



Face of Fillmore

By Sherry Shepard
July 20, 2022

We often hear the phrase about history repeating itself. It seems that is what has happened in Fillmore this past week.

On July 8, 2022, the Half Way Hill Fire began between Meadow and Fillmore. With conditions being ripe for a catastrophic fire, with high winds, low relative humidity, and drought conditions for years, we have all worried this would happen.

People with homes and cabins in the cedars south of town watched in horror as the flames threatened their property and evacuations were ordered to keep lives safe. Local fire departments along with federal ones had jumped into action and with the assistance of retardant dropping planes, the cabins were saved.

Night brought a light show all over the side of the mountain with giant flames reaching into the dark. Saturday the conflagration continued with the outcome of favorite areas of the mountain unknown at this writing. We can hear the drone of the planes in the distance as the wind picks up once again. Favorite places like Pine Creek, Paradise, Mountain Sheep and others are said with worry in our voices, knowing the outcome will probably not be what we would hope for.

Just a little less than 80 years ago, a similar event took place.

Early in the afternoon of September 16, 1942, a few local farmers in Meadow were burning brush to clear some privately owned land and the fire got away from them. They had started their project on a calm day, but weather conditions soon changed, and a stiff wind began to blow the fire out of control. It burned across the face of the mountains heading northeast, and all along the foothills and into the mountains, finally burning itself out in Chalk Creek Canyon as the wind abruptly changed. Nearly 10,000 acres burned along with 60 power poles belonging to the Telluride Power Company, which came across the top of the mountain from Richfield. Residents described the fire as looking like “the whole world was on fire”. Crews under the direction of District Ranger Ivan Christensen succeeded in stopping the advance of the flames as they



reached the Fillmore Cemetery and threatened to spread into the town. The fire was brought under control within 24 hours. The fire reached the deer experimental station about 2:30 p.m.

The experimental station was located at what locals call “The Ski Lift” at the point where the Pine Creek Trail meets the Sand Rock Ridge Road. The deer experimental station was built at Maple Springs in 1940 near the foot of Sand Rock Ridge in an area appropriately called “The Deer Pasture”. This was supported by funds from the Pittman-Robinson Wildlife Act. It was operated under the sponsorship of the U.S.A.C. as well as federal and state wildlife organizations. It was the largest operation of its kind, covering some 700 acres. A home was built there for the man in charge of the station and large deer pens were built all around the area. Different types of browse was fed to the deer in each pen as an experiment to see what types of food they thrived on as well as observing their habits.

Authorities worried about the safety of Everett Doman and his family who lived in the home there. The house was bypassed by the flames, but all of the other structures were destroyed, as well as several deer, which were found in their pens, as seen in this picture taken of a forest service employee and the remains of a deer after the fire. The Doman family was safely in Oak City Canyon, where they had gone earlier in the day to count deer. Adding to people’s concern, was the fact that on that day, Bertis Frampton had a cart out in the hills, picking browse to feed the deer at the experimental station. With the flames fast approaching, he was unable to reach his father’s car, so he saddled his horse and headed for the top of the mountain. When nearing the summit, he was again hemmed in by flames. He later told that he lost control of his horse and continued on foot. The fire raged for hours and hours, and, according to some accounts, Bertis’s horse, minus rider, showed up in Fillmore at its home. Family and friends feared the worst and continued searching for Bertis.

Through the night and into the next day, hundreds of people on horseback and on foot combed the hills for signs of him. Everyone was certain it was not possible for him to have survived the conflagration. Newspaper articles about the search were seen in all of the major newspapers. In the September 17 issue of the Salt Lake Tribune, Fishlake Forest Supervisor Blaine Betensen was quoted as saying, “There is little hope of finding him alive.” Bertis had, in fact, made it to the top of the mountain and found a couple who was herding sheep. He stayed with them overnight and then headed back down the ridge by Pine Creek. When he reached the highway, a local businessman, Mr. Lawson, picked him up and drove him to Fillmore, where he drove up and down Main Street hollering at the passersby to let them know he had found Bertis.

The fire gutted the corrals at the Deer Pasture, but, thanks to Bertis’s quick actions before leaving when he turned on the hoses and soaked down the house, it was not touched. The forest service had the structure taken apart and moved from the location at Maple Springs and reassembled at its present location at 245 South 200 West. At first it was occupied by forest service employees, but later sold and used as a rental.

Jack Peterson called me soon after this first Deer Pasture Face of Fillmore to fill in the “rest of the story”. He told me he remembers this blaze well. As a young boy he thought the whole world was on fire. Following that event, the home was partially taken apart and moved to Fillmore. Jack told me that the garage located close by the home was moved all in one piece. It was relocated by the house on Second West and stayed at that location for quite a few years, until about 1962 when the forest service wanted to make some improvements to the lot and the extra building was in the way.

The garage was sold to Jack Peterson and saw its next move. It was raised on jacks and Jack drove a diesel truck underneath it to move it to its third location.

The new location for the garage was behind Jack and Mary Jane's new home on Fifth South. Jack planned to refurbish it and use it for storage, but other projects took priority. The garage remained in its original state until a few years later when Chester Baker, Jack's neighbor to the east, decided he could really use it for storage. Once again, the same truck and jack system was used, and the garage moved across the street where it is today.

While what happened 80 years ago is fascinating to recall, it is the present fire that is causing us concern. On Friday, July 8, two fires began near Fillmore, the Half Way Hill Fire and the Tire Recycling Plant Fire. Credit is given to John Higgins for using a bulldozer to bury the flames of the tire fire very quickly.

Our thoughts at this time are turned to the mountain and devastation there. Scott McKane of Fox News described it on Tuesday, July 12 as "an all-out inferno!"

Our imaginations and the sight of the huge flames make us wonder what could possibly be left and what lies in store for the future. Memories of great times on the mountain have caused more than one person to shed a tear. One resident said, "It will never be the same again in my lifetime." Many have thought the same.

Our thanks to the Fillmore Fire Department and those of other towns in East Millard County, the sheriff's deputies, East Millard Sheriff's posse, the county road department, Utah State, BLM, forest service firefighters, fire departments from other areas around the state and to the Great Basin Fire Team now on the scene for their valiant efforts.