

Timeline History of Highlands Ranch

Pre-History to Modern Day

PRE-HISTORY

- 66-68 Million years ago, dinosaurs roamed the area
- Ice Age – Mammoths, sloths, and camels roamed the area-- 150,000 year old mammoth skull found at Chatfield, 13,000 year old mammoths and more at Lamb Springs

NATIVE AMERICANS

- A bison kill conducted by people from the Cody Complex occurred at Lamb Spring around 8800 years ago.
- Ute Indians roamed this area around the 1500s, from the Southern CA area
- 1700s Comanche in the area from the northern plains
- Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa also here
- Stone found used for arrowheads and spear points

EUROPEAN INFLUENCE

- 1540 – Spain claimed the area
- 1541 – Juan Francisco de Coronado explored the area up to southern Colorado
- 1700 – France claimed area known as part of their “Louisiana”
- 1763 – Given to Spain as part of Treaty of Paris
- 1800 – Returned to France under Treaty of San Ildefonso
 - Napoleon dominated Europe
- 1803 – Napoleon sold Louisiana Territory to U.S. “Louisiana Purchase”
 - President Thomas Jefferson
 - Cost 4¢ per acre

AMERICAN EXPLORERS, MOUNTAIN MEN, TRAILS, GOLD RUSH

- 1820-1840-- Fur trade peaked in Colorado- brought largest number of Americans to area, explored every stream, pond, & valley, crossed the “Great American Desert”
 - 1807 – Zebulon Pike (Pike’s Peak)
 - 1820 – Major Stephen Long (Long’s Peak)
 - 1840’s & 1853 – John Charles Fremont - explorer
- 1840-1859 – fur trade in decline, gold rush yet to come
 - William Gilpin – explorer CO territorial governor, Gilpin County
 - Frederick Ruxton – British explorer & travel writer
 - 1858 Gold discovered in Cherry Creek
- 1859-1860s – Pike’s Peak Gold Rush
 - 1859 Gold discovered in Idaho Springs and other areas
 - 25,000 stayed in the area

COLORADO TERRITORY, THE HOMESTEAD ACT, AND COLORADO STATEHOOD

- 1860-1910 – cattlemen and farmers brought real wealth to the area, statehood
- 1861 - Colorado Territory established, Douglas County one of the original counties
- 1862 - Homestead Act accelerated settlement to area, signed by President Lincoln
- 1868 – Kit Carson and Major D. C. Oaks built a campfire in Daniel’s Park, along the Territorial Road
- 1876 Colorado became the 38th state to join the Union, known as the “Centennial State” (1776-1876)

EARLY LANDOWNERS TO THE AREA

- **Early homestead and settlement activity, difficult in dry climate**
 - 1859 Rufus “Potato King” Clark obtains land in NW corner of HR, grows potatoes
 - 1/4/1867 – David Gregory first to homestead in Highlands Ranch area (80 acres) lost homestead in 1870
 - Soon to follow – neighbors Charles Babcock and Jesse Estack
 - 1867-1910 – 189 filings on present Highlands Ranch
 - Railroad and Timber Claims also prevalent in area
Railroads Union Pacific, Pueblo and Arkansas Valley, Kansas Pacific
- 1876-1913 **Henry H. Failing** and family homestead in southwest area of Highlands Ranch/Backcountry
 - Property improved and expanded with farming and ranching operations
 - 1910 property had grown to 2000 acres, many outbuildings
 - 1913 sold to Douglas Investment Property
 - 1920 unique octagon-shaped wooden silo built
 - 1954 ultimately sold to Lawrence Phipps Jr.
 - 1979 Mission Viejo to present day, ranch in BackCountry, unused
- 1878 **Lafayette Grigs** and Lorinda Underwood establish Underwood-Grigs property
 - Named property Pinetree Ranch, located next to Territorial Road, northern side of today’s HR/Backcountry Wilderness area
 - Primarily cattle and dairy operations, built clapboard 2 story home, corrals
 - 1925 sold to Mansion owner
 - 1979 onward, eventually became part of Backcountry, home decaying
- 1879 – 1943 Austrian immigrants Johann Welte & brother-in-law, Plazidus Gassner, build **Big Dry Creek Cheese Ranch** at northeastern end of HR.
 - Made brick and limburger cheese for more than 50 years
 - Developed dry land farming techniques & interviewed by Scientific Farmer 1906
 - Very successful farm and dairy ranch, large home, many outbuildings
 - 1943 Property sold to Lawrence Phipps
 - 1979 Mission Viejo and HR, eventually became local park, all buildings gone

- 1884 – **Samuel Allen Long** homesteaded 40 acres (Highlands Ranch Mansion property)
 - Director of Baltimore & Ohio Railroad (B&O RR in Monopoly)
 - 1891 had already added 2,000 acres & built stone farmhouse, named it Rotherwood
 - 1892 Long injured in cable car accident, sold property 1893 to real estate developers

- 1897 – **John Springer** purchased Rotherwood /Mansion property
 - Former Illinois State Legislator, attorney, engaged in banking in Dallas and VP of Continental Land & Cattle Co.
 - Eventually expanded ranch to 12,000 acres and called it Springer Cross Country Horse and Cattle Ranch, enlarged mansion, turning it into European-influenced castle
 - After 1st wife Eliza died, married Isabel Patterson and renamed mansion “Castle Isabel”
 - 1911-1913 Scandal erupted when Isabel involved in Murder at the Brown Palace, Springer divorced her, and sold property to Colonel Hughes

- 1906 – **Matthew Plews** homesteads property on north-eastern edge of Highlands Ranch
 - Master gardener from England, worked at Wolhurst Estate
 - 1910- By 1910 had constructed a 2 story farmhouse and extensive greenhouses
 - Operated a very successful nursery-landscaping business in Littleton
 - 1937 Sold to Elizabeth Hamblin mother-in-law of notorious mobster “Smiling Charlie” Stephens, who then went to prison from 1939-1944.
 - 1944 Smiling Charlie got out of prison, the property was sold to mechanical Engineer Fred Eberhardt, who used the property as a summer getaway
 - 1967 property was sold to Gates Rubber, who traded it to Johnny Bowen Family.
 - Property was named **Fly’n B Ranch**, as Johnny Bowen operated his private plane to his ranch in Strasburg, CO. The Bowens lived here until 2004.
 - 2004 Sold to Erickson, who developed Wind Crest
 - 2006 Erickson conveyed 5 acres to Highlands Ranch Metro District. The original Plews home was included in the conveyance.
 - 2010 Fly’n B Park was opened. Original farmhouse repurposed- community use

- 1913 – **Colonel William Hughes**, John Springer’s 1st father-in-law, acquired the Mansion and called it Sunland Ranch. His granddaughter, Annie Clifton Hughes, acquired the property upon Colonel Hughes death in 1918.

- 1920 – **Waite Phillips** of the Phillips Petroleum family purchased Sunland Ranch and called it Phillips Highland Ranch (no “S”)
 - Phillips renovated or expanded the Mansion home, and raised Highland Hereford Cattle
 - Phillips had many other properties, and sold Phillips Highland Ranch in 1926.

- 1926 – **Frank Kistler** of Wolhurst Stock Farms purchased the property and created the Diamond K Ranch
 - Raised dairy and Angus cattle, purebred sheep, hogs, and chickens
 - Also involved in the oil industry, part of high society in Denver
 - 1929-30 Elaborate Mansion renovation, added Fireplace, large grandfather clock
 - 1930 Arapahoe Hunt Club moves to Diamond K property
 - 1937 Lost millions in Great Depression, sold Diamond K to Lawrence Phipps Jr.

- 1930 - **Arapahoe Hunt Club** moved to Diamond K property, remained until Mission Viejo sale.
- 1937 – **Lawrence C. Phipps, Jr.** purchased the property for cattle ranching
 - Son on U.S. Senator Lawrence Cowle Phipps of Colorado
 - Businessman, philanthropist, military service, rancher, horses
 - Property called Phipps Ranch and/or Phipps Highlands Ranch
 - 22,000 acres + Property extended from Quebec/Monarch almost to the foothills
 - 1970 – western portion of the property taken/sold to U.S. Government for the Chatfield dam following 1965 severe flood.
 - Arapahoe Hunt Club operates in the southern ranch, Phipps named “Master of the Hunt”
 - 1976 Phipps died at Highlands Ranch

- 1977 – Highland Venturers (Marvin Davis & others) purchased the property from the Phipps Estate.
- 1978 – Mission Viejo Company acquired an option on the property
- 1979 – The Board of Douglas County Commissioners approved Planned Community District Zoning for the property and Mission Viejo Company purchased the property
- 1980 – Construction began on the 1st phase of Highlands Ranch

MODERN-DAY HIGHLANDS RANCH

- **1981** – The 1st families moved into homes in Highlands Ranch
 This date is now considered to be the “founding” of the Modern Day Highlands Ranch
- 1985 – C-470 opened
- 1997 - Shea Homes, a division of the J.F. Shea Company, acquired Mission Viejo Company and Highlands Ranch.
- 2010 Shea Homes gave the Mansion and endowment money to HR Metro District. Renovations began on the Mansion.
- 2012 - Newly renovated HR Mansion opened. Highlands Ranch Metro District hosted the grand opening of the newly renovated Mansion, inviting the community to enjoy this community treasure.
- 2019 - Dinosaurs bones were discovered in Highlands Ranch!
- 2020 – Highlands Ranch residential is basically “built out” with the last remaining residences being completed. Approximately 100,000 residents call HR “home”
- 2021 - Highlands Ranch celebrates the 40th Anniversary (1981-2021)