

## The Search was on for a Century Farm/Ranch in Liberty County

A couple of years ago Alice Shepherd a member of the Broken Mountains Genealogical Society came up with the idea of searching for a Century Ranch/Farm, with the help of Lyla Pugsley and Maxine Ward. They searched many sources, but were unsuccessful. So in the meantime we decided to look for a person born in Liberty County nearest to the County Birthday and still lives in the County. After locating a birthday person we received confirmation from the National Archives the end of May that there is in fact a rancher who does qualify for the Century Award. So we presented both awards. The Birthday Person was Glenn LaValley and the Century Ranch Award went to the Oswood Family.

### Strength from the past, hope for the future Oswood family loves life in the Hills



AT HOME ON THE RANGE-- B.J. and Michele Oswood received the Century Ranch award presented by the Broken Mountains Genealogical Society during the Diamond Centennial celebration. Their third generation ranch has been in existence since May 1895. The Oswoods are pictured next to the original house built on the Oswood homestead, which in later years was used as a barn.

By **Valorie Zach**  
**Liberty County Times**

B. J. Oswood's life-long hobby of saving things from the past has

strengthened the glue holding his family traditions together.

The importance of hanging on to his traditions was evident last weekend when he and his family received the Century Ranch award for their generation farm/ranch operation, given by the local Broken Mountains Genealogical Society. The honor was bestowed in conjunction with the Diamond Centennial celebration, for the verified farm or ranch that has been in existence since 1895.

Against the backdrop of the Sweet Grass Hills, the Oswood ranch is situated 23 miles northwest of Chester, at the foot of East Butte. Including some state land, BJO Ranches, Inc. now totals 4,040 acres. Red Angus cross Herefords are raised there in addition to wheat and hay. Oswood also takes in other lease cattle in his operation.

Benjamin John, otherwise known as B.J., 53, has lived on the homestead of his grandparents John and Cecilia Oswood, for the past 33 years. His father Bennett, and Grandfather John all made their living on the same ranch. His grandparent's house, built in 1910, was the first home for B. J. and his bride, Michele, when they were married in 1962. According to accounts of the Oswood family history, the lumber for the house was brought to the ranch on wagons from Fort Benton.

The original house was built on the land sometime before 1900, and in later years, used as a barn.

In 1975 B.J. and Michele built a new home. Careful not to dispose of the past, they kept the old barn and house, including a great deal of his grandparent's housewares and some items from Norway, where B.J.'s grandfather originated.

Tucked among the keepsakes B. J. managed to hold on to through the years, right next to his dad's tickets for the Dempsey-Gibbons fight in 1923 at Shelby, are the original Abstracts of Title to his grandfather's properties, some signed by President William McKinley.

B. J.'s grandfather, John was born in Bergen, Norway and came to America in 1893, having lived first in northern Illinois before coming to Montana. In the Spring of 1895 he and his brother Knute formed a partnership, pooling what money they had to buy 40 head of cattle. John also hired out to herd sheep, since he wanted to learn that aspect of business as well. In 1898 Knute got homesick and sold his share of the partnership to John, returning to Norway.

John became a government trapper when local ranches were losing calves to wolf-packs. He married Cecilia Risvod in 1899 and they had three children, Bennett, Margaret and Tillie. John started out with squatter rights until he could homestead and then continued to acquire land as he

went along, buying it up from other homesteaders.

Cecilia passed away in 1948 and John in 1957. B. J. remembers that he was 14 when his grandfather died.

John's son and B. J.'s father, Bennett Oswood, was born on May 22, 1900. He and his wife Beatrice and their children, B. J., Barbara and Berniece (interestingly, everyone's name in the family started with the letter B), lived on the farm that bordered John's place, four miles west, which was all one big unit, said B. J.

Buildings have been added over the years and an addition was made to the garage. The original root cellar, built in the 1930's is still in use.

Electricity wasn't hooked up on the farmstead until 1951.

A pond, artesian well that flows 24 hour a day and the beauty of the Sweet Grass Hills are special features of the ranch. B. J. remembers his grandparents used to keep cream and butter in a cement trough down in the well and the water would keep things cool.

Oats and hay for the horses were main crops in the early years. Wheat and barley came later when B. J. broke up the land in 1956 and started crops. In 1976, B. J. bought the land from his father, Aunt Tillie Holm, sisters and step-mother.

He's been a farmer and rancher all his life, learning the ropes from his dad and grandpa. "From Day One I've loved it," he said.

It's been no small task managing to keep his operation afloat in these trying times for farmers and ranchers.

It's been rough to hang on to with bad prices on grain and cattle through the years and weather elements," said B. J. "But with lots of changes , we've survived," he added. "Oil and gas exploration, drilling and leasing hav helped us," he added. Michele has helped quite a bit, too." he said with a smile. Very optimistic about the future, he feels "this might be one of the best years yet!"

The ranch has been a constant source of joy to the families that have lived there. "It's always been a gathering place." said B. J., "for all the neighbors to get together - these two places (his parent's and grandparent's homes) were always full of people."

Michele said she's always enjoyed the peace and quite of country living and the outdoors. Their two sons, Brett 26 and Bryan 22 had lots of friends out to stay when they were growing up. Brett is now employed in Great Falls but can be found at the ranch on most weekends. Bryan attends college at MSU-Northern and help out at the ranch during the summer months.

"It's been a good place to raise family," said the Oswoods, who all love

music and have many happy memories of "jamming together" on the ranch. "They (the Oswood ancestors) made friends through all the years and it was carried right on down," said B. J. fondly. "This is a good community, everyone helps one another out."

Another tradition in the Oswood family has been their livestock brand, which was passed down from John to his son Bennett and then again to his son B. J., who passed the N-9 brand on down to his son Bryan, to make it a four generation brand. Bennett had the B+O brand which he gave to B. J., who in turn gave it to his son Brett. BJ now has his own brand - BJO.

B. J. said that "saving things" always ran in his family, and he takes a lot of razzing for it, but has high hopes of saving and passing the ranch on down to his boys someday. As for him and his wife, "We'll stay here until we aren't able to," he said.

According to affidavits and other information gathered by members of the genealogical group, from the National Archives in Washington, D. C., the official date the Oswood ranch originated was May, 1895 -and a descendant of the Oswoods is still living on the very first piece of land purchased.

It is hoped to keep this award presentation as an annual project of the local Genealogical Society.

Following are the obituaries of the OSWOOD family: