutinize and buy up neighboring parcels, and the ranch enjoyed steady growth from 1924

to 1966. Their final land purchase was the Newsome Ranch in 1966.

After years of shrewd dealing, persistence, and working other jobs, they controlled nearly 2,000 acres. Their range stretched to the base of Sugarloaf Mountain, where a tremendous gold boom had played out years before.

In 1933, Ernie married Mae J. Toots, who he had met at a Sugarloaf dance one night. Mae and her twin sister were the oldest daughters of a Black Hawk miner. She cheerfully relieved the family of all domestic burdens, although whenever possible she saddled her horse and helped with the riding. Mae was a good pupil and learned the cattle business inside and out.

Even though they had no children of their own, Mae and Ernie were involved with the Sugarloaf community's youth, including teaching younger kids how to dance. They also participated in the Sugarloaf community fairs sponsored by the Sunshine Club. In their free time the couple played cards with the neighbors, read books, did "little projects," listened to the radio, and went to bed early, since they were usually tired. The couple was married for forty-two years.

Ernie's advice for a successful marriage was simple, "When you live with someone it doesn't take long to learn what cuts to the bone. And when you learn what that is, go easy and avoid it. Sit back, rather than bite in."

Steve Betasso died in 1939 and Mary died in 1949. After that Dick, Ernie, and Mae, collectively, operated the ranch. They specialized in stock raising and nurtured approximately one hundred head of cattle at a time. Practically everything except building the herd and expanding the ranch ran on a shoestring budget. Together, the trio managed to keep the place together.

Dick and Ernie were hard workers. Since most of the ranch revenues were filtered back into the operation, Ernie took on another full-time job to make ends meet. He fed cattle morning and night and worked his second job during the day. Dick focused on running the cattle operations.

Dick, a bachelor, lived in the brick ranch house. Ernie built the small clapboard house across the road west from the brick house in 1948, which served as Mae's and his home for sixteen years.

Ernie did a lot of mining over a twenty-five year period, while ranching on the side. He dug for gold, silver, and tungsten in the Nederland and Sugarloaf area mines. He worked the Harold mine at Sugarloaf. During World War II, he was employed at the Hoosier and Phillips mines in Nederland. He worked as a hoist and machine man at the Forest Holmes mine on Hurricane Hill, near Nederland, and as a mill man at the April Fool, in Boulder. He was also employed as a blacksmith. Ernie mostly labored in tungsten mines, but the gold mines he worked in at Salina included the Bell mine and the New Britain. He also worked at the Star at Gold Hill.

From 1945 to 1963, Ernie worked for "Sandflats," a sand and gravel company, which was "a better job than underground mining," according to Ernie. The company later became known as Flatirons Company.

Ernie's attraction to the financial benefits of a full-time

job saddled Mae with a tremendous amount of responsibility. She was left with juggling most of the ranching chores and household tasks, while Dick handled the cattle operations. This allowed the Betassos to pump more money back into the herd. This pace did not slacken until Ernie had a heart attack in 1959. After his recovery, Ernie joined his wife and brother full-time in the ranching business. Ernie, particularly, enjoyed riding with the herd--riding after them, sorting them, and sending them away--and watching the cattle grow.

Mae showed a prodigy-like knack for the cattle business. She could ride fence and sort cattle as well as any cowboy. However, she enjoyed the calving season the most. She closely monitored the calving operations around the clock and organized the calves' first branding. This kept the newborn mortality rate down. Mae arranged for most of the calves to arrive in April, May, and June, so that they would all be about the same size in the fall.

She worked from dawn to dusk maintaining the ranch and their home, "cowboying," cooking, washing, cleaning, sewing, carrying water, and tending the chickens and family garden.

Hoping to ease the strain on their grazing land, the family grazed their 125 head of cattle on U. S. Forest summer range land. After paying a fee for a U. S. Forest Service grazing allotment, the Betassos "trailed" the cattle in July, up Magnolia Road, to open range at higher elevations, near Tolland (Boulder Park), with old-fashioned cattle drives. They also pastured cattle in the meadows near the Moffat Tunnel's East Portal and Mammoth Basin. They hired a "rider" to be with the cattle.

The animals grazed in "high range" for three months until late fall. Then, they were "rounded-up," "trail-herded" back to the fenced "home ranch" (Betasso Ranch), and fed all winter on the wild bunch grasses that had grown there all summer long. The Betassos also grew limited amounts of alfalfa and hay as winter feed.

It was always a challenge to get the "haying" done before winter. Sometimes, the Betassos would buy a whole field of hay, cut it, bale it, and haul it home in trucks to use as winter feed when there was not enough pasture. Additional hay was purchased from hay dealers as needed.

The spring calves and old cows were usually shipped in the fall, after a summer of grazing, and the rest of the cows were taken back to the ranch to winter. In the spring, the ranch's two-and-three-year-old steers were sold by the head. The railhead at Crisman provided the Betasso brothers with direct access to several cattle markets.

There were animals other than cattle on the ranch. Horses and mules shared pasture lands while chickens were raised for eggs and family consumption. Horses and mules were used for transportation, working the cattle, and pulling wagons and farm equipment. The cattle, sent to the Denver market, supplied the income to the ranch.

After Dick's death in 1964, Ernie sold three ranches on Sugarloaf that became Mountain Meadows subdivisions, Mountain Pines, and Pride of the West subdivisions. He and Mae moved into

