




AVIMOR™

ORIGIN

Story

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In the late 1880's, long before Colin McLeod got off the train in Caldwell, a single wagon appeared in the clearing opening southward from what is today Howell Event Center in Avimor.

Eliza Howell and her family had taken the Oregon Short Line from Ogden, and likely disembarked at Kuna to begin a new life in the hills of Avimor. She was born in 1859 to a prominent Mormon family of Utah, and met her husband William, a native of New York, when he was working the Union Pacific Railway. Eliza and William raised four daughters here on Spring Creek, residing here for nearly two decades, from about 1893-1911.

Like Colin McLeod, Eliza and William came to Idaho young and penniless, but built generational wealth and social standing off little more than a homestead claim and ingenuity. In 1911 they relocated their ranching headquarters to Weiser, and their residence to the affluent Warm Springs Historic District near downtown Boise where their handsome estate still stands at 1250 Warm Springs Avenue. It is listed on the National Register of Historic places.

Obscurity surrounds the years Eliza spent here in the farmhouse on Spring Creek: land records and newspaper clippings are the chief evidence. They show the birth of a child, the 1893 creation of a US Post Office here in Idaho with Mrs. Eliza Howell listed as postmistress. There's also a newspaper clipping thanking the community for its support during the fatal illness of their toddler, Ida Howell—as poignant as it was brief.

A yellow and crumbling map recording the small settlement of Howell where Idaho 55 now bisects the county line gives structure and meaning to the most compelling traces of Eliza's story: the white farmhouse and the red barn gracing the small stream and quiet valley in the heart of Avimor.

Why did William select this particular clearing in the hills for his wife and daughters to make their home?

Today, Spring Creek flanks a hiking trail enjoyed by everyone from Avimor residents to Idaho Novus school children and Eagle day-hikers. The pioneers treasured its clear, cold waters as both a source of hydration, and a rustic thoroughfare. Eons of trickling through the Boise Mountains cut a functional yet beautiful path among the green and granite: Spring Creek Trail was used first by Shoshone and Bannock tribes, then by French fur-trappers, and countless early Idaho pioneers. Later Spring Creek trail evolved into a convenient leg of the crucial stage route from Boise City to Horseshoe Bend, the latter being a gateway to the lucrative and gold-rich Boise Basin. Eliza and William registered their little settlement as a post office in 1893, and William's own pen reveals that at that time it would serve 100 residents from the surrounding area.

Staking a claim along a busy stage route meant prosperity for the growing Howell family. Chinese miners, Shoshone braves, immigrant farmers, and federal surveyors from the east, all passed by Eliza's kitchen window on their way to conduct business, stake a claim, settle bitter disputes, or just to provide dinner for their families. These men would need a change of horses and a hot meal by the time they reached Eliza's front porch, and welcomed a rest stop along the lengthy, 23-mile route from Boise City to Horseshoe Bend.

Raising sheep and providing accommodations to passers-by provided a stable and pleasant livelihood for Eliza's girls, and the constant traffic along the stage route probably meant quite a bit of excitement.

This is Eliza's story.¹



October 9, 1879

Ogden, Utah

Married! – and not yet 20. My handsome husband and I just returned from the chapel to our home on Franklin

Street. How comfortable and charming is my new home—a home of my very own! My dear William is 26 and has traveled all over this Western Frontier! Daddy and Mother came straight to Ogden when they first started west, but my dear husband explored Montana, Wyoming and Idaho Territory with his trains and his guns. What a lucky girl I am to be the wife of a railway man!

December 26, 1882

Ogden, Utah

Baby is so precious. How I love to be the mama of such a big healthy baby girl.² She wears her little bonnet at Sunday service so proudly— she seems much older than one year. Yesterday was Christmas and Mother and Daddy came over for dinner. I made a goose and Mother brought the pudding and the light biscuits. We had canned oysters brought in from Salt Lake City and— imagine this— bright, beautiful oranges from San Francisco. My dear husband is so kind to buy such delicacies for little Grace and me! How dear is our happy home here on busy Franklin Avenue!



January 1, 1886

Ogden, Utah

A brand-new year and two little daughters to call my own! We have many sweet moments in our daily lives in our little town. But William told me today he is looking at an opportunity for discounted land directly from the government, north of here in wild Idaho Territory. He said we can get a lot of free land, as long as we raise a good crop there in five years. He said that Grace and Ida will be able to breathe the nice fresh air and see the baby lambs being born every Spring. I just hope the stores and churches in Idaho territory are as nice as here in Ogden. Baby loves her little ribbons and bonnets, and Grace is now nearly four— she'll be going to school soon! She will be so sweet skipping with

the lambs to school, just like Mary in the nursery rhyme. I will miss Mother and Daddy terribly, but I am sure they'll visit. Boise City isn't that far away, is it?

May 3, 1887

Pocatello, Idaho Territory

Grace, Ida, Mary and I are at the depot while William gets our bags from the luggage man so we can take the next train to Kuna. Idaho Territory seems nice so far. Some of the church members settled near here and I think the people at the train depot seem friendly. But I am wondering how William will raise sheep here with all these rocks and dust? The only water source I've seen is the Snake River, and I can understand why they named it after such a disagreeable creature. Many drownings have taken place in its fierce waters, the conductor man told us as we were disembarking. Will my home be on this frightening river, among these ancient rock formations and dusty sage? What about the little white church and steeple, the store with the pretty ribbons and fabric, the town square? Oh I hope what lies ahead is not like Pocatello!

May 20, 1887

North of Boise City, Idaho Territory

Home Sweet Home! I knew William would come through! We got off the train at Kuna, which was tidy enough for a whistle-stop junction, and our freight wagon bumped along the twisted stage route to Boise City and then headed north through the hills to our homestead. What a splendid site for our new home! William got to work raising a little shanty for us right away, and he is bringing in some old French trappers to help us dig a well. The weather is splendid now, but we know winter will be here soon, and before long our little creek will run dry. For now, the cheerful little creek is enchanting in its bubbling and frothy course. Little Gracie already waded in, her happy little feet so relieved after that dusty and bumpy wagon ride! No churches or town squares in sight here, but I really don't miss them. These wildflowers, green hills and the little brook will be enough for Gracie, Ida, baby, and me!

Easter Sunday 1888

North of Boise City, Idaho Territory

Easter feels very different here in Idaho Territory than back in Ogden, that's for certain. I asked William where we'd be attending Easter services and he said the closest church was Horseshoe Bend, nine miles north of us. What a strange life this is here on the frontier! Our only news comes by way of our visitors from along the stage line.

*** Please note that the images published here have been reimagined for this story since it has been difficult to find actual photos of the Howell family.*

¹ Because so little remains of Eliza's day-to-day life, the above is supplemented with published accounts of early pioneer life of similar families, including Nellie Ireton Mills' *All Along the River: Stories of Early Pioneers on the Payette River* and the journals of early Idaho missionary Narcissa Whitman.

² Grace Eleanore Howell was born on November 1, 1880, and spent most of her adult life in San Francisco.

Last week an interesting gentleman rode in, on his way to Ola to see about some grain he said was ripe there now. He is an old bachelor and calls himself Con the Packer¹. He brought us a newspaper from early March, and it was tremendously fun to read the happenings from Boise, even though the news is nearly 2 months old! At first William was worried about him; he said that horse thieves are a possibility in these hills. When he leaves to check on the flocks he always leaves a rifle lying across two machine cut nails above the door.

But Old Con ended up being harmless and has actually become a great friend. He helped William repair the back fence before he took off this afternoon for Horseshoe Bend. We had a kind of Easter dinner with our guest: William shot a jackrabbit in the hills on Saturday, and I made a stuffing and some of the potatoes left from last years' harvest. Potatoes grow very well here, and they last a long time in the little make-shift cellar William was able to dig beneath the main house, which isn't finished yet. It's coming along just fine: French Joe and Port-man-teux come by every day and help William and me. They are old fur trappers and live in a cave somewhere along the Payette River. William pays them with meat and huckleberry wine. In fact, we haven't even had lamb or beef ourselves this year— William uses it all to pay the help. Except of course the jackrabbits William shoots out in the hills. He also brings home an awful lot of salmon. He said the river north of us is swarming with so many fish, we could have fish for days if we wanted. As for my part, give me a jackrabbit stew any day over an old fish!



Eliza Howell

October 29, 1888

North of Boise, Idaho Territory

Our house is finally finished, and the girls and William and I moved in last week, just in time for winter. Our claim shanty had become very cramped, though we were thankful for it. But our handsome white-washed wood frame house is so much better. I so enjoyed admiring its spacious wood floors— and the windows! Real store-boughten glass windows from a store in Boise City! Gracie and I made curtains to hang around them, pinning them up in a pretty way. The red calico trimmed with pretty frick frack looked so pleasant, framing the orange and gold foliage of the fall trees. And you won't believe it— the little wild apple trees next to the creek actually gave us fruit this year! Fresh, crisp red apples— oh they felt so good to bite into after so many months of potatoes, bread and game. I want to make a pie but I wouldn't dare cook what we picked. The taste of freshness is too lovely. Oh what a fun Christmas it will be this year in our new home with boughten windows and fresh apples from our own claim!

January 11, 1889

North of Boise, Idaho Territory

The good Lord gave us a new baby last year, even as He took one back up to Heaven. We have just buried our dear little Ida² after a long illness, only three years old. I am thankful her suffering is over: God wanted her back and she is resting now with Him.

March 10, 1889

North of Boise, Idaho Territory

William and I have three precious flowers left to raise in our little homestead in the hills. Gracie³ is about to turn ten and she is such a help to me with her little sisters. She helps William with the lambing each Spring, which is coming up again I can hardly believe. Mary⁴ is eight and she has become quite the little housekeeper here at the homestead while Gracie and William are out with the lambs. And our newest addition— sweet Ada Rose! Her blue eyes and strawberry blonde curls match her pretty name.

When my Ida was ill, Mrs. Phelps visited most days, bringing food for the family and some lineaments and herbals to help soothe her fever. Having another woman around was so comforting in our trial. She and her family arrived from Scotland last fall, and they reported that this area was just the same as the Old Country. They intend to raise sheep like William does, and they will only be a few miles from us. To finally have permanent neighbors is a welcome change indeed. I guess the hills here in Idaho territory are perfect for two things: raising sheep and growing potatoes. A lamb pie covered in a crust of mashed potatoes makes a happy dinner on our chilly nights.

August 15, 1893

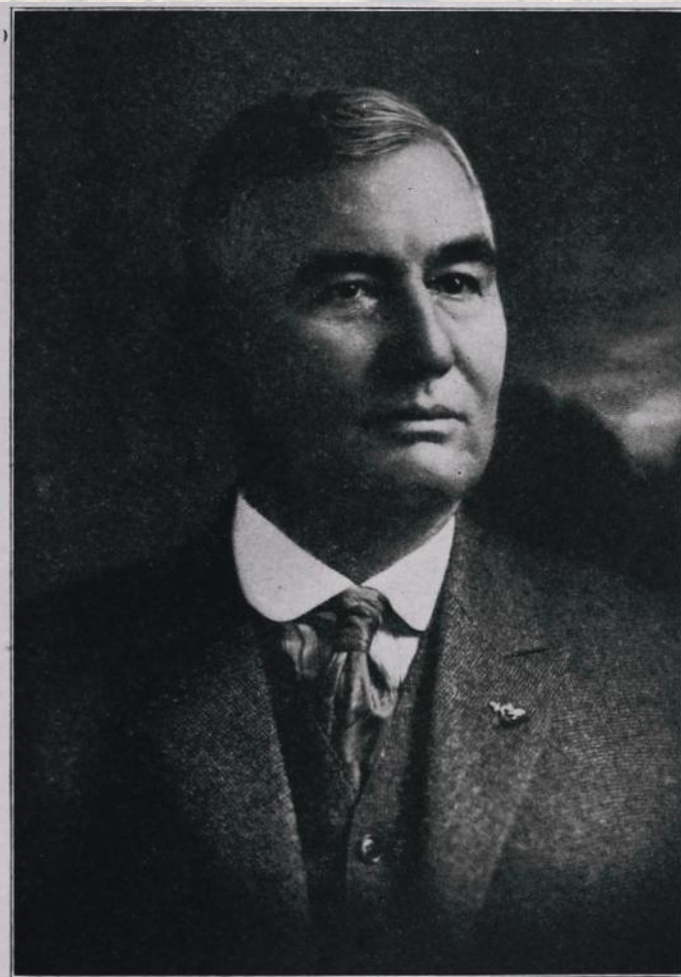
Howell, Idaho

A postmistress, as well as farmwife, shepherdess, seamstress and lately, midwife! The Phelps' welcomed a new little one to their clan, a boy they are calling Peter. I attended the birth

and was blessed to wash up the little crying bundle before handing him to the proud papa. The Phelps' have become great friends to us as our closest neighbors.

I love to be a postmistress as I get to see all of our dear neighbors at least once a week, and sometimes Mrs. Phelps stops by two or even three times. The postman is kind enough and brings us news from the big city. He told us this week that Idaho Territory has officially joined the United States of America! That's right, I am now a postmistress of an official, real state of the USA! I feel so proud to be an American today!

Three times a week the post will come through from Boise on its way to Ola, far up in the mountains where Old Con has his claim. We saw that dear old wildcat last week. He brought us some tin cups and plates and a whole bushel of huckleberries for pies, jellies and wine! He said the huckleberries are bursting in the balsam forests this year!



William Howell

December 30, 1903

Howell, Idaho

A new year— a new century! The 1800's are over, and just in time for me to become a grandmother. Our precious Grace Eleanore is off to San Francisco with her new husband expecting a baby of her own. She is now Grace Eleanore Davis. To let my first pretty flower fly far away from me was

not easy, but I am thankful she found a good man with whom to share this beautiful journey.

I can feel a change is coming in this new century; the flocks are thriving, the clover is high and strong and thick in the valley, and William put up nearly 30 tons of hay this fall. But William is getting older now; he is nearly 50 and I have just turned 43. He is as strong as ever, but he has been seeing about more business down in Boise City of late. I think he's getting restless for change out here in these old green hills. They have become so dear to us, but somehow I feel a new chapter is beginning for our family.

July 4, 1907

Howell, Idaho

My dear husband spends much of his time out in Boise City now, and we join him there often. He is combining with some other gentleman farmers to start up a big bank there, to loan money to all of the new settlers we are seeing come through. What a time to be alive! Two daughters married and gone to California, and my dear William transacting business in the city much of the time. He has hired quite a few Spaniards to help him with his flocks now; they came all of the way from the Basque region and are extremely devoted to their ancestral profession. Gregori is our foreman, and, my land, how well he handles William's flocks. This February during the lambing a mama ewe we thought for sure we'd lose due to the birthing position of the second of two twins, was saved due Gregori's skillful and gentle hand.

Ada and I spent two winters now at a rented home off State Street, leaving the homestead in the capable hands of Gregori and his young, pretty wife Angelu. Now we are back on the claim of course, enjoying the summer air and verdant valley. The purple lupine bend and wave in the soft, warm air and the fat bumble bees hover around the honeysuckle and the wild roses. I enjoy being back in a town during the winters, but my heart still sings in our clearing in the foothills.

October 31, 1911

Howell, Idaho

A young shepherd by the name of Colin McLeod knocked on our door today...

¹Conrad Wertz, popularly known as "Con the Packer" was a bachelor free spirit who roamed the Boise Basin in the 1880's through the turn of the century. His name appears in numerous newspaper articles He maintained a lesser known route to Boise Basin, known as Jackass Road, named such because of his trademark team of donkeys. His year and circumstances of death are unknown.

²Ida Eliza Howell died on December 3, 1888. A December 22 bulletin thanks a "Mrs. Phelps" for kindly aid and sympathy during the fatal illness of "our little daughter Ida." It is signed William and Eliza Howell.

³Grace Eleanore Howell was born on November 1, 1880, and spent most of her adult life in San Francisco.

⁴Mary Ann Howell was born at some time around 1890, though records vary as to the exact birth year. She resided with her parents most of her life and never married.

At the turn of the century, Eliza Howell's family prospered on the banks of Spring Creek. Meanwhile, a teenage boy bid farewell to everything he had ever known, and boarded an ocean liner bound for a land on which he'd never set foot. Colin McLeod was not yet nineteen when he disembarked the train at Caldwell. He began with nothing, but found work quickly, eventually saving enough to begin a business of his own. Though he'd found prosperity ranching in the Owyhee Mountains and in real estate in Caldwell, he still longed for the hill country reminiscent of his native Scotland. Then he had a chance encounter with the valley that would one day become Avimor – a valley that stole his heart. This is Colin's story.

March 9, 1898

Ardgay, Ross and Cromarty, Scotland

A ticket to America with my name on it.

It began on the icy Dornoch Firth just this morning . . . John was sinking quickly- more quickly than I would have imagined possible. I sprang from the rowboat into the water—Gorb was it freezing . . . it was like a thousand needles piercing my skin beneath my shirt. My boots were still on . . . I kick them off (I recovered only one), John climbs on me, claws at my face, panic, sinking, us both. . . then a foothold? I feel the soft lake bottom with one desperate, groping toe. A moment later- the side of our boat, and then . . . safety. For me at least. I pulled John into the tipping boat—almost tipping yet again— even as the delicious thrill of life surged back – we would survive. Life would end some day, aye, but not there, on Dornoch Firth, in the dreary, gray mist of a March morning.

Later, before the fire at the estate at Gledfield I sat across the hearth from John's father, the master of the estate.

"I owe my wee 'un's life to ye, young Colin. Zounds, your selflessness, your bravery, in going into Dornoch Firth for him, lad. . . how could I repay you? Tell me laddie, what do you want? Your poor father is now gone, your mother has been dear to us for many years. What might I do for ye? I'll give ye aught."

America.

This afternoon McPherson went into the village and dispatched a telegram to Liverpool and purchased a one-way ticket on the steamer, the Parisienne, bound for New Scotland— Nova Scotia— they call it. The name on the ticket? Colin McLeod. He also bought me a train ticket, leaving tomorrow morning, bound for Liverpool, and handed me a 20£ banknote. I fled home to tell Mother.

Mother wept.

March 16, 1898

Aboard the S.S. Parisienne

Mother. She came with me to the McPherson's where I'd take the coach to Glasgow to catch the train for Liverpool. "God go with ye. May there always be smoke in your chimney, lad," she said as she grasped my face hard with both trembling hands. I leant down to let her kiss me good-

bye. Wee Mother. I will never see her again.

Freedom. But for a boy of 18 . . . Adventure! To go beyond the village at Ardgay, all I've known. The Estate of the family around which my existence has revolved for all my eighteen years. The flocks, the green hills, the ancient estate— Mother. Dornoch Firth. The little church in the shire, the cottage, the village . . .my school fellows, the mist, the hills. The green hills.

Now- the ocean. The Atlantic Ocean stretches before me. Salt and wind sting my lips, my clothes and hair still smell of the muddy depths of Dornoch Firth. I wore my dead father's old boots since mine lay somewhere at the bottom of Dornoch Firth. An iceberg looms starboard side, a few miles distance toward the wintry reaches of the frosty Atlantic, as my frigate and I forge westward toward my new life, my new destiny in America.



March 26, 1898

Halifax, Nova Scotia

We at last disembarked the Parisienne at the port of entry here in Halifax. Other lads disembarked with me, some looking dirty and shifty, some like they didn't know where they were going. The immigration office didn't like boys who had nowhere to go in the New World. A few lasses were aboard too, with their mothers.

"What's your occupation, boy?" asked the man at the Office of Immigration, eyeing me suspiciously, after I'd told my name.

A shepherd.

He looked at me for a moment and then marked the column for "male"-- 18 years old. He did not write shepherd, only Gent. A Gent. Yes. A gentleman on his own, alone in a huge, empty country full of land and freedom and riches. Colin McLeod, Shepherd Gent.

April 3, 1898

Montreal

In Halifax I bought a ticket for Calgary, where I'll change trains and head south, and finally disembark somewhere in the western United States. A lot of lads head for Idaho Territory as there is plenty of free land and sunshine and

the work for a shepherd is abundant.

I am tired of staring out at this train car but I dare not change my plans. The money McPherson gave me is nearly out, and I am unsure as of yet whether I'll even make it to Idaho Territory with what I have left. No more pints for me.

April 10, 1898

Bonniers Ferry

My old Iron Horse left the endless prairie behind and roared through the Canadian Rockies toward the new American state of Idaho. Lad back in Calgary said it only came into existence about seven years ago and that Uncle Sam gives out free land to anyone willing to improve it, even to a Mac like me. I'm just about out of money so I am now looking for a place to stop and settle, and look for work. I'll file for a claim once I get some knowledge of the area. I'd like to find a hilly green place with lots of open land, perfect for raising sheep ...

January 1, 1899

Caldwell

My first new year as a lone shepherd gent— I even found work at a camp down The Rocks with a fellow called Finley McKenzie. That part of the country is good for raising sheep, inferior to Ross and Cromarty on account of its dryness, but the land is freely available. I turn nineteen in a few weeks; on my eighteenth birthday I could never have fathomed I'd be in America tending sheep among cowboys, Indians, saloon lasses and pioneers.

April 18, 1904

Poison Creek Ranch

Each year I am saving and soon I will be able to go into business for myself. I do like working for McKenzie, but I am eager to begin my own work, somewhere along Jump Creek. I will stay in the sheep business; I am astounded at how our ancestral profession thrives here in the American West. There are many Scots operating businesses of sheep, wool and cattle. With all of the MacDonald's, McKenzies and McLeod's about, one almost feels as though he were in the old country.

August 8, 1907

Poison Creek Ranch, Jump Creek, near Homedale

Today I made Miss Anna Purser my wife.

A lass from Devon, England, she came to the US with her parents as a wee one. Mr. Frank Purser raised sheep in The Rocks in Jordan Valley, on the Oregon and Idaho border. Now that I am a married man, I want to leave this remote tumbleweed country. I would like to put down roots closer into town, Marsing or Homedale perhaps, or even Caldwell. I need to continue to save my wages and live cheaply, or I will not be able to provide a decent life for my Anna. Man told of a lone grave near here from just about ten years ago; lass hunted down and killed by an Indian. And the Snake River is dangerous: its quieter stretches invite hostilities

from natives, while its rougher parts are too fierce to approach. I've nearly drowned once in my life: I won't test whether I'd survive a second time.



December 25, 1908

Caldwell, Idaho

My bonnie Anna and I officially sold the ranch in Jordan Valley, and are now bona fide city folk, if you can call Caldwell a city. The town recently erected a new train depot in this up-and-coming little hamlet. It is a world different from remote and rugged Poison Creek Ranch. There our only contact with the outside world was the occasional stage coach arriving from Silver City, Homedale or Nampa.

We are happy and prospering now, Anna and me.

April 15, 1910

Howell, Idaho

On my way to Horseshoe Bend to see about some mares, I stumbled upon a bonnie plot of green earth completely covered in wildflowers. Zounds, I was back in Ross and Cromarty as if transported by the angels. A handsome red barn and a small apple orchard lie peacefully on a murmuring creek by a little white farmhouse. Mother's last words flickered in my mind like a candle on a chilly night: May you ever have smoke in your chimney ...

The plot of land seems milder and gentler than the dry, hot wind of the Owyhee Mountain summers. It is difficult to determine its location: Gem, Boise or Ada County? It seems the Creator fashioned it and then dropped it at random—kerplunk— and where the three counties meet, ignoring merely human boundaries and property lines.

Anna and the children and I are comfortable and happy living the winters in town, but I am now in a position to add a ranch of my own to our buildings in Caldwell and I'd like to see whether the owner of this valley is open to selling.

*Please note that the images published here have been reimagined for this story since it has been difficult to find actual photos of the young McCleod Family

June 1, 1910

Boise County Courthouse, Idaho City

Eliza Howell is the record owner of my valley, along with her husband and girls. Her husband is record owner of one plot west. The land laws allow a husband and a wife to each homestead for free on 160 acres, so I guess the gent had his lady file for the neighboring plot thus doubling his holdings. Smart gent. Of course just my luck the land's been privately owned so I stand no chance of filing a homestead claim of my own and getting in on the land grab. It will take a few more years on Jump Creek working at Hudgeon's Ranch before I'll save enough to make an offer. I'll keep a close eye on the papers here and as soon as the Howells decide to part ways with their bit of dirt, Anna and I will be ready and waiting.

May 15, 1914

Boise County Courthouse, Idaho City

Och aye . . . a lad called Archibald snapped my wee piece of earth right out from under my neb. He bought Spring Valley from the Howell lass, but I see no one inhabiting the claim as of yesterday when I passed by on my way to the courthouse to check the land records. Drat!

July 4, 1915

Spring Valley Ranch

Mine! The bonnie stream, the green hills, the wildflowers, the farmhouse with its brick chimney, the red barn— all in my and my Anna's name. A place where one can breathe. We've grown fond of our folks in Caldwell but I've longed for the mist and the hills for nearly two decades since I got off that Iron Horse in Caldwell. Anna has too. The mist and the green hills and the wee lambs— all for us, forever. May there always be smoke in your chimney . . .

October 10, 1920

Spring Valley Ranch

We are preparing to harvest the lambs and bring our flocks back into Caldwell for winter. Sheep herding has thrived here in Spring Valley, and I've added more acreage. I now own parts of Gem, Ada and Boise County. The hardest part of buying land: finding a way out to the courthouses to record my deeds. Civilization sure is spread out here in America. Here in Idaho you'd best not aim at transacting business between November and April. The County Seat at Idaho City requires a long, dangerous ride on horseback, and an isolated one too. Roving thieves, bears, rockslides and mudslides. Anna and wee Colin and the babies and I return to Caldwell for the winter; next week we'll head out. We can get snow as early as November in these hills, and we'll want our stock safe at our barns in Caldwell before the first freeze.

By the 1950's, Colin McLeod Sr. had enlarged Spring Valley Ranch, slowly adding thousands of acres of land in Ada, Boise and Gem Counties. Ancestral sheep and

cattle husbandry practices coupled with Scottish frugality and his stalwart refusal to take a vacation, resulted in a thriving ranch operation, even through the difficult Depression Era.

Stewardship of land and investment in community were the guiding principles of the McLeod family farm. When the Great Depression settled over Boise City, the McLeods hosted community meals for local farm families that had lost their farms and their livelihood when the economy crashed. Meanwhile, Colin Sr.'s son Smokey, born in 1920, joined his dad and started a family of his own right here in the foothills that would become Avimor.

Another ancient sheepherding people trekked to the foothills with Scottish natives like Colin McLeod. The Basque region of the Iberian peninsula straddles the border of Spain and France, in a mountainous, hilly country reminiscent of the shires of Scotland—or the foothills of Avimor. Like his father, Smokey shrewdly noted the value the Basque brought to his business, and set about bringing capable young men to the foothills of Avimor to support his thriving sheep and cattle ranch.

The young Basque men who joined the McLeod family were not unlike Colin McCleod— restless, capable, unattached. They cherished the Old World yet saw something touchingly familiar in the green foothills of Avimor. More often than not, Scottish and Basque newcomers accepted work as shepherds with an established rancher and saved their earnings until they could go into business of their own. Others worked for a season or two, and then returned home with their savings.

Jaime Uranga is a nineteen-year old sheepherder from the Basque region of Spain. He arrived last year and found gainful employment at Spring Valley Ranch. He works alongside his ancestral sheepherding dogs Andorra and Navarre, Pyrenees Mountain Dogs from Jaime's home in the mountains of Northern Spain. Indeed, the McLeod family employed a Basque man with the surname Uranga between the 1950's and 1960's. Some of the names and dates below are fictional, but the details of the stories about the McLeod family and Spring Valley Ranch operations are based on author interviews with McLeod descendants.

April 25, 1956

A remote hillside near Cartwright Road below Stack Rock

My *ola*¹ is where I left it last year in this clearing where Spring Creek meets Custer Creek. I reworked some of the thatching in the roof and fortified a wall that had loosened during the winter. I'll manage fine with the Custer Creek *ola* for a few weeks until Peli and I drive the flocks up farther north when the summer's heat settles in.

A lamb wandered off at some point yesterday afternoon. Andorra had disappeared after dinner and didn't come when I gave the signal so I knew we'd lost a sheep. I left Navarre with the flock and wandered way back down Spring Creek, and was about to turn around when I heard a low, gentle growl, and some chirping and squeaking.

Andorra was all the way down in the creek bottom lying with her nose on her paws growling softly at something scurrying about in the brush close to the water. Just beyond the lamb lay motionless in the bramble, some visible blood indicating it had been struggling to untangle itself for a while. A fat marmot was minding his own business gathering some berries, chirruping busily, noticing neither Andorra nor the lamb. At the sound of my voice Andorra was at my side, but whined pleadingly in the direction of the “predator.”



I was able to untangle the youngster from the snare and carried her back upstream to where the flock and Navarre napped peacefully in the warm sunshine. I cleaned up the baby and got her to drink some milk from the *ama*, who gingerly approached us as soon as she picked up her offspring's scent. By nightfall it was walking unsteadily behind *ama* shyly. I left it nestled close to her, sleeping quietly.

A foundling lamb earns a night's repose.

May 15, 1956

Spring Valley Ranch

Zzzzzzzzzhhhhzzzzzz . . . Again today I heard a low hum near the homestead when I stopped in for supplies. Andorra heard it too. She ran to the house and pawed at the wall curiously. She didn't seem especially alert yet she wondered what could be the source of the noise and I did too. I heard it before when I came to meet Mr. McLeod a few weeks ago for supplies. The boss didn't notice and I was too distracted to ask. Today I heard it again, and seeing Andorra react that way piqued my curiosity even more.

May 20, 1956

Spring Valley Ranch

The family will return soon from Caldwell and I want to show Mr. McLeod the flock's growth since last month. I am looking forward to another summer with the family at the homestead. Last year, Mrs. McLeod's suppers were a delicious ending to long hot days. I am usually able to procure only canned beans and potato chips for Peli and myself when we are in the hills alone with the flock. When

I see Mr. McLeod's old truck rounding the hillside from the northwest I know Andorra and Navarre and I will eat *ona*² for a spell. Mrs. McLeod's meals at the white house are even more *ona*. Andorra is very funny with Suzie, the McLeod's dog, when they first meet after a season apart. When the truck pulls up and Suzie's head is hanging out the passenger window, Andorra bounds up to her and immediately growls. Suzie growls back, and then they circle one another suspiciously for a few seconds. The next instant they are up on hind legs playing and frolicking like the lambs. Navarre watches placidly. I think he thinks they are both his wives.

June 1, 1956

Spring Valley Ranch

I asked Mr. McLeod about the humming noise by the chimney of the white house. He said he'd take a look and let me know what he finds.

June 17, 1956

Spring Valley Ranch

The low, steady buzz grew as the late spring became a warm, sweetly scented early summer. Now when Andorra approaches the homestead she immediately runs to the base of the brick chimney and begins to sniff around. She doesn't even bother searching for Suzie or greeting the children. We pulled out a chink of weak siding near the chimney base and a hunk of something golden and dripping appeared. Honeycomb! Honey bees had built a huge hive inside its walls! We pulled out a few more pieces of the siding and even more golden hunks of fat, sweet, sticky sweet honeycomb dislodged.

Ona campfire pancakes for Andorra and me tonight.

July 4, 1956

Scott Mountain Lookout, Garden Valley

Elevation: 8,215 feet

A happy fourth of July birthday to Uncle Sam as Andorra, Navarre and I make our way farther north to our higher summer *ola*. We covered about twenty miles in just under a week, and as we reach the higher elevation we feel exhausted, but the cool mountain air and Alpine streams feel refreshing. It was getting too hot at Spring Valley Ranch, especially for Andorra and Navarre. Their thick coats aren't meant for summer in the American desert.

July 31, 1956

Silver Creek Plunge, north of Garden Valley

Mr. McLeod and family were at Silver Creek Plunge this weekend. They drove up for the afternoon and I was able

¹ An *ola* is a shepherd's hut, a makeshift shelter in which a lone shepherd would retreat for the night close to his resting flock.

² Good, as in food, in Basque.

to leave Peli with the flocks and check in and talk business with Mr. McLeod while the kids played in the creek. I had a few buckets of huckleberries to hand off to Mrs. McLeod. There's a huckleberry patch back behind where we graze the flocks that I think I'm the only one who knows about. Even Peli wasn't looking when I disappeared a few days ago with two milk buckets. I've been keeping the buckets in the flowing creek to chill them; when I handed them to Mrs. McLeod today they were as fresh and crisp as the moment I picked them.



September 1956

Fire!

We were headed back into the lowlands for the autumn wooling in Marsing, camping for the night near Spring Creek. A tiny black thread of smoke appeared toward Spring Valley Summit. We only had a few small fires last season, my first here in Idaho, so I wasn't sure what to expect. I left Navarre and Andorra with the flocks and Peli and I headed back to the homestead in Mr. McLeod's truck. Patti and Sandy were on hand, as well as Mrs. McLeod, who flew out of the house with a stack of large flour sacks. We locked Suzie in the house and all packed into Mr. McLeod's fire truck cab, kids and all, and flew up State Road 15 toward the summit.

I now understand why Mr. McLeod always keeps an extra truck with four huge containers of water in the bed. It's parked near the house, always prepared to go if smoke appears. This time, it zigzagged up the hill toward Horseshoe Bend, and we pulled off as we neared the blaze. Already flames had licked down the side of the mountain toward us. Mr. McLeod, his wife and the kids all leapt out of the cab and began to soak flour sacks and potato sacks in water from the storage tanks. I followed them. They threw the soaked fabric panels over the red flames, running into the smoke to retrieve the wet sacks and re-soak them before flying back to the blaze and smothering them again. We all worked together combatting the blaze until only a few smoldering piles of brush were left. Everyone was covered in black ash and reeked of smoke as we piled back into the truck to head back to the ranch. We were exhausted, stinking and hot— but we had succeeded in fighting the blaze.

It's strange how the hills seem so tame and friendly, until a fire breaks out and they become the enemy.

December 1956

Boise City

I am boarding for the winter in Boise City with other *Euskaldunak*³ at a boarding house in the big, bustling city. We left the flock to winter in Marsing and I am not needed at the ranch until the spring lambing in March. I already found work here in the city for a few months as a chimney sweep, and I expect I'll do well in that profession until I can get back out to my sheep and my hills. I badly miss my sweet Andorra already— she had to stay at the winter quarters in Marsing with Navarre. The family has returned to Caldwell for the season.

I've been thinking back on this year— on the honey and the huckleberries, on Andorra and baby lambs, on the green hills and the rushing Payetter River. I'd planned to spend only a year or two here in America, and then return with my savings to the old country. But something in my heart is telling me to stay with the McLeods, maybe putting down permanent roots here in Idaho. The American West is really a land of dreams and opportunities, and I can see why so many *Euskaldunak* who plan on working for just a season or two, end up never leaving.

Skilled Basque sheepherders like Jaime typically did not leave the Boise area, despite an often strong and deep tie to the Old World. Known for their fierce commitment to saving lambs, and recovering lost sheep, Basque sheepherders were in high demand among shrewd Idaho ranchers like Smokey McLeod. Indeed, many of the young men employed at Spring Valley Ranch went on to become notable livestock businessmen in their own right, settling down and marrying, making Idaho not only their livelihood, but also their forever home. Basque culture continues to thrive here in the Treasure Valley, due partly to family ranchers like Smokey McLeod who recognized their legendary expertise and unparalleled work ethic.

(The annual Basque Festival, dedicated to honoring and preserving Basque heritage in the Boise area, takes place in downtown Boise the last weekend of July.)

³ Basque word for a person who speaks Basque; how Basque refer to themselves.



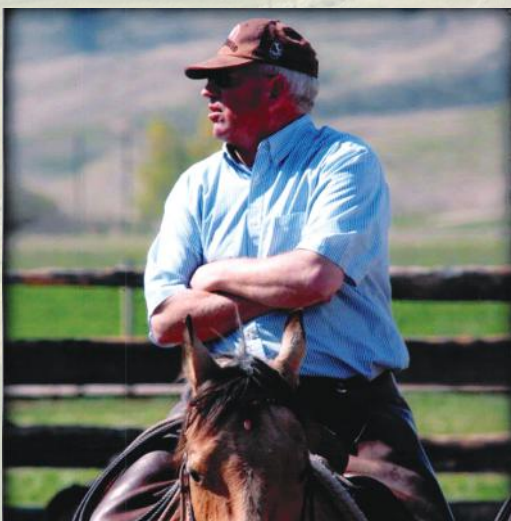
Anna and Colin McLeod



Colin McCleod



Colin "Smokey" McCleod II



Colin "Sandy" McCleod III



Jennifer Husmann is a historical writer originally from Florida. Her book about historical sites in her native state was published by The History Press in January 2026. Also a sixth grade teacher at Idaho Novus Classical Academy, Jennifer lives with her husband and three children in Avimor.



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