

GUIRAUD RANCH
(J.T. McDowell & Sons Ranch)
(Buffalo Peaks Ranch)
Garo vicinity
Park County
Colorado

HALS CO-13
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
National Park Service
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- Location:** Garo vicinity, Park County, Colorado
USGS Topographic Map: Garo Quadrangle
39.112348, -105.890157 (center of main house, Google Earth, Simple Cylindrical Projection, WGS84)
- Significance:** The Guiraud Ranch is significant for its role in the history of ranching in Colorado, showing the evolution of a working agricultural landscape over the past 150 years. Established by Adolphe and Marie Guiraud in 1862, it was one of the first ranches in Park County. The ranch remained in the Guiraud family until 1942, when it was sold to J.T. McDowell & Sons. The ranch headquarters as it appears today reflects the mid-twentieth century modernization and expansion of the ranch by the McDowells. The Guiraud Ranch is an excellent representation of ranching in Colorado's mountain parks illustrating the historical trends of the region on a small scale: the early establishment of ranches to supply mining camps in the 1860s, the introduction of irrigated hay meadows, the development of stock raising (cattle and sheep) from open range to fenced pastures, the progression from family ranch operations to incorporated businesses and foreign investment opportunities, and the sale of much of the region's water rights to Front Range communities in the late twentieth century. The ranch's picturesque setting in a high mountain valley surrounded by vistas of distant peaks is also a key part of its character, ideally representing the much-celebrated beauty of Colorado's Rocky Mountain ranches.
- Description:** The Guiraud Ranch is located approximately nine miles southeast of Fairplay on Highway 9 in Park County, Colorado. The ranch extends over 1,840 acres in sections three, four, five, nine, ten, fourteen, and fifteen of Township 11 South, Range 76 West. Park County is located in the geographical center of Colorado and covers 2,200 square miles with an elevation ranging from 7,000 to 14,000 feet above sea level. With a population of 14,523 people, Park County is a rural community with a tradition of agriculture and ranching that continues today.

The headquarters of the Guiraud Ranch is located on the 160 acres originally settled by Adolphe and Marie Guiraud in 1862, which included portions of the southeast quarter of section four and the north of section nine (where the ranch is located).

The headquarters lies at 9,200 feet above sea level in a mountain valley with Red Hill (about 9,900 feet elevation) rising to the west and Reinecker Ridge (about 10,100 feet elevation) rising to the east. Flat pastures extend between the rises and to the north and south. The taller peaks of Silverheels (13,822 feet elevation) and Little Baldy (12,142 feet elevation) are visible to the north. The headquarters

is situated to the east of Highway 9, sheltered behind Red Hill, which largely obscures it from view. This location provides a natural windbreak in a region that is famous for windy conditions. The vista from the headquarters has changed very little since the ranch was established, with the highway the only modern intrusion.

The ranch lies within the Grassland Parks ecoregion. The primary vegetation is bunchgrasses such as Arizona fescue, Idaho fescue, mountain muhly, Junegrass, and slender wheatgrass. The region features springs as well as fens, where continued groundwater seepage has encouraged the development of peatland. There are very few trees or shrubs. This ecology is ideal for ranching and traditional range land use.

The ranch is located in South Park, one of three mountain parks in Colorado. The parks have long been recognized for their scenic beauty and lush grazing pastures. South Park has a short growing season with cool nights, making it poorly suited to most farming. But its waterways and rich grasses have made it ideal for grazing. Irrigation has also been used to create hay meadows. With both valuable agricultural land and scenic beauty, South Park has been promoted to settlers and investors as well as tourists. In 1871, the *Rocky Mountain Directory and Colorado Gazetteer* said of South Park that “no better grass of hay-growing country can be found anywhere.” (48) A publication by the Union Pacific Railroad in 1891 lauded South Park’s beauty:

The park for the most part is gently undulating, with small hills at sufficiently long intervals to add to its interest and beauty, while there are intervening areas which stretch out for miles in level plains, forming delightful views that would entrance the eye of the artist, and could be best described in a picture, a poem or a song (127).

As pioneers in South Park, the Guirauds had their pick of ranch locations. Their choice was advantageously located to take advantage of two waterways: the Middle Fork of the South Platte River, which flows to the south of the headquarters, and Trout Creek, which runs to the east. These waterways were essential to the success of ranching in South Park, providing water to irrigate meadow lands and grow hay. Though the irrigation system is no longer in use, the path of the irrigation ditches is still visible. One ditch, aptly named Guiraud Ditch on topographic maps, runs north-south through the property and another runs east-west, located south of the main house. Abandoned secondary irrigation trenches and irrigation canals weave across the ranch, most of which have been filled-in or reshaped by weather and gravity. Rusted culverts, tractor parts, cracked tires and skeletal remains of cattle are dispersed across the property. An extensive barbed wire fencing system also divides this large landscape into distinct pastures.

The ranch headquarters is composed of three building clusters focused around domestic activities, cattle and shop activities, and sheep raising. The clusters are arranged in a rough L-plan with the cattle and shop cluster to the north of the domestic cluster and the sheep cluster to the east of the domestic cluster. The domestic cluster is located near the southern edge of Red Hill. The cattle and shop area lies to the northwest of the domestic area, in a sheltered spot tucked up against the side of Red Hill. The sheep cluster lies on the grasslands to the east of the domestic cluster and is the most geographically exposed of the clusters. Though the ranch was established in 1862, no nineteenth century buildings have survived. The oldest building on the ranch is the house, built by Marie Guiraud in 1906. The other buildings are all believed to have been built by J.T. McDowell & Sons in the mid-twentieth century.

The buildings have been vacant since the City of Aurora acquired the ranch, but the surrounding pastures continue to be used for grazing, leased to local ranchers. A dirt two-track path leads from the highway to the ranch headquarters. A metal and wood gate identifies the ranch and controls access. The path then turns north, leading to the cattle and shop cluster. The path branches, with one path rising up the side of Red Hill, leading to a loading dock and grain bins and ending at the upper rear level of the barn. The lower fork continues to the corrals and passes through them to provide access to the pasture beyond.

The domestic complex is located about fifty yards from the ranch gate. The domestic complex is comprised of the main house, a bunkhouse (north of the house), a cookhouse (northeast of the house), and a garage (west of the house). All of the buildings face south. The buildings in the domestic cluster are unified in appearance. All are white, single-story, frame buildings, resting on concrete foundations. The house, bunkhouse, and cookhouse are all covered with wood clapboard siding while the garage is sheathed in composite siding. All roofs have exposed rafter tails. Except for two enlarged openings on the house, all the windows appear to be original, a combination of wood-framed one-over-one sash windows and six-light fixed windows. Two-rail, round rail fencing encloses the area around the house and bunkhouse. Sidewalks run between the rear of the house and the bunkhouse and lead from the bunkhouse towards the garage. Several trees have been planted on the south side of the house; these are the only trees on the site. A clothesline is located to the east of the house.

The original section of the house is rectangular in plan with a tall, steeply pitched hipped roof covered in wood shingles. The roof encompasses a porch that extends across the south facade. The porch is supported by five unadorned, square wood columns. There are two entrances on the south facade. The house was updated in the mid-twentieth century with two picture windows installed at the southwest corner, a large flagstone fireplace and chimney in the main room, wood paneling, and a remodeled bathroom. Two gabled additions have been added to the north (rear) of the house, creating an L-plan building (measuring

39' x 54'). Each addition has its own entrance on the east side. A free-standing concrete chimney is located at the interior of the ell, adjacent to the first addition. A metal-clad chimney is located on the roof of the second addition. Located to the west of the house, the single-car garage is rectangular in plan with a front-gable roof with tails clad in wood shingles. A garage door is located on the south and a single window on the north.

The bunkhouse (32' x 27') is rectangular in plan with a front-gable roof clad in a mix of green asphalt and grey composition shingles. The south facade features a central door with two one-over-one sash windows on either side. A small shed roof addition is located on north (rear) wall. An interior brick chimney is visible on the roof.

The cookhouse (24' x 50') is rectangular in plan with a side-gabled roof clad in wood shingles. There are two entrances on the south facade. Concrete steps lead up to each door. A slight roof overhand marks the entrances. Two one-over-one sash windows are located between the entrances and another window is located on the east end of the facade. Seven metal chimney pipes of various sizes rise through the roof on the north side.

The cattle and shop cluster is located northwest of the house and includes a barn, loafing shed, corrals, scale house, shop, workshop/garage, two granaries, and a loading dock. This was the primary work area of the ranch headquarters. It includes space for working cattle, machinery and equipment repair and storage, and grain and hay storage. Much of the construction is somewhat haphazard, with the cluster evolving to meet whatever needs arose and building modifications utilizing whatever materials were readily available. Standing seam metal sheeting currently covers most of the shop, workshop/garage, and second level of the barn. Sections of the shop and workshop/garage are sheathed in wood composite panels. The first floor of the barn and the loafing shed are constructed of cast-in-place concrete. The two-story barn is banked against Red Hill with its rear second story opening onto the hillside. The single-story loafing shed extends from the north end of the barn and is also backed against Red Hill. The large corral complex is connected to the east side of the barn and loafing shed. The shop and workshop/garage are located to the south of the corral.

The barn is covered with a gable roof clad in asphalt shingles. Three ventilators are located on the roof ridge. Stalls are located on the first floor of the barn with a hay loft above. Large metal sliding doors are located on the south and north sides. Three pedestrian metal doors are located on the east side. There are square fixed windows punched out of the concrete masonry walls at the first level, two on the south wall and seven on the east wall. On the second story of the west side, three doors provide access to the barn loft from the dirt path running along the ridge.

The loafing shed is covered with a shed roof that slopes towards the east. There is no wall on the east side allowing cattle free access between the sheds and the adjacent corrals. Concrete walls divide the loafing shed into six bays. Concrete columns within each bay support the roof. The corrals are constructed of dimensional lumber. A central alley runs north-south through the corrals. The corrals are divided into a series of pens connected by gates. The scale house (5' x 8') is located on the east side of the alley, adjacent to the scale platform and loading chute. It still houses the original scale equipment.

Located to the north of the shop, the workshop/garage (80' x 50') is rectangular in plan and covered with a south-facing front-gabled roof clad in asphalt shingles. A large overhead garage door is centered on the facade with a smaller garage door to the west and two pedestrian doors. On the east and west sides of the building, the main roof slope extends over open-air workshop areas. There is a metal smoke stack on the west side of the building, and a brick chimney at the roof ridge.

The rectangular plan shop building is constructed of wood framing covered with metal sheeting and rests on a concrete foundation. The south-facing front gabled roof is sheathed in composite roofing. The south facade contains a single pedestrian door. A four-light window is located on the west side.

The sheep cluster consists of a lambing barn, two loafing sheds, and a corral. The buildings are all frame with the walls and roofs clad in sheets of corrugated metal. All have dirt floors. The lambing barn (36' x 97') features a split gable roof with a south-facing clerestory to maximize interior light. A band of windows extends across the length of the clerestory, divided into eight groups of four, four-light windows. The south wall below the clerestory features four pairs of four-light windows and two pedestrian doors on the west end and two large openings on the east side. A corral is connected to the south side of the lambing barn, creating a large open pen. The wooden fencing is somewhat haphazard, but is primarily two rail with vertical pieces of wood nailed to it to prevent sheep from escaping. This corral connects to a smaller corral which abuts the south side of the south loafing shed (20' x 65'), which lies southwest of the lambing barn. Two large openings on the south side of the loafing shed lead into the corral. There is no wall on the west side of the shed and the opening is covered with wire fencing. The second loafing shed (20' x 95') lies directly north. It also features two large openings on the south wall, but it is not connected to the corrals.

History: The history of the Guiraud Ranch can be divided into six main periods of development. During the initial period of the Guiraud's settlement (1862-1875) the headquarters was established in its current position, cattle and hay operations were introduced, and irrigation was developed. After Adolphe Guiraud's death, Marie Guiraud continued to grow and expand ranch operations (1875-1909)

growing the ranch acreage from 640 acres to 5,000 acres and taking full advantage of the arrival of the railroad by platting the town of Garo. The ranch remained in the Guiraud family after Marie's death, passing on to her son Ernest and then her granddaughter (1909-1942). In 1942, the ranch was sold to J.T. McDowell & Sons who modernized and enlarged the ranch (1942-1967), running both sheep and cattle, constructing new headquarters buildings, and increasing the acreage to 11,000. After J.T. McDowell & Sons sold the ranch, it was operated by a series of foreign investment companies (1967-1985). The City of Aurora purchased the ranch for its water access in 1985, but has continued to lease the land for grazing. The evolution of the ranch reflects trends in stock raising seen throughout Colorado's mountain parks.

Adolphe and Marie Guiraud immigrated to the United States in 1849, a year after their marriage. They moved around the country, living in New Orleans, Cincinnati, and Leavenworth before coming to Park County in 1862. Adolphe had tried a variety of occupations before settling in Park County including wine dealer, farmer, baker, scale operator, and merchant (Bjorklund 2010: 33). Fortune seekers had been rushing to Colorado since 1859, hoping to discover gold. The Guirauds were entrepreneurs who seem to have been drawn to the region by the commercial opportunities the new communities of prospectors offered, rather than by the lure of gold itself. Guiraud arrived in Park County with one cow, two horses, and a yoke of oxen (Bjorklund 2010: 34).

According to court records, the Guirauds settled on land adjacent to Trout Creek in 1862, using dams and other means to divert water onto the land for irrigation in order to raise hay and other crops. In 1870, the Guirauds constructed an irrigation ditch in order to irrigate additional land. This was the start of one of the oldest ranches in Park County and one of the earliest claims for water rights ("Thomas v. Guiraud" 1883, 201). Despite this use of the land and establishment of water rights, records of the General Land Office show that Adolph Guiraud did not actually acquire a patent to the land until 1874, purchasing 160 acres of land in sections four and nine under the Sale-Cash Entry Act of 1820, which provided for the sale of public lands. At this time there were few other ranchers in the area, and a great deal of open public land, so physical claims were often more important than official ownership. Government-owned land was open for grazing, so ranchers did not need to own enough land to support their herds, instead utilizing adjacent unclaimed land.

The potential value of South Park's native grasses for stock raising was quickly recognized by early travelers and settlers in the region. In 1871, the *Rocky Mountain Directory and Colorado Gazetteer* reported that "stock-raising is fast becoming an important feature in the industries of Park County, for which its superior pasture-lands afford unusual advantages. There are already over 6,000 head of cattle and 700 head of horses owned by parties near Fair Play, and these herds will be increased rapidly" (50). The ranchers following prospectors to the

region could make a good profit providing beef to the mining camps. The road network in Colorado was still very primitive at this time, but the camps provided a ready local market for whatever the South Park ranchers could produce. Adolphe Guiraud died in 1875. The *Fairplay Flume* later described him as one of South Park's pioneers, a man "who witnessed its development and bore an influential part in promoting its welfare . . . He was a very useful citizen, and one whose place, when made vacant by death, could not easily be filled" (June 11, 1909). After Adolph's death, Marie continued to develop and expand the ranch, becoming a leading citizen herself.

The Denver, South Park, and Pacific Railroad arrived in Park County in 1879. The railroad chose to cross the South Platte River at the south end of Red Hill very near the Guiraud's ranch complex. Marie Guiraud took full advantage of the opportunities presented by the railroad, platting the town of Garo about a half mile south of the ranch headquarters. The arrival of the railroad had a significant economic impact on South Park and vastly increased the accessibility of travel. Railroader Sam Speas, Jr. remembered, "With the coming of the railroad, South Park was transformed from a quiet valley where the buffalo grazed to a busy thoroughfare" (Speas 2003: 21). Garo became a major shipping point for cattle and hay from South Park ranches and took on an important role as the junction of the Fairplay and Alma branches of the Denver, South Park, and Pacific Railroad. The railroad operated until 1937. By this time most of the local ranches had switched to shipping by truck. The tracks were pulled up the following year.

The 1880 census recorded Marie Guiraud as the head of a household with seven children living at home: Louis (born in New Orleans), Joseph (born in Ohio in 1857), Matilda (born in Kansas in 1861), Eugenia (born in Colorado in 1865), Antoinette (born in 1868), Henry (born in 1870), and Ernest (born in 1874). Marie, Louis, and Joseph were all listed as stock ranchers. The household also include Manuel Gurduns from New Mexico who herded cattle for Marie, and Samuel Wilson from England who was a ranch hand. May Gwillim, a school teacher from England (likely teaching at the Garo school) was also boarding at the Guiraud ranch.

The success of the Guiraud Ranch and Garo was reflective of the overall success of ranching in South Park at this time. According to a promotional publication of the Union Pacific Railroad from 1891: "With a soil that is unrivaled in richness, with easy facilities for irrigation, with quick and convenient access to the markets, and, withal, a fast-increasing population of industrious people, the grassy plains of South Park were soon converted into fields of grain. It has become wonderfully productive of the smaller cereals, of potatoes, hay and nearly all farm products.

Here all varieties of grasses grow in the greatest luxuriance, and it is the most abundant hay-producing section of the State. Thus, South Park, in great part, has

become an important self-sustaining industrial section, among other things producing cattle and sheep in great numbers, and of the finest quality” (128).

By the 1900 census, Marie’s children had all left home. She lived alone at the ranch except for one ranch hand, Nelson Eller of Oklahoma. Marie had extended her holdings significantly, owning several nearby ranches (including the Prince Ranch) operated by her children. In 1906, a fire, believed to have been sparked by an ember from a passing locomotive, destroyed the Guiraud house. Marie hired architect Gus Carlberg to construct a new house which the *Fairplay Flume* described as “a fine ten-room, one-story building” costing more than \$3,000 (May 4, 1906).

The Guiraud Ranch was 5,000 acres at the time of Marie’s death in 1909. Her obituary in the *Fairplay Flume* praised her perseverance and management of the ranch after her husband’s death: “with a large family of little children and heavy financial reverses she struggled on and not only kept their property together but prospered well, added to their possessions and accumulated an estate very nearly as great, if not the equal, of the largest estate ever built up in Park County.” (June 11, 1909). Ernest Guiraud took over the ranch after his mother’s death. After his death in 1936, the ranch passed to his daughter Mildred and her husband Harry Johns. Little seems to have changed at the ranch during this period of ownership. The 1940 census recorded Matilda and her husband Harry Johns as living in Denver. Harry’s occupation was listed as rancher/ cattle business. After Mildred’s death in 1942, Harry sold the ranch to J.T. McDowell & Sons for \$50,000.

The McDowells made major investments in improving and updating the ranch during the 1940s (including constructing new buildings), spending \$34,569 in improvements by 1949. J.T. McDowell, Jr. was the managing partner and lived on the ranch with his family. J.T. McDowell, SR. was a contractor, assisting with the new construction at the ranch headquarters. The ranch operation included cattle, sheep, and hay. It is unclear whether this was the first introduction of sheep to the ranch. Some Park County residents were raising sheep by the 1870s and their popularity continued to grow, with more sheep than cattle being raised in the county by the 1920s. Numerous articles in the *Fairplay Flume* mention the Guirauds shipping cattle, but no mention of sheep was found. By the early 1970s, the J.T. McDowell & Sons Ranch was valued at \$421,841 (“McDowell v. McDowell” 1972).

In the mid-1970s, the McDowells sold the ranch to a Netherlands investment corporation. It then passed on to Oecofintra, A.G. a Swiss corporation. In 1985, the City of Aurora purchased the ranch for its access to the South Platte River. Opening up this section of river for public recreational use was mitigation for river access lost with its construction of Spinney Reservoir in 1981. The City of Aurora renamed the site Buffalo Peaks Ranch.

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View to east from Highway 9 showing the entrance to Buffalo Peaks Ranch with Red Hill on the north and the ranch house just visible in the distance (Abigail Christman, 8/1/2011).



View to the northeast showing the ranch house (Abigail Christman, 8/1/2011).



View to the southeast showing the rear addition to the ranch house (Abigail Christman, 8/1/2011).



View to the east showing the bunkhouse and cookhouse with the sheep cluster in the distance (Abigail Christman, 8/1/2011).



View to the east showing the sheep cluster with Reinecker Ridge rising in the background (Abigail Christman, 8/1/2011).



View to the north showing Red Hill on the west, grasslands at the center, and Reinecker Ridge to the east. The visible buildings are (L-R) the barn, corrals, workshop/garage, and shop (Abigail Christman, 9/10/2011).



View to the west showing the two granaries and the barn (Abigail Christman, 8/1/2011).



View to the north showing how the barn and loafing shed are built against Red Hill (Abigail Christman, 9/11/2011).



View to the north showing loafing shed to the west and the central alley through the corrals (Abigail Christman, 8/1/2011).