

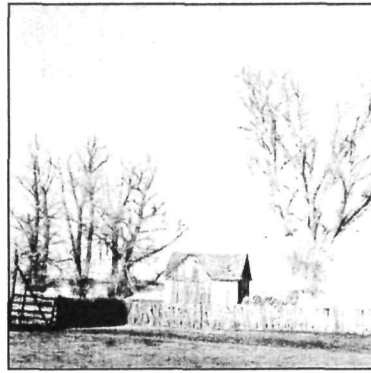
heirs resulted in the gradual sell off of stock.

THE RANCH CHANGES OWNERS

In 1907 the ranch was sold to Henry L. Corbett of Portland and his partner C.E.S. Wood. They formed the Blitzen Valley Land Company. They wanted to return the ranch to its former glory and to sell small tracts of land to the influx of homesteaders coming into Harney County.

The company was reorganized in 1916 and renamed the Eastern Oregon Land and Livestock Company. Louis Swift of the Swift packing company, Chicago, purchased 46 percent of the EOLC stock for \$1,470,000. The valley was laid out in 160 acre tracts for farming. The EOLC also established a hotel and store at Frenchglen in the mid 1920's.

In 1935 the federal government purchased a 64,000 acre portion of the Blitzen Valley ranch holdings from Swift for \$675,000. The property was added to the Malheur Bird Reservation, later renamed Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. The purchase followed drought conditions on Malheur Lake and meant that the refuge would be able to maintain adequate water levels for breeding and nesting birds.



VISITING FRENCH'S EMPIRE

Several buildings remain standing in the Harney Basin from Pete French's era.

- The unique Round Barn, an Oregon State Heritage site, stands on the Barton Lake Ranch and is open to the public year round.
- The P Ranch long barn is the only remaining building constructed by French at his main headquarters. The barn is on the National Register of Historic Places and is open to the public year round.
- Ten buildings remain standing at the National Register of Historic Places Sod House Ranch. The ranch is open to the public from August 15 through October 31.

Peter French and Ranching in the Blitzen Valley



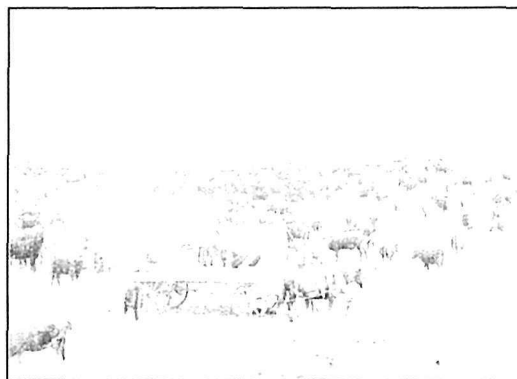
In 1872, when the California State Legislature ended open range grazing, Hugh Glenn, a wealthy stock grower, sent a large herd of cattle northward into the unknown territory of Eastern Oregon. Entrusted to twenty-three year old John W. French (Peter French) and a few Mexican vaqueros were 1200 young Shorthorn cows and heifers.

They drove the cattle northward to Catlow Valley where they encountered a prospector named Porter. Down on his luck, Porter sold his small herd of cattle to French. With the sale of his cattle went Porter's squatter's rights to the west side of Steens Mountain and his P iron brand.

Further explorations of the area ended in the discovery of a lush valley to the north -- a valley where melting snow from Steens Mountain meandered slowly northward for 40 miles before reaching Malheur Lake. Filled with a mixture of native grasses, the valley would provide forage for cattle and horses. This was the end of French's journey, the lush Blitzen Valley.

With financing by Glenn and management by French the operation expanded. Fences were built; freight wagons loaded with goods came from Ft. Bidwell, California and La Grande, Oregon; drainage and irrigation of parts of the valley began; hundreds of horses were broke for freight teams, haying, and for buckarooing; more vaqueros

and ranch hands were imported; native hay was cut and stacked (1½ tons per acre). A store, a long barn, a round barn for working horses, bunkhouses, blacksmith shop, storage sheds and a residence were established at the P Ranch by the late 1870's.



French increased the quality and size of the ranch herd through careful management and breeding. In 1882 he purchased Durham bulls to improve the herd. Durhams were desirable because of their durability and dependability on the range. By 1887 French was running more than 45,000 cattle on the ranch. By exporting large numbers of cattle (12,000 head were driven to Cheyenne, Wyoming in 1879) French was able to prevent overstocking and deterioration of the range.

LAND ACQUISITION

French explored the countryside as his management of the ranching operation progressed. He and his men scouted for springs, streams, productive

grasslands and natural corrals. Under the Swamp Lands Act of 1860, the Homestead Act, Timber Culture Act, and Desert Land Act French's men filed claims for land in the Blitzen and Diamond Valleys. Eventually the claims of the ranch employees and from other settlers were acquired for the ranch. This included the purchase of 48,500 acres in the Diamond and Blitzen Valleys for around \$40,000.

French established sub-headquarters at the Round Barn near Barton Lake, and at the north end of the Blitzen Valley at Sod House Ranch. With managers at each of these locations, French oversaw extensive land holdings for the Glenns.

THE DEATH OF PETE FRENCH

The acquisition of neighboring property was not always welcome. P Ranch hay was burned and fences were cut by disgruntled homesteaders. This unrest ultimately led to French's death in December 1897. He was shot by Ed Oliver, a settler who owned land surrounded by the ranch's holdings. Oliver was arrested and later acquitted of the murder.

At the time of his death, French's ranching operation for Hugh Glenn's heirs covered 190,756 acres, including the entire Blitzen Valley from Steens Mountain to Malheur Lake. For a few years the ranch continued to flourish, however, debts accumulated by Glenn's