

Gathering stories on homesteaders (February 17, 2016)

At least once a year, usually in the winter, I like to write a column about the homesteaders. Some are gleaned from stories told to me in the '50s by the homesteaders themselves, some are from letters sent by homesteaders' families after they passed away, a few are from U.S. Forest Service and Glacier Park archives.

Recently, Lois Walker, retired archivist, has been a new and wonderfully prolific source. She has been exploring the archives of *The Columbian*, an early Columbia Falls newspaper. Periodically, she emails these neat and informative articles to me. I print them and now have a growing file of North Fork stories from the 1914 issues of *The Columbian*.

Many of my earlier columns have been about Matt and Mata Brill because I knew him best. Of course when I was 10, he was in his 60s and retired after selling Kintla Ranch to my family.

Thanks to Lois Walker's research, I now have information about Matt in 1914 and they have "fleshed out" my previous knowledge. Following is some of the story of Matt.

"Matt Brill, who is employed at The Hotel Glacier (Lake McDonald Lodge) during the Park season and holds down a homestead in The North Fork country was in town last week as blue and glum as could be. He had just lost his pet deer by drowning in the cold waters of Lake McDonald. Coyotes chased the animal into the lake. It was about 16 months old, very tame, and a favorite of the crowds at the resort.

"Mr. Brill's two dogs found the fawn when about two weeks old in the vicinity of Deep Creek. They brought it to their master who fed the little thing with a rubber nipple on a fountain pen, attached to a bottle containing condensed milk and she thrived wonderfully. No attempt was made to keep the deer in captivity but it always stayed near the cabin. In the spring, when Mr. Brill started for Lake McDonald where he was to work all summer, the deer swam the river and followed its master. At the hotel its constant companions were Brill's two big collie dogs and the three ate, slept and played together.

"It was not an uncommon sight to see the animal walk timidly into the big hotel and drink at one of the bubbling fountains.

"The loss of 'Fannie' is considered a district calamity by the hotel people and a serious bereavement to Mr. Brill."

That was in 1914, but Matt was obviously well-known in the valley as this next story is from *The Columbian* in January 1910.

"Along with numerous other celebrities which our city harbors, there has lately developed the fact that we have a professional heel-and-toe pedestrian in the person of Matt Brill, the pleasant-faced young gentleman who dispenses the liquid refreshments over the Hotel Gaylord bar. It seems that a discussion arose among a few friends as to just how fast Matt could move, and to

settle the matter a purse of \$10 was raised to be given the walker if he could walk four miles in one hour.

“Arrayed in the regulation garments (?) and with a retinue of trainers and attendants which would have done justice to a professional, Matt prepared to the course, which happened to be from the Jas. Grist residence to the Talbott place, and at the crack of a pistol started the event, which was to win or lose for him a month’s salary. Matt won in exactly 51 and one-half minutes.”

More in the future. What do you think?