



A casual traveler coming upon the cement foundations, sunken silos and large cement box-like structures in the desert about 15 miles north of Fruita on Road 16 might stop and wonder what had gone on there.

Could this be the remnants of a lost civilization like Mesa Verde?

But this isn't Mesa Verde. It is what is left of Garmesa, an ambitious ranching effort, started in 1911 by Quaker Oats. Garmesa got the name because part of the ranch was located in Mesa County and part in Garfield County.

The ranch, on about 1,000 acres, had a pig barn with a cork-padded floor to protect the pigs' feet, a cow barn and horse barn. The barns were heated and had running water in the feed bins. A corral, grain-storage area, two grain silos, five cisterns, distilling plant for providing safe domestic water, office, machine shop, cook house and several residences completed the compound.

To the south of the compound, corn, alfalfa, wheat and other grains were grown to feed the stock.

During the nine years the ranch operated, from 1911 to 1920, outstanding livestock such as Holstein dairy cattle and registered Duroc hogs, along with horses, turkeys, chickens and other farm animals were raised.

Because the ranch needed water, Ruby Lee Lake was built. The lake was constructed on the plateau a couple of miles to the north of the compound and provided plenty of water for the first three years. Then the lake began to fill with silt. Despite attempts to eliminate silt, spring rains brought torrents of silt-filled water rushing down Stove Canyon.

Bob Lazear was the manager of Garmesa Ranch, and Ruby Lang, who lived on a farm on the road to Garmesa, remembered watching Lazear roaring past their farm in his Stutz Bearcat and wearing a leather jacket and goggles. Lazear was the first person she knew who owned a car. The Lazears also had a red Reo truck.

When the ranch was beset with water problems and was no longer profitable, a liquidation sale was held on March 31, 1920, and the operation was scaled down. By 1927 operations had ceased, and the buildings were moved to farms south of the Highline Canal. The Lazears' 12-room home, the largest house in the project, was sold and moved to a Fruita ranch.

Lazear, and his wife who was the daughter of a Quaker Oats official, moved to Cheyenne to manage the Quaker Oats Wyoming Hereford Ranch there.

The late Ruth Brown Jerome lived at Garmesa as a young girl and wrote about her childhood in a book "Echoes of the Past". Her family moved to the ranch in 1916 when she was five years old and occupied one of the 24 homes.

Her mother, Rachel Brown, carried the mail from Fruita to Garvin Post Office at Garmesa by horse and buggy.

In her book, Ruby noted that Coyotes were a big problem at the ranch. Once when Ruth's father planted a watermelon patch, he was surprised to discover that the coyotes were eating melons, but only the ripe ones. Chickens had to be locked up at night to keep them safe from the coyotes. Hills in the area were infested with rattlesnakes and it wasn't unusual to find snakes in homes.

There was little social life other than an occasional party at the main ranch house.

The Garmesa school was built to accommodate the children who lived at the ranch. Of the six children attending the school, five were from the Brown family--Sylvia, Della, Georgia, Richard and Ruth. The sixth was Ada Ashley, who lived with her grandparents, the Perrys, at the ranch. Transportation to school for Ruth and her brother, Dick, was an Indian pony, which they had found and broken. Mabyll Righdenour Chapman, the teacher, lived at the Perry home and ate her meals there.

Garmesa was meant to be self-sustaining. Had it not been for the silt filling the reservoir it might still be a thriving farming community instead of a ghost settlement.