WAHL FLYING RANCH HISTORY

Composed by Dicksie Knight May & Shirley Wright Lilley

Michael WAHL was born 18 Aug 1840 in Laufen, Germany and died 21 Jul 1902 near Seguin, TX. He married Katherine UTZ in Germany and she died 30 Jan 1900. Michael owned a guest house (gasthaus) that had been in the family several generations. In 1892 he had a falling out with the mayor because he built an access road from the main fare to his gasthaus without permission. Because of this his barn was lit on fire 3 times. He sold the gasthaus to the Sanwald Family and emigrated from Germany to the United States (US) arriving on Dec 24th 1892 through Ellis Island. His wife, Katherine arrived in the US on 5 May 1893. The children who accompanied her are listed at Ellis Island as daughter, Rosine, granddaughter, Minnie¹, listed as her child and son, Wilhelm. Another son, Charles, also came to the US, although two of their children, Gottfried and Jacob WAHL, remained in Germany.

The son, Wilhelm "William" Walter WAHL, born 11 Oct 1880 in the gasthaus in Laufen am Kocher, Germany who arrived on the vessel Haval with his mother on 5 May 1893. They traveled to Texas to join their family who was living near Seguin and San Antonio where many WAHL descendents continue to live.

William's citizenship document was finalized 8 Apr 1912. He stayed in Texas where most of the Wahl family had settled until he moved to Dalark, Arkansas, along with his brother-in-law. His brother in-law was Frank Gangl who had married Wilhelm's sister, Rosine Wahl, at Sequin, TX, on 4 Oct 1897.

During this period William advertised in a German language newspaper in Jansville, Wisconsin, that he would like to meet a nice German girl for a bride. Anna Marie Perleberg who lived in Racine and Oconomowoc, WI responded to this advertisement by letter. He later told his family he chose the most intelligent lady he heard from who also had the best handwriting. He traveled to Wisconsin and they were married by an Evangelical Lutheran Pastor after three days and then returned to Arkansas. Their first child, Frederick "Fred" was born 29 Sep 1905 in Dalark, Arkansas.

Wilhelm's sister, Rosine who was married Karl Gangl on 4 Oct 1897 at Sequin, TX, moved to Canada from Arkansas. Shortly afterward Wilhelm and Anna decided they would like to join Rosine and her family there. Most of their business dealings in Arkansas where they lived was by trade and barter so money was not easy to come by. They got rid of everything they could and began their trip with very little money. They traveled by wagon and by the time they arrived in Laramie, Albany, Wyoming; it was in the middle of winter of the year 1906. Anna and Fred kept warm by staying under a canvas. Because they were so short of funds they decided to stay in Laramie.

After arriving in Laramie Wilhelm first worked on a ranch for the Fischer family on the Big Laramie River. As soon as William was able to get the money together he purchased tools so that he would be able to contract with the Hahns Peak Railroad Company in order to clear timber for the right-of-way for the railroad. While on this job, Wilhelm, Anna, and Fred lived in a tent

at Fox Park for one winter. That winter the father made skis out of barrel staves so he could get the mail and go to town for supplies. After that job was completed Wilhelm and his family moved to Laramie and he went to work at the plaster mill south of town. Later he drove a delivery wagon for the beer brewery located in Laramie. It is not known where they lived during this period of their history, although Newspaper articles place them in Centennial and Mountain Home. This would be in the area where the Hahns Peak Railroad was being built.

In addition to Fred three more children were born to Wilhelm "William" and Anna after arriving in Laramie. Their son, Walter Henry Wahl was born 6 Sep 1908. Their daughter, Emma Anna Wahl, was born 6 Jun 1910 and the youngest son, Richard Albert Wahl was born 23 Sep 1912.

William Wahl family made his first homestead entry 9 Apr 1912ⁱⁱⁱ. They homesteaded and the first patent document for Section 34, Township 15, North, Range 73 West, was issued 25 April 1917 for 160 acres as a Homestead Entry, Original. His second patent document for the same Section, Township and Range was a Sale-Cash Entry for 120 Acres. The homestead title was issued on 25 Apr 1917. This property is west of the railroad tracks from Cheyenne to Laramie about seven miles southeast of Laramie. In addition, the family purchased another 200 Acres. The property they purchased had originally belonged to James and Mary Malven in Section 28 and in Section 34, John & Emma McGill and their heirs and Knud F. and his wife, Dora F. Knudsen. Others who homesteaded in Section 34 were Ciara and Jabez Simpson and Wm E. Goforth. The 1941 Polk's Directory for Albany County Farmers and Ranchers lists Walter H Wahl's tax evaluation was for 440 Acres at \$1,051. In 1943 Polks Directory listed 440 acres tax evaluation for \$1,500. Originally Sections 34 and 28 were included in the Fort Sanders Military Reservation.

William Wahl was working on the railroad when he homesteaded his land. When the trains came by the ranch, the crews would kick off pieces of coal for Wahl's family. Their mother, Anna, would send Fred and Walter with the wagon to pick up the coal along the railroad tracks to heat the house. The family owned cattle, sheep, horses and chickens therefore coyotes were a big concern. William's Brand was the German Script for W The ranch buildings consisted of the family home, a cow barn and milk house with attached room that was used originally as a well house, then later as a bunk house, and eventually a granary. In addition there was a chicken coop and an outhouse.

Anna's parents, Karl Fredrick William and his wife, Carolina Perleberg, came to Wyoming from Wisconsin and lived out their lives on the ranch. They came from Schwedt, Berlin Germany and immigrated to Janesville, Rock, and Wisconsin about 1885. After they arrived at the ranch Grandpa Perleberg hand dug the first well and framed it with a log handle and rope and bucket so that the family could easily get their water. Later they hired a rig to drill the well on the hill and at that time they used a windmill to pump the water.

At one time there were eight people living in the two bedroom house, The Wahl and Perleberg families. The family was living on the ranch when Anna's father, Grandpa Perleberg, died June 14, 1914. The day he died Anna sent Fred to the nearest neighbor to get help. They had to shovel snow to get the morticians wagon in to pick up the body.

Grandmother Carolina, who only spoke German, continued to live on the ranch. During these years Emma slept on the sofa so that grandma would have a bedroom. Grandmother lived until June 14, 1931. Both grandparents are buried in the Wahl plot at Greenhill cemetery.

Getting to and from the ranch was very difficult even though it was only 7 miles. Sometimes they took a trail that led to Laramie rather than taking the regular road because of the snow. Their transportation was by horse or horse and buggy. The family attended St Paul's German Lutheran Church in spite of the distance to town, but became more active when they moved to town.

The family ran a dairy on the ranch and sold their milk and cream in Laramie to a creamery. It was 7 miles to town which was very difficult in the winter. Sometimes they took a trail that led to Laramie rather than taking the regular road because of the snow. Their transportation was a horse and buggy, but Wilhelm would ski into town when they needed supplies during these years. Later on the family bought a town house at 714 Spruce in Laramie as William worked on the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) to supplement the ranch income. He first worked as a fireman, but eventually retired as an engineer.

When Fred started school at the West Side School he would ride his horse from the ranch into town and stay at the Spruce house during the week and return home to the ranch on horseback for the weekend. Later when Walter started school he joined his brother for this weekly trek between home at the ranch and school. Their Mom would be at the ranch taking care of ranch business. All of the children attended the West Side, now the Lincoln School on Cedar when it was still a wooden structure, and when they got to the seventh and eighth grades they had to go to the East Side school which is now the Civic Center.

Around 1916 when Emma was ready to attend school Anna moved with all the kids into town to their house on Spruce, hence Richard was already living in town when he started school.

In 1917, when he was 12, Fred went to work on the UPRR as a call boy. A call boy sat on a bench under the dispatchers windows until needed to "call" the crew for their train. He had a bicycle to find the crew wherever they might be (which sometimes proved interesting). Because he worked a 12 hour day and sometimes had to call a crew at night he rigged up a flashlight on the handle bars. One night he didn't see a ditch that was across a road and went head first into it mangling his bike. He was not a happy camper. When time came to return to school he persuaded his father to let him keep working until he was old enough to apprentice as a machinist. He promised to take correspondence courses to finish his education, which he did faithfully, even teaching himself calculus. When he was of age he became an apprentice machinist

The first car the family owned was a Durand that they bought in 1926 and they also had an Overland. The boys liked to work on cars so they built a very long garage on Spruce with a full length pit so that you could work on them.

The family continued ranching and going back and forth from town. There was an airmail landing strip in Laramie that was used when their planes couldn't land in Cheyenne. In about

1926 as Fred was observing the planes that flew into this field and reading aviation magazine he became interested in flying. A barnstormer with a hisso powered biplane came to town and he took a ride and decided this was for him.

This is all it took to make Fred decide he wanted to learn how to fly. Through writing letters and advertising he located a flying school. He found Lee Briggs, a dealer for Ford car and farm implements in Memphis, Missouri, who owned a flying school. Briggs wanted \$15 an hour to teach him how to fly. Fred told him he was a machinist and welder for the Union Pacific and didn't make that kind of money and Briggs said they would work something out. Briggs agreed to allow part of the tuition in exchange for teaching his shop foreman acetylene welding and doing other welding jobs for him. At that time Fred planned to go to Missouri after Christmas to learn how to fly.

Fred was still working for the UPRR. One night when it was 20 below zero Fred and his helper was given a job of piston packing. They had to get the material to make a gasket on the piston to keep the steam from leaking. The steam would freeze on the window making it impossible for the engineer to see anything. They had to go to the shop and make a gasket. They got wet from the steam while putting in the gasket and he and his helper got up in the cab where the fire was going in the firebox to dry out. Pretty soon they heard someone on the gangway and knew it was the night foreman. The foreman accused them of sleeping and Fred told him they weren't sleeping they were trying to dry out so they wouldn't get pneumonia. The foreman was having none of it so he told them to go home and come back the next day for a hearing. He said when he got home his mother asked him what was he doing home at 1 AM in the morning and he told her he got fired. The next day at the hearing they laid him off. So that year he planned after Christmas to go learn how to fly and told his buddies around the shop that is what he was going to do. Fred's buddies in the shop said it was too bad that he couldn't go and learn to fly now, and Fred said, "Oh, yeah, watch for me at 12 o'clock, I'll be on Number 4 heading for Cheyenne." They were there watching and he was on train Number 4 headed for Memphis, Missouri.

Fred soloed on January 4, 1927 in a Standard J-1 OXP5 powered biplane. He flew to Chicago with his instructor and took his flight test for a Federation Aeronautique Internationale pilot license and received Sporting License Number 107 and certificate Number 6692, a license recognized worldwide at that time.

Fred went home and a chance came for him to purchase an airplane in Missouri. The engine needed to be 180 HP for the altitude in Wyoming; so he ordered an engine to be installed. Fred and Richard who was 15 years old went back to pick up the airplane and found the engine parts still in a box. They installed the engine and after getting the timing right they left Missouri for home. They left Memphis at daylight headed home. The engine overheated and they had to land every few miles. They had 15 forced landings within 210 miles until they got to Fall City, Nebraska where they landed in a corn field. The crop had been harvested, but the stalks were still standing. It was dusk and they didn't realize how close they were to the fence. In the morning when they were taking off the grain was just high enough to slow down the plane. As they were taking off the landing gear didn't clear the fence, hence the ware caught and turned over the plane on its back. Richard said he saw something red flash by his face and through the

plane was on fire so he scrambled out. It turned out to be a map book with a red cover. Fred called the factory they were headed for which was only 50 miles away and the man came and paid Fred \$500 for the plane and he saved the money toward purchase of another plane. Fred & Richard used that money to get home to Laramie on the bus.

In July of 1927 Fred heard that Dick LeFrink had a couple airplanes at Frontier Days in Cheyenne for sale. He wanted \$1200 for one and \$1500 for the second plane had 150 HP engine so he bought that one. Fred had saved some money and had the \$500 from the wrecked plane and with his father's help he was able to borrow the remaining money to purchase a plane. He and Richard flew that plane back to Laramie and buzzed the UPRR Roundhouse before landing at the ranch. Tex Langford, the local Texaco distributor in Laramie, furnished the gasoline and oil in exchange for putting the Texaco Star insignia and advertising on his airplane. . . What a good deal!

Fred met his wife, Margaret Mumm whose parents were Edward and Amelia Bramwell Mumm while she was a student at the University of Wyoming. Her grandparents ran the Virginian Hotel in Medicine Bow in the early 1900's. Margaret graduated and became a teacher before they were married. Margaret was teaching at Ft Steele and Fred would fly up and see her on the weekends. She told the story that the children would say "Miss Mumm, Texaco Lindy is coming, Texaco Lindy is coming!" While they were going together Margaret was in college and on weekends she would visit the family at the Spruce house. On Sundays she would go to church with them and after dinner she would play the piano and he would play the violin most of the afternoon. Margaret and Fred married 21 Jun 1928 in Rawlins and after the children were born she took care of the business end of his company.

After Fred obtained an airplane he began his flying career and he opened an airfield on his father's ranch. This is where Fred taught flying and provided flight service for those who were brave enough to venture into the air. Richard states that Fred flew many for amusement and amazement. The family dragged an area for the runways and Fred's father contracted for a hanger to be built there. Fred's first student class was his brother's, Richard and Walter Wahl and John Thalken. Other students from the local area were Raymond Johnson and Jimmy Richards. Both of his brothers, Walter and Richard, were barnstormers with Fred and helped to operate the business.

Fred had several commercial operations while at the ranch. He owned what was called Laramie Airways. He flew charter trips for the University of Wyoming, for Professors from the Extension Service at the University of Wyoming. For that he used a plane that was identical to one that Lindbergh flew. It had a bigger cabin so there was room for passengers.

Fred continued to engage in barnstorming including aerobatic maneuvers, wing walking and taking people for rides. Fred's wife, Margaret, and Walter's girlfriend used to 'Wing Walk at the county fairs when Fred would put on an air show and he also sold rides on his airplane.

One time Fred flew a couple of men from Laramie to Saratoga where they landed prairie. The snow was deep and the sage brush slowed them down, but it was a good landing, but they couldn't take off. Fred talked the mayor into letting him use the main street take off on instead

of the prairie. To be able to do this they moved all the cars off the street and kept the kids in school so no one would get hurt. Fred paced off the street measuring the distance between buildings so he could figure out how much wing clearance he had. He had to leave the passengers to keep the weight down due to the risk.

Mountain Airways Corporation was formed and on Dec 1, 1931, his father leased to the Corporation the 60 acres they were using for the hanger and landing field. Fred Wahl was the President of Mountain Airways with Al Sherwood was Secretary. Mountain Airways leased the property until Dec 1, 1941.

Fred and Margaret had a dance band that played at Grays Gables and Woods Landing on Saturday nights. Fred played the fiddle, his brother, Richard, played the trombone and Margaret played the piano and sang duet with Ray Johnson who played the banjo. They used the money to supplement their money during the depressions.

The airmail emergency facility landing area near town currently where Interstate 80 and Hwy 287 now intersect was still there in the 1930's. Fred helped find the present location of the current airport, General Brees Field, where the wind would blow the snow off. It was built in the 1930's during the depression by the CCC's.

Fred was the second aviator to receive a license in Wyoming, and the first in Albany County. He moved his business from the Wahl Ranch to Rawlins and Cheyenne with airlines. His early career included flying for the weather and mail services in Wyoming and Montana. He flew a cargo ship in WWII. He went to work for Inland Airways in Cheyenne which became part of Western Airlines. By the time he retired he had flown everything from the OX5 Jenny to the Boeing 707-720B. He retired from the airlines at the age of 60, flying his own private plane until he was 85. He and his wife lived in Porterville and Lindsay, CA, for more than 25 years where he was a member of the Flying Farmers and Flying Octogenarians. Margaret died March 1992, as did his son Allen, on August 10, 1990. Fred died December 24, 1995, in Tacoma, WA, at the age of 90 and is buried in Inglewood, CA. In 2011 he was inducted into the Wyoming Aviation Hall of Fame. His plaque hangs in the Cheyenne airport.

Fred and Margaret's children are son, Allen Frederick Wahl, born 21 Dec 1929 in Laramie and died 6 Aug 1990 in San Jose CA and daughter, Claova Margaret Wahl, born 24 Mar 1931, born in Laramie. Allen married Freda Denker in 1946 and they had the following children: Frederick 'Fred' Leslie, Brent and James. Claova married Thomas Earl Johnston in 1951 and they had the following children: Diane, Thomas, Carol and Mark.

Walter Henry WAHL was also was a pilot and he too participated in barnstorming with his brother and their wives. He flew with Fred and he liked to tell this story. Fred had been working on the engine of the plane because it was leaking oil. On that day when they were flying the oil was leaking back over the cowling and it would catch fire, but the wind would extinguish it. This was an open cockpit bi-wing airplane. Walter said, Fred tapped him on the shoulder and he turned around. He pointed to the fire extinguisher and pointed to the wing. He wanted Walt to take the extinguisher and climb out on the wing so he could put the fire out if needed before they

could land. Walter climbed out on the wing and said he held on so tight that there were finger marks pressed into the struts.

In 1930 Walter Henry WAHL married Elvira Murdock, the daughter of Ray and Emma Pregal Murdock. Elvira was the daughter of Ray and Emma Pregal Murdock. The Pregal family owned a ranch in the area.

Walter and his family lived on the ranch where Walter pastured 200 sheep east of the buildings. They kept the cattle south of the barn and had a dug out for lambing. They raised some chickens and sold eggs. They separated the milk and sold cream and butter in town. While they lived at the ranch there was a wind mill and also a wind charger. They plowed up a field to plant potatoes and had a garden. In the winter the tumble weeds were pile up along the fence and the snow would accumulate and pack hard so that the animals would climb the fence.

When Walter would work on the RR day shift he drove his two boys to town and drop them off with their Great Grandmother Emma Pregal Murdock on Kearney and they would walk to school from there. After school they rode the bus and walked the two miles home from the highway. Sometimes when they caught the bus to school they might ride their horses to the road, but this was only if their Dad had worked the night shift and could take the horse's home. When they were around 10 years old they got bikes and rode them the two miles to catch the bus.

Some horse experiences that Billy Wahl, Walter's son, had when he was somewhere between 10 to 12 years old are as follows: Billy saddled up his pinto and was galloping about a mile from the house when the saddle rolled and he was suddenly upside down looking at the front feet of his galloping horse. All he could think about was how a neighbor had recently had a cowboy get trampled by a horse. Am not sure if it was Billy's shift in weight or his voice, but the Pinto stopped short and he was able to extricate him from the saddle. Billy never forgot to check the cinch again. On that same pinto Billy was looking for some cows and it started to rain. Lightening hit a tree about 100 yards from where he was and knocked him out of the saddle. Nearby rocks flew when it hit. Thinking that lightening never strikes twice in the same place he continued up the hill to look for the cows. The next thing he remembers is "it was really like a bright sunny day!" He doesn't remember noise or anything when he stopped the horse and got off he said the horse was shaking as bad as he was. On the way home there was a dry creek bed running with water. He said the pinto always hated to cross water, but after the stress of the lightening the pinto went running right up to the water and jumped it, almost unseating him again, and didn't stop until they got to the barn. After that day the horse would not leave the barn or corral on a rainy day.

In 1945 Walter transferred to La Grande, OR with the Union Pacific Railroad, and Elvira died there shortly afterward. In 1955 he married Olive Opal Stretch in Cheyenne. He retired from Dow Chemical in Golden, CO, and moved to Ft. Collins, CO in 1972. Walter died in June of 1997 and is buried at Greenhill Cemetery in Laramie.

Children of Walter Wahl and Elvira Murdock are William "Bill" Ray Wahl, MD, born 12 Aug 1931 and Walter Edward Wahl. Dr. Bill Wahl married Evelyn Joan Fultz in 1953 and they had the following children: Arlene "Ranette" Wahl, Wm Brent Wahl and Jennifer Lynn Wahl.

Walter married Patricia Haskell in 1951 and they had the following children: Melody Lee Wahl, Dana Edward Wahl and William Walter Wahl.

The third child of William and Anna is Emma Anna WAHL who was born 6 Jun 1910. Emma graduated from the University of Wyoming in 1931 and taught school at Albin and Moorecraft, WY. She obtained a Masters Degree at the University of Wyoming UW. She married William Pence Rice, Jr. in 1934. They lived in Basin and Casper before returning to Laramie in 1934 where worked for the Union Pacific Railroad.

In an article written by Emma in the Laramie Boomerang she states that she remembered her mother's one buggy and that she was very proud of it because she could get to town in 20 minutes. In 1918 her parents saved enough money and had a surrey with a fringe on top. In those days, if you had a surrey with a fringe on top it was almost like owning a Cadillac. They used it mostly on Sunday to go church from the ranch. She and a girlfriend would sit in the buggy and crotchet and visit, plus they liked to go on walks. Emma also liked to play cut-out paper dolls, with clothing and furniture that she cut from catalogs.

Emma managed the hot lunch program in the early 1950's at Washington School before returning to research in nutrition at UW where she also earned a MS degree in home economics in 1959. In 1969 she published a cookbook "Baking and Cooking at High Altitudes" which was distributed world-wide.

Emma was very active in St Paul's Church in Laramie which originally was St Paul's German Lutheran church but has evolved into St Paul's United Church of Christ. She was a Sunday School teacher, youth group member and leader and member and officer of the Ladies' Aid Society and occasionally played the organ during her high school and college years.

Emma and Bill were part of the original planning and establishment of the Laramie Plains Museum and was a guide for visitors for several years.

Emma Wahl and William Rice's children are Wallace "Wally" William Rice, born 3 May 1936, Basin, Big Horn, WY, Janice Virginia Rice, born 4 Nov 1937, Basin, Big Horn, WY and Richard "Dick" Rice, born 12 Jan 1940, Casper, Natrona, WY and he died 28 May 2009. Wally married Rosella Peterson and their children are Stephen and Kevin. Janice married Robert Fraley and their children are Timothy, Roger and Mary. Dick never married and one of his hobbies was tracing family history.

William and Anna's son, Richard was also interested in flying, obtained a pilot license and was very involved in flying with his brother, Fred. Richard has many stories about their barnstorming experiences and he has a large collection of aerial photos taken from the bi-plane that Fred owned. Richard was with his brother when he bought his first airplane and while flying it home from Missouri it developed ignition problems and they were forced to make 20 landings in the first 200 miles. The last landing was into a fence and since the plane was damaged Fred sold it. Again Richard was with Fred when he went to pick up the second airplane that he had bought from Dick LeFrink. When arriving in Laramie they flew over the house on the ranch.

Richard^{vi} graduated from University of Wyoming with a BSME, Electrical Engineering, in 1934 and in 1947 he graduated with a Dr of Law from George Washington University. . He went to work in Washington in the US Patent Office in 1936 and rejoined the office following service in WWII. He became the Assistant Director of that office. During his 34-year career with the Patent Office, Mr. Wahl attained the highest position as Superintendent of the Examining Corps. He was appointed Assistant Commissioner of Patents by Presidents Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Nixon and served as United States representative on several international commissions, working on cooperative patent systems. For his service to the Department of Commerce, Mr. Wahl was awarded the coveted Gold Medal. In 1978 Richard received a Distinguished Alumni Award and in 1998 he was inducted into the University of Wyoming College of Engineering Hall of Fame and honored because he was in the first class of the College of Engineering. Richard married Nellie Vandel and their child is Timothy "Tim" William Wahl, born 18 Jan 1955 in Alexandria, VA. Tim married Rhona and their child is Brent Wahl. Richard lives in Florida where his son and his wife lives and also his grandson, Brent.

Richard Wahl bought three bricks at the Wyoming Territorial Park in memory of the Wahl family, the first one is labeled The Wahl Flying Ranch and the second one is in memory of Fred Wahl and the last one is in Richard's name.

The ranch was sold the Wright family by Walter WAHL in 1943 and descendents of that family still live there.

NOTES from Dicksie KNIGHT MAY:

The following people contributed to the Wahl Flying Ranch History: Richard Wahl, Tim Wahl, Claova Wahl Johnson, Dr. William "Bill" Wahl, Ranette Wahl Bell, Richard "Dick" Rice, Wallace "Wally" Rice, and Jan Rice Smith. Dicksie May and Shirley Lilley performed research of the land records, census records and city directory research pertaining to this ranch.

This history is dedicated to the memory of the Wahl family and especially Richard Wahl who came to Wyoming to be interviewed for this history and contributed much to make this history possible.

20 Apr 2012

iii Newspaper article, Laramie Republican no. 204 April 09, 1912

¹ Minnie was the illegitimate child of Rosine.

ii There was a brewery named Laramie Brewery from 1906 through 1907.

Lerante Albany 00. E.R. 0. L.S.E. 1919 Wyoming Brand Book

V Claova believes that William Wahl dug the well...

vi Information on Richard from the following websites: