

## Settlers of 'The Ranch'

# The Marion's story reveals Broomfield pioneer

by Anne Crouse

On Memorial Day, 1977, Percy and Frances Marion celebrated 60 years of marriage. A party in their honor was given at The Ranch, only a few hundred yards from the spot where Percy Marion was born on November 25, 1891.

At 85 and 82 respectively, the Marions are delightful to visit. The stories told by Percy reflect the development of the region and provide fascinating insights into the life of the first settlers in the Broomfield area.

In 1885 Percy's father, Joseph H. Marion, bought a "relinquishment" of property from his brother. The 160 acres, or one quarter section where The Ranch is now located, was the beginning of one of the most successful farming operations in the area.

Joseph Marion had come West from Pennsylvania after the Civil War. He went to California first, then moved up the coast to Washington where he moved cattle by boat on the Feather River for \$7 per

load. He also supplied horses to area ranchers. He narrowly missed the massacre at the Battle of The Little Big Horn when he arrived with horses for General Custer moments after the battle. The

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experience earned him a reputation as "the sole survivor" of Custer's last stand. The weather was hard in the Northwest and Marion contracted Ague. It was then that he decided to find his brother whom he believed to be in the Denver area.

By the time he arrived in Colorado in 1879, the fever had caused Joe's weight to drop to 120 pounds. He got a job in Denver, but he soon moved to Leadville and began working in the mines. Within a few years he got "leaded;" that is, he contracted Miner's Consumption, a disease caused

by the combination of Arsenic and lead dust in the lungs. Joe Marion left Leadville and decided to settle on the quarter section then being farmed by his brother at what is now called "The Ranch." He bought the property a short time later, put in an irrigation system (which also helped to control the rattlesnakes), bought what was called a "claim Shanty" from the government, married, and began to raise a family. At that time there were no fences to define property lines and Marion had to go to Denver once a month to pick up mail.

Farms were isolated, but within two years, more people began to move in. German, Swiss and Russian immigrants began buying up the odd sections of railroad land at \$3.50 per section. The railroads owned right of way land for 20 miles on each side of their odd sections and even with the sale of these land sections the railroad companies still kept the mineral rights. They own them still in 1977, and with

the resurging importance of coal as an energy source, this ownership is an important asset.

Joseph Marion homesteaded in 1884 and "old" Broomfield was founded in 1885. Percy Marion, his son, was the youngest of the three children born to the Joseph Marions and was the only boy. He learned farming and ranching from his father and helped build the family's first large home on The Ranch property in 1907. It was begun in 1991 and took 16 years to complete.

Percy met his wife at a dance in Broomfield when he was 19 and she was 16. Her name was Frances Cram, she lived at Westminster and he says of their first meeting, "I thought she was a cute kid." They didn't see much of each other at first but then Percy discovered that Frances' father had a scale where he could weigh his hay loads. He also found out that Frances was running the scale. She says, "My father paid me 10¢ a load and sometimes I got as many as two loads a day." Percy says, "I used to drive 3 miles out of my way to use those scales just so I could get a chance to talk to Frances."

After six years of courtship, they were married in 1917. "We made our own fun and laughed at it," says Percy. "We never

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Percy Marion stands by the porch post he built from field rocks.