

White Grass Heritage Project “Sharing the Legacy”

INTERVIEWEE: Jon (J) Gerster and Pat (P) Cavicchioni; Disassembled the WG Barn

INTERVIEWER: Roger (R) Butterbaugh, Caretaker at White Grass Dude Ranch; Coordinator
Of White Grass Heritage Project

LOCATION: White Grass Dude Ranch, Grand Teton Nation Park, Moose, Wyoming

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Transcribed by Julie Greene 2020

Note: This transcript has undergone minor edits, e.g., false starts and some text were removed to make it more “reader friendly”. Jon and Pat’s complete interview transcript is below:

R: (0:26) The White Grass Heritage Project was started in 2013 and the aim of the project is to collect oral histories, historic photographs, artifacts, mementos, and documents related to (1) history of the ranch when it operated as a dude ranch and (2) to record the history following 1985 when Frank Galey died and the dude ranch era ended to the present. The Grand Teton National Park took possession of the ranch in 1985 and in a couple of days, we will celebrate the official opening and the ribbing cutting of the rehabilitation of the ranch; turning it into a national park service center for teaching others how to do historic preservation work in their parks. Government employees, other professionals and students will come here and study and stay in the cabins and go back to their perspective parks to do preservation.

It is my pleasure to introduce Jon Gerster and Pat Cavicchioni, who were instrumental, following the closing of the ranch as a dude ranch in 1985 because they were involved in the historic preservation of the White Grass Ranch barn. For dude ranches, the barn was the center of activity of the ranch. Jon and Pat were instrumental in saving the barn from total destruction by the Park because they took the barn down and moved it to a couple of locations. The barn now resides in Wilson, having been restored there on a private residence.

Welcome to Jon and Pat. We will talk about how you got involved in taking the barn apart and moving it.

But first, Pat tell me some of your background in the valley because you were residing in the valley and working for the Park during the time you were taking the barn apart. What

brought you to the National Park Service and what brought you to Grand Teton National Park (GTNP)?

P: I had a friend, Lynn, whose husband's cousin was a Park Ranger at Coulter Bay (GRTP). She knew I would be interested in pursuing something like. So, I decided to move out here in 1989 after I got my Master's Degree in Community Counseling. I moved to Yellowstone National Park. I worked in a concession there the summer of 1989. Then I came down to Jackson and applied to be a park ranger and I got a position at Moose in the visitor center as a Permits backcountry ranger. I spent 4 seasons there. I met Jon in February of 1990 in a first aid class and that began a lifelong friendship. That's how it all started. I had never been west before.

I was a seasonal ranger in Grand Teton National Park for 4 years from 1990-1993. In 1997, I embarked on another career – school counseling (grades 7-12). I worked in that endeavor in Jackson, Wyoming and Saratoga, Wyoming. In 2013, I was rehired by Grand Teton National Park. I worked summers in Permits again from 2013-2017. This time it was in a new building, Craig Thomas Discovery and Visitor Center, where I am located today.

R: (5:10) What lured you to the west?

P: I had always loved the mountains. When I was growing up, I collected these huge boxes of brochures from all over the world. The mountains, lakes and water brought me west. I was born in Brownsville, Pennsylvania. When I look back at those years, I remember loving those mountains. That memory stuck with me. I lived there 5 years and finished growing up in Dayton, Ohio.

R: Pat, sounds like you found a home in the West. Jon, what is your background? How did you get out here; did you grow up a native westerner?

J: No, I grew up in Michigan on the water. I came west to Alaska in 1984 and was a ranger helping train their summer sled dogs. That got me. I had never been west in any significant way and I went straight to Alaska. I then went back and finished my college degree and graduated in 1987 and came out here in the summer of 1987. A friend of mine was working in Yellowstone, and she told me I had to come out to see Yellowstone. I worked in concessions that first year in Yellowstone National Park and then finished my degree and came back out in 1988 to help with the 1988 fires. That was quite a summer. I just stayed and did not want to go back East. I did various things for a couple of years. Then I found this behemoth (White Grass Barn) in 1989.

R: (7:28) You are looking at your album and looking at the pictures of the big barn. As we go through this interview, Jon and Pat will refer to various pictures in the album (The Barn Book), so both have agreed to allow us to scan the photos for archiving in the Park and the Jackson Museum.

Note: Several of Jon and Pat's photos of the barn can be seen at www.whitegrass.org under Collections/The Barn/Dismantling, Moving & Rebuilding the Barn.

What was your college degree?

J: I actually have a degree in International Finance. I got out of school just after the October crash of 1987. There was nothing in the financial world and I had already spent a summer out here and in Alaska, so I decided to go back West. I already loved it out here. So, I committed to being here and never worked in the financial world other than being a bank teller. I did not want to go back East and work in the financial world because it was constrictive and stuffy and I love it out here. I love the freedom, mountains, heritage, etc. I guess you could say my body was born in the East but my spirit was born in the West.

R: In talking about the barn, do you have history or interest in history or preservation?

J: I did. My dad would buy old, run-down Victorians and fix them up and then go to another place. My grandmother was a historian, so I grew up with love of history, anything old. White Grass and all the history of the dude ranches in this valley was fascinating to me.

R: Did you work with your dad restoring homes when you were growing up?

J: Bits and pieces. He hired out things he couldn't do but we did what we could do. A lot of it was cursory and design and trying to get back to what the building was. I grew up learning to peel back layers of a building. It was fascinating to see what it is in the present and peel it back to what it started out to be. Also, to go back to the different eras and why the changes happened and who made the changes was interesting. It is the evolution of the buildings through as it ages – interesting.

P: (11:05) I enjoyed the outdoors from a very young age. I remember working and being outside a lot. In college, I took cabinet making classes and made some pieces of furniture. I like building things. I like hands on projects, but history was not something I was in to at that time. It was around me and I enjoyed it, but I didn't study it. It was later that that happened. I took metal shop, welding and a variety of art classes.

R: You like to do things physically and work with your hands? You like going through the process of how to construct things?

P: And restoring antique things. When this project came along, I found it very challenging. It just looked like it would a lot of fun.

R: Please explain who bought the White Grass barn and shared it with the other.

J: I found it.

P: It was Jon.

J: I think it was in the Jackson Hole Guide and Times and I stumbled across it. I think it was referred as the surplus building auction. I had never been to White Grass before. It struck my fancy and I said I am going to go out for that.

R: So, this was a government authorized auction.

J: Yes, and I didn't know the first thing about White Grass at that point. I found my way here on a Wednesday morning in November 1989. There had been a snow the night before. I got here and I parked where the barn was. There were about 6 people. You could see the big barn and some wrangler cabins. Randy Simon or Thane (park employee) walked us through.



Photo of White Grass Barn thought to have been used by Frank and Inge Galey in a Christmas Card, circa unknown. Photo courtesy of Perry Benson.

I had just started to work at the Togwotee Mountain Lodge as a winter guide in Yellowstone. As we walked through, I could see all the different buildings; the barn being one. I could see that everybody was interested in the cabins because they were smaller and were able to be transported in their entirety. Nobody was interested in the barn because it was so big. It struck me that this building was a great building, so I asked what happens if nobody bids on this building. I was told that it would be burned by the Park. I asked what was the minimum bid on this building? I learned I could bid one penny as long as I removed it. It is what is called "beneficial and advantageous to the US Government."

I felt certain that I was the only bidder so I bid one dollar. You can see in the barn book I had to write a check for (20%) 20 cents for my down payment. I got the letter from them in January 1990 that I had been awarded the building. I took a gulp because I was not sure what that meant for me. I just knew I owned a log barn in Grand Teton National Park and now what do I do. At that point, everything was in a rest period because it was winter. The letter said that you could not get to White Grass until the beginning of June and the barn must be removed by the end of July.

I was 25 yrs old and did not understand the ramifications of what it would take to move this thing. I met Pat in February 1990 at a first aid class. The winter guides had to take first aid/CPR in order to work in Yellowstone. The winter guides (snowmobiles) were new then and they were basically wranglers from the summer guest ranches. They were used to riding

horses in the summer, so they traded their horses in for engines/snowmobiles. The wranglers would just sit on the back of the snowmobiles and casually point out sightseeing sights for the tourists. They would just sit and smoke and chat with each other.

By contrast, I would go to Old Faithful, etc. and learn about the park history and give a real interpretive trip. At the end of the day, the guests were happy, and they would tip. So once the word got around that I was making good tips, the other guides wanted to do their own things. They just made stuff up.

Pat was the only woman in this first aid class. When they told us to pair up, I paired up with her and we became very good friends. I was living at One Acre, a local ranch. I then told her I had to move this barn.

R: And you thought what Pat?

P: (19:54) I thought okay and let's do it and it never struck us as being insurmountable.

J: We came up on July 20, 1990, or earlier to look up at the barn. At this time, I had had a winter season with Towgotee Lodge under my belt and Dave Helgesen was very happy with my work there. The Park took note that I was the only guy that did an interpretive trip. They were happy that the visitors were getting an accurate experience.

We came to the barn and did a lot of measuring. I did climbing and had climbing gear. The barn was at least 2 stories tall and I would climb up on the roof. I had been climbing in the Tetons since I arrived. I had a Victorian in Bozeman so it was no big deal to climb like a spider on top of it. I wasn't afraid of falling but it was the landing I was afraid of.

P: We didn't have the resources to use mechanized equipment. So, everything was manual with the exception of hauling the barn disassembled out of there.

R: You started in July and finished in early November and that meant taking the structure down, moving it across from the ski village on Bill Reiser's property.

J: That summer I started looking at the barn and thinking how I am actually going to pull this off and get it out of here. I had to put down a \$200 deposit, which was not refundable if the work was not completed. That was a lot of money to me. Pat and I decided we were game. I called some of the ranches and asked if they had room for me to store the barn. A lot of the ranches were confused and thought I wanted to store something in their barn. I mentioned the White Grass barn to Bill Reiser, and he said he had a place that I could put the barn.

(23:08) I was very appreciative, and they were very helpful. I would live at the One Acre cabin. I got a night job at Billy's Giant Hamburgers in the Town Square (Jackson, WY) and I would have all day here. Affordable housing was at a premium and I became friends with the people I was working with at Billy's. I offered them to come stay at my cabin with no rent but part of the deal was they would work it off. I brought everybody up. I had Andrew, Clark

from Scotland, John Kemp, Dane, and a college friend of mine. They became my ad hoc crew. We were all in our mid 20's except Pat, who was very young 41.

R: Give us a visual idea what you were looking at. What were the dimensions of the barn?



White Grass Barn, circa 1990. Photo courtesy of Cavicchioni & Gerster.

J: It was 50 feet long by 35 feet wide by 2 stories tall. I think we came up several times and just stared at it and thought where do you start and how do you do this. I called Dave Helgesen up and asked if I could borrow one of his snowmobile trailers. They are long and low; they were perfect. I had a pickup and I thought that is how I would get it out of here. I would take it apart and take it out.

The first thing that happened was a hail storm. My truck was less than a year old so I pulled it through the gangway of the barn and it got saved it. The barn saved the truck.

We started looking around and we could see this was going to be one hell of a project. It is a



Barn with side shed dismantled and roof coming off. Photo courtesy of Cavicchioni & Gerster.

one dollar barn and I have to figure out how to move it. We started with the side shed, which was falling apart. We started from the top on the side shed and then worked our way down. The barn was in good shape but the shed was in bad shape.

I didn't know anybody that worked up this way; I was completely green. We then took the metal roof off and put things in piles. We started pulling nails because nails are not your friend when it comes to your feet. We found that out a few times that summer. We took nails out of other people's feet and made a few trips to St. John's Hospital.

(27:39) The roof was all metal with different colors. It was obvious that the roof that was on there was not the original roof. Everything from the logs up was not original. I was raised to ask why that was not original and what happened. People came up to us and asked what we were doing. We would tell them that we were saving the barn because if we didn't move it out of here, the Park was going to burn it down. It became almost a mission and as more people talked to us, we gathered more information informing us what the ranch was about. We learned about White Grass from other people's stories. Some people were happy that the barn was being saved from being burned and other people were sad that it was going to leave the ranch.

R: From an historical standpoint, we should say that the barn itself (not the shed) goes back to 1913-1919 because that is when Harold Hammond and his partner, Tucker Bispham, came up here to homestead the area. Part of getting a deed to property through homesteading was that you had to 'prove up' the property. The story we have in our archives is that Harold and Tucker put the barn there in order to 'improve the land.' It has a long history and a couple of incarnations. Frank Galey did not like shoveling snow, so he decided to take his favorite tool, dynamite, into the barn to set a charge and vibrate the snow off the roof. At some point, there was an upper level (above the original log walls) put onto the original barn making it higher (making a second story).

So, when you came into the barn, you were not dealing totally with the historic structure but an addition on the building. We should note there were approximately 28 buildings when the ranch ended in 1985. There are 13 original buildings that still reside at White Grass. The others were either burned through carelessness or sold and moved off the property. The buildings that remained are here because they were entered into the National Historic Place Registry. This allowed them to be preserved and prevented the Park from taking them down or burning them. It is very true that if you had not bid on it, it would be ashes at one point or another. Your work really preserved this barn that has now been reconstructed in Wilson.

R: (31:47) So, you look at the barn and then take the side barn off. Where does the story go from there?

J: Getting rid of that addition got us down to the log building. I was interested in just saving the log portion of it. I had intended to rebuild it somewhere. Pat and I were looking for land and I was looking for anyplace I could own to put it on. We were looking everywhere from Hell's half acre. We went up to Montana, over to the Madison Valley, south of town where this thing could be rebuilt and eventually the original lines of the roof would be reconstructed.



Reconstructed roof removed exposing the original log structure dating back the 1913-1919. Photo courtesy of Cavicchioni & Gerster.

We learned from people, as we started to take it down, the stories including the dynamite, Frank Galey, etc. So, our interest in White Grass history was sparked and we wanted to know more and more.

Obviously, this place is unusually beautiful and the cabins and everything that was here at that point were in a state of disrepair. The ranch had been empty for 5 years and it became obvious that the Park wanted this ranch off the map, particularly the Park Superintendent, Jack Stark. They had a pool at Park Headquarters as to whether we would be able to pull this off and whether I would get my \$200 back. When we found out that there was as pool at Moose about my failure, I said we were going to get this thing out of here. Everybody started getting into it. Not only is it a privilege to have access to this wonderful place; there was nobody else up here.

People would park their car on Death Canyon Road and wonder over to the barn and either ask questions or tell us what they knew. That late summer was quite an education.

R: (34:38) You tell a story of a lady who came by and was asking if you had found some cowboy boots in the barn.

J: Above the first set of doors, as you drive up the ranch road, on the east side, there were a pair of cowboy boots. You can see in this photo that there is a pair of cowboy boots there. Who knows why but at that point, when the woman and her 2 kids came up, I had taken the boots off and put them into the back of my truck. It was wild seeing this woman and 2 kids (maybe 8-10 yrs. old) in tears. She asked if we had found a pair of boots nailed above one of the

doors. I said yes and wondered what they were and she said those were my husband's boots. He was a wrangler here at White Grass but later he was killed. As a memorial, his boots were nailed above the door. She asked if she could have them and I said you bet you can. She told me a little bit about White Grass history. She talked about Frank Galey and the early days of going up in the mountains with the guests. It just spurred me to know more and more. Those boots now reside with her. I never got her name.

So, we kept going bit by bit. We were under the gun at that point because the contract said the barn had to be out of there by end of July and we didn't even start until July 20th. I think they turned a blind eye because they knew we were working on it. We had spread this mess out all around the barn and I think the Park Superintendent said he would rather we clean it up than his crew clean it up. We kept going and they knew we were working on it.

R: (37:45) On an average week, how many hours of labor would go into deconstructing the barn?

J: I was here 7 days per week. When we both weren't working, we were here. I worked evenings at Billy's from 5pm to 1am. We would get up in the morning and be here all day with whoever could be here and not working.

R: So, is it safe to say there might have been 100 hours or 75 hours/week put into the barn?

J: I would say easily 75 and not quite 100. Easily 75-90 hours /week.

R: How many people out here?

J: There would be at least 3 and a lot of times there would be the 2 of us. It all depended on who could come up. Pat was working at Moose at that point.

P: I would bring lunches and dinners.

R: This was a significant commitment of time and energy to be up here.

J: (39:10) I didn't number any of the newer materials from the roof up. We pulled all the nails because I thought it was good lumber. I had never dismantled a log building before. How does one number such a thing to rebuild it in a logical way. There is north, south, east and west; each log had its own number. We would have its own number on each notch, we would write a number with a sharpie. We had to keep organization in it because this thing could easily unravel into complete chaos.

P: I helped with the nail pulling and he would tell me what pile he wanted what in. I carried lumber. I couldn't carry the logs, so the guys helped with those.



Pat Cavicchioni - But a small portion of nails pulled from the Barn. Photo courtesy of Cavicchioni & Gerster.

- R: Looking at the pictures, it really does look like it was an orderly process.
- J: We wanted to know what areas under the roof were used for; it was obvious that there was a bathroom, water heater, a hay portion, and a game room. We learned some of the evolution of the building and again what would we had done if people had not come up to us and tell us what they knew.



Upper portion of the barn above the horse stalls built, not part of the original structure. Photo courtesy of Cavicchioni & Gerster.

- R: (41:41) They would tell you how the barn was used. In your exploration, you discovered saddle racks (the holders for the saddles) and that was part of how the ranch organized horses and bridles, and saddles to go on particular horses.
- J: Absolutely, that is why the barn was built the way it was. The doors were split so you could have the lower halves closed and upper halves open. The gangway went all the way through so you could just pull the horses all the way through. As we got to the logs, they were

90 years old and had a nice brown patina that the sun had just baked in them. They were very easily damaged and easily scratched.

R: Pat, you had said Jon did not like those logs scratched.

P: No, we had to be careful. He was always very careful. He used a leverage system remembering physics from high school. In some of the pictures, it shows how he did it with just one hand, taking some of the longest logs off the building.

R: Some of those you estimated at 350 pounds or better. So that would translate to a 12 inch diameter log?

J: Yea, I think they were about that big around and there was a seam in the middle. The building was 50 feet long so the logs were seamed at the middle, so they were about 25 feet long. They were heavy and fortunately we had gravity working in our favor. We made ramps by leaving out a board against a layer of logs and pried up the log above it and slide it down the ramp. I had an old climbing rope and we started lowering them and numbering them one by one. Pat took pictures. And Jon took pictures.



Lowering the logs with ropes. Photo courtesy of Cavicchioni & Gerster.

August was our big moving month. When September shows up, anything could happen. I did not want us to be snowed in and lose out because the weather kept shutting it down. I pushed us to keep going and I got the nickname “the Warden”.

R: (44:50) I remember a picture of you sitting on the front porch of the main cabin with food and wine glasses at the end of the day.

J: That was her birthday. We did bring meals every once in a while and have meals on the porch of the main cabin. Pat brought an air of work, food but certainly fun. She wasn't a guy so she brought a breath of fresh air when she showed up.



Pat and friends on the porch of the Main Cabin with Blacktail Butte in the background. Photo courtesy of Cavicchioni & Gerster.

She (Pat) was also one of our 'inside people' because she worked at Park Headquarters. She had her ear tuned to whatever headquarters might be saying about what is going on down here.

P: It was always positive.

J: It was good. I think they were thrilled that we were saving it. I think there were a lot of people at headquarters that were happy that it was being saved and some who were mystified who is this crazy guy trying to take this big log barn apart.

R: You must admit that it was very adventurous and challenging project. It was an enormous task.

J: For young people - we were all in our twenties and it was done manually except for transport. All done manually because they had to be lifted manually up on the snowmobile trailer. We had to do it gently because we could not just throw them on there because they will get scratched up and I don't want a building rebuilt that looks like it has been through a war. The whole idea of restoring this is so it could look as beautiful as it did. I wasn't just approaching it as a pile of logs but I was approaching it from an historic preservation perspective.

R: (47:14) I am aware that you saved a lot of things that were in the barn. For example, the old medicine cabinet made of rough-cut lumber. The story I have was that it was used to store the medicine for the horses.

J: It has a powerful smell inside. It was oily and had things you put on the horses' hooves. A lot of that stuff was still in it. It was covered in smelly liniment smell. We saved it.



Preserved Barn Medicine Cabinet gifted by Carole Hofley. Photo courtesy of R. Butterbaugh.

I wished I had saved the ladder that went to the loft. I wished I saved more but going back to the day, it was a challenge to save what we did. We were pushing it to save what we did.

Once we got into the building, we had a lot of time to interact with it. It had to be dismantled in a logical way because all the innards were attached to those walls. We had to figure out what was attached to what and how to pry everything apart in a logical way so those logs wouldn't fall apart. There was some damage to the logs, probably during the explosion. There were some splits and to take a log off the wall was not a big deal if the log was in good shape; many of them were. Some of them had been damaged at the top and some of the seal logs at the bottom had some rot.

R: Thanks to Pat for documenting with pictures and addition to marking the logs were considered credible so that helped in putting them back together. Did you have a sense that the roof that had been on the barn, probably repaired or redone over the years, protected the building from moisture and rot.

P: It was a good roof.

J: (50:07) That is what saved it. Had they not put a roof back on it or tried to repair whatever damaged roof was there, it would have never survived. It was well built. There were 2x12s; they were pretty big beams. It was a well-built new roof but when you get down to the logs, that is what I bought it for. I thought about using some of the lumber to put the new roof back on but everything that came off, came off logically. Everything on the roof was screwed on, so we had to unscrew that and then lower them down. They were very sharp and unwieldy and that had to come down in such a way that they would not kill anybody, including me. I got sliced plenty of times. There was a fortune in lumber.

Again, the logs were what I was interested in. We just approached it from a top down perspective and a historic perspective. It hurt tearing up the floor and seeing the original building coming down. It was sad for us because we had spent a number of weeks taking the roof off. But getting down to the meat of that building and having learned what we had from people coming up to us, we were being pulled into the history of the ranch.

R: Do you recall other stories?

J: People would talk about Frank Galey, the former owner, and the stories how he liked to drink, the truck that was pulled up to the back of the kitchen and all the bottles that were tossed in it. Through the 3 months we were there, we began to knit an oral history of this ranch and it seemed as though we were ripping the heart out of this place.

R: (53:14) Most people exposed to dude ranching many years ago, say the barn on the dude ranch was the heart of the ranch because people came to ride the horses. So, after breakfast, everybody would go to the barn to get their horse and off they would go for the day and then come back.

J: But there were other stories.....there was that hayloft and haylofts come with their own stories. There was some purity lost up there and we would talk with some people that would tell us of romances in the hayloft, parties in the haylofts. We began to realize that this barn was more than just a barn; it was the center of ranch life. It was a fun place and a place that was utilitarian. The barn itself began to assume its own persona. It had a life of its own. For us, it gave us an incredible respect for the building itself and what it represented for the ranch. We would walk around these buildings and noticed many were falling in with no maintenance at all. For us, it was wrong. This place is being allowed to go back into the dust. It has a great history.

(55:00) We started learning about the Forbes Family and people who came out from Philadelphia and helped establish this ranch and the dude ranching era. The intellectual elite would come out here for the summers.

P: And create memories for them and their family vacations.

R: And the people in that era would come out and stay sometimes 1-2 months and sometimes the whole summer. They would repeat year after year; bringing their kids and their kids would grow up here.

J: I identify with that because I grew up in summer place on a lake in Northern Michigan. There was no air conditioning in those big cities in the Midwest - Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit. So those families would leave dad in town working and he would come up on weekend. The mother and kids would spend the summer in the cottages. Everyone wanted to get out of the hot cities. I identify with leaving your house for the summer. My childhood mirrored a lot of what happened at White Grass. I identified with that and I became kind of a romantic in a sad tragedy of what was being allowed to be lost at the ranch.

R: But you were saving it too, which must have felt good even though it wasn't saving the place in its originality.

J: Yes, it was that double edged sword, but we were on a mission to save it. We were also under a big gun to do it in a way that was logical.

R: What did you find structurally in the barn, in the barn interior?

J: There was a tack room with bridles and reins, a liniment cabinet, a ladder that went to the hayloft and the door on the outside. The end doors weighed a ton because all the ironwork was hand forged and they had to come off. We preserved them so they would not be mangled. Once the building was opened up and the ceiling was gone, everything in it was lodgepole pine including the troughs, floor, stall dividers, etc.



Hand forged hardware on the entrance doors to the barn. Photo courtesy of Craig Struble.

R: You are not talking about sawmill lumber but rounds that were used to divide the stalls.

J: As the tree came down, they were maybe 3-5 inches round and they were like a log building stacked on top of each other. The floor was hand flattened with an ax and you could still see where the hooves hadn't worn everything off. The square notches on the log walls were beautifully done and so precisely put together. There was one spike down through each one. We had to pry the log enough in the corner to lift the head of the spike to get the spike out of there.

R: How long were the spikes?"?

J: I think I still have a number of those. Some of them were 10 and 12 inch spikes. The seam in the middle was a very easy starting point to get the log moving outward. But it was still being held in the corner by that spike. I would tie the climbing rope onto it and once that spike

came off, that log would launch because there was nothing holding it at that point. So, suddenly you have several hundred pounds air born. You had to be very careful.

R: Was there chinking between the logs? What was the material used?

J: A lot of chinking was gone but you could see it had fallen out over the years and somebody had put something else in it including rags.

P: It was mostly thin wooden slats.

J: They had taken thinner lodgepoles and cut them into corners and nailed that in between the logs. The chinking was anything but airtight; I don't think the barn was airtight. It was mainly a shelter. There was a lot of that log chinking.

R: (1:01:53) Was there any evidence of shoeing horses in the barn such as anvils in the barn?

J: No anvils, I don't remember any tools. I think that stuff was gone by that time. There were some things that had fallen under the floor over the years. The windows had been boarded up with fiberglass and the windows were in awful shape but we did save some window frames. We tried to save anything that was original. We wanted to rebuild it with as much original stuff as we could. Some of the saddle bars had numbers on them.

We had a lot of time up here. It is quiet and a reflective time. This building started to speak and tell us stories on how it was built, who built it. The brand was on the side of the barn (H quarter circle B). You start asking questions and how are we going to get it saved with our meager resources. It would have been nice if one of the wealthy ranchers around here would have taken it on their ranch and rebuilt it. It would have been a free barn for someone but nobody was thinking that way then.

R: (1:04:53) Jon, you've been describing your personal experience you had with this. I want to ask Pat if she had the same experience.

P: I came here everyday. You get to be a part of whatever spirit that is still here of the ranch. You start building stories in your mind. You know people came here for vacations and they loved it and had a great time, eating and drinking, recreating and relaxing. It was that sort of spirit, homecoming, place of memories.

J: This place is full of memories and full of life and it was quiet.

P: So, we built a background from stories that Jon got from people, who came by as we would walk around the buildings, we would talk about it and wonder what happened here and what happened there.

Some of the stories conflicted. Some stories evolved and they end up less accurate than when they started. We would get one story from somebody and then we would get an opposite story from somebody else. Through just the volume of people talking about their memories,

we were able to sort through the embellishment and realize that some things were more accurate.

R: Part of the White Grass Heritage Project is to have recorded stories from dudes and wranglers. One of the questions we asked in the interviews is how would you describe the impact of the ranch on your particular life. You obviously interacted with the spirit and history of White Grass. So, what has been the impact on you; short term in the 1990s and here it is 2016?

J: (1:07:46) We found Frank's grave and at that point we had heard a lot of stories about Frank.



Frank Galey's marker at White Grass Cemetery. Photo courtesy of R. Butterbaugh.

We had heard so much I felt like I had met the man who had been gone for years. We would actually talk to Frank so we almost established a friendship posthumously with him through the stories, our interaction and the ranch. He didn't build this barn, but he impacted what happened to it under his ownership. It was interesting to knit a person together through stories. He became a 3-dimensional living person through wonderful, hilarious and sometimes tragic stories.

R: Are you a different person now?

P: Yes, I think so. It was an amazing project from beginning to end and all the people we met and worked with were so wonderful. It was probably one of the best summers of my life working on that kind of project with that kind of history to it.

J: It was very organic. With no mechanized equipment, it was very quiet here. We heard the elk bugling in the fall, coyotes came up and we watched the amazing stars and moons. We would ask ourselves how this amazing meadow got here... What was it like before White Grass showed up on the scene and why was it called White Grass and from where did that name come? It became a very special place for us even though we were never guests here but, in the end, I guess we were, in a different kind of way. I always felt like we had a partial ownership of the place at that time. It was very special.

R: (1:10:21) You obviously dealt with the project of dismantling the barn with a loving hand and a loving spirit. It is very commendable.

J: We were going to reuse the logs for rebuilding a barn for me and the intention was to rebuild it into its original form. It was never going to be a house or for commercial use. So, when I sold it to Norm and Carole Hofley it was under that stipulation. We met at McDonalds and the one condition required was that it was to stay a barn. It was such a beautiful building. We had an emotional attachment to the building and the whole ranch, as well.

R: Ownership, personal attachment, and a real sense of protection of it?

J: We saved it as much as you could save it. I would have loved for it to stay right where it was with Buck Mountain in the background. To come around the last corner in the road and to see the barn, you could see how beautiful it was! You knew it should not be leaving; the Park gave it no choice. It had to have a life somewhere else and I am glad the Hofleys got it. There was a young man from the Park who worked trails would come by each day and go up Death Canyon Trail. He got to looking at that and he got to feel that he wanted to do something for this ranch.

R: (1:13:07) I think the person you are talking about is Al Williams. He has long and very storied history in this park for 30 years. He did do trails in this park and actually lived on a ranch that was an inholding for a while on Moose-Wilson Road. He tells in his oral history of coming up here and having a connection that this place had a right to continue. He put old roofing on the roofs when the park wanted it to dissolve into dust. He is now working for the Western Center for Historic Preservation and for the past 10 years, he has been the project manager rehabilitating all the remaining structures on the ranch! So, you are kindred spirits.

J: (1:14:15) I had been away from Jackson for many years and was in Bozeman when Pat said on the phone, "Do you know what has happened with White Grass ranch?" I assumed it is gone and she told me that it is being saved. So that first time I came to Jackson, we came here and I had floods of memories. To see that this place was actively being saved was wonderful. That is exactly what we wanted to happen. We did our part...we saved the barn. In talking to Al, it turned out that the barn was the spark for him and said that it is wrong that the barn was leaving and that the ranch was smoldering down into the dust. That gave him the impetus to do what he did. I am just amazed!

We ended up getting a Historic Preservation Award from Sheila (Bricher-Wade) and won a SHPO (State Historic Preservation Office) Historic Preservation Award.

Note: Sheila Bricher-Wade and Carole Hofley have both given oral histories of their involvement with White Grass buildings/restoration. Those oral histories are available at www.whitegrass.org under Collections/Documents/Oral Histories.

R: Tell us what the award was for.

J: It was for historic preservation of the White Grass barn. That was awarded in the summer of 1992. It was an honor.

R: We should say that Sheila Bricher-Wade was an officer for SHPO and when the Park was in the process of letting this place fall to the ground, she and SHPO was one of the several groups that were challenging the park to save it. She knew both superintendents, Jack Stark and Jack Nichols, who wanted it (White Grass) to go away. Then in 2003, a new superintendent came in and he respected culture resources. Instead of going downhill, impetus was to put it back together.

J: We were talking back in the barn days that this would make a perfect living history center. If this ranch could be restored, it could run as a guest ranch and they could still pay and all could be done the old way with horses. We were hearing about other living history projects at other ranches and we were wondering why it couldn't happen here. This is the perfect place; it's iconic, it still exists, it is in a national park and it is an opportunity staring Grand Teton in the face. It was frustrating that it was not happening. I remember thinking that all of this was going to be saved when Pat told me what was going to happen. Not until I met Al (Williams) last year, I had no idea that his looking at us doing what we did spurred him into doing what he did. I said, "Every good fire needs its first spark". So we were that first spark getting this out of here. We kept saying that it was wrong that it was leaving.

I viewed Jack Stark as this villainous character because it was so obvious that it was wrong to take this barn out of here. By then, we had knitted our stories together. We knitted Frank in our minds, we knitted this ranch functioning with the horses and rides. So, for us, White Grass had come alive. I told the Park I would give it back to them if I could.

R: Are there other things you want to add to this story? It is 2016 and you did this work in 1990, so it has been 26 years ago since you were here.

J: (1:20:08) I had to get rid of the excess lumber, including the wonderful lodgepole guts of the building. It was ambitious enough to save the logs themselves and I hired a logging truck after I got it down to the Reiser Ranch and had it in piles. I used the tin roofing to pile up over the logs so they wouldn't weather. I bought 60 acres south of Hoback (South of Jackson, WY) and hired a logging truck who took them down there in 2 trips. He hauled it into the middle of nowhere. It was a beautiful view.

The barn sat at the Reiser Ranch for 2 years (1990-1992) and I bought what I called the new White Grass because I adopted the name. I said if this old White Grass is going to be wiped off the map and the barn is the heart of this thing; then where the barn goes so goes the name. So, we called it New White Grass. I think I called it the Double Diamond because it was the mountains with the White Grass. It became 2 diamonds, so we called it the Double Diamonds. We were going to use it to be the heart of this place but then I found this mansion in Bozeman in 1994 which I bought to restore.

I sold the land in Hoback but didn't sell the barn with it. It was going to go separately. Another logging truck had to be hired to get it out of there and I thought these buildings were being moved around an awful lot. That is when Norm and Carole bought it. So, the barn lives on but sometimes buildings have "adaptive reuse," so they have to assume a new life in order to remain relevant and to exist.



Reconstructed White Grass Barn in Wilson, WY by Carole and Norm Hofley, circa 1990. Photo courtesy of Carole Hofley.

For us, every piece to this thing had some story. Those saddle bars had stories; we would talk about the conversation held amongst people sitting in those saddles; what the parties held in the hayloft were like; and pictures of what the barn looked like. It became a living thing for us and cemented our friendship. It was our bond. It was an adventure.

- P: We were of the same mind. Jon has gone on to another historic project building in Bozeman. I think we would have gone ahead with a barn if we could have followed through on how to make a living in the middle of nowhere. We didn't have that piece, so we had to look for something else.
- J: The mansion in Montana was the way; it was a Bed and Breakfast for about a decade before we bought it. It was been shut down because it was too early for B and Bs in that area; no one knew what to do with them. By the time we came into the scene, we decided we were going to save this old mansion. We ended up winning a Historic Preservation Award for the state of Montana. Now we have one for 2 states.

We found an old farmhouse a couple miles from the mansion and we bought that one for one dollar. It has stained glass, beautiful hardware and great original stuff in it. I like reusing things. Just because this barn wasn't then currently being used as a barn didn't mean that it could be one in the future. It is like recycling.

- P: (1:24:53) I started showing folks in the park the pictures. They were interested and I let them make copies and that led me to you, Roger, and then I got excited about all the stuff happening at White Grass. I pushed Jon to come here and take classes and get him back to the White Grass. He had other projects in his future.
- R: I believe in vessels of memories. This room we are into today/in the Main Cabin at White Grass, is a vessel of all sorts of memories, some good and some not. There were/are things

here impacting the lives of many, and it is interesting to think of who interacted with this space and what brought them here. For me, it becomes a great learning tool.

Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it. So, I think historic preservation is the most powerful form of education. A book is a 2-dimensional item and a building is a 3-dimensional item.

A former director of Western Center for Historic Preservation, Craig Struble, made the comment, when I first became involved in 2011, that if you look at a building – it is logs and it is roofing; it is just things, objects. But once you understand the stories that go with it, it becomes a living vessel.

Pat, is there anything you want to add?

P: (1:27:23) No, I would like to see Jon find another project. He has to finish what he's involved in right now.

J: I tend to get them started. I am the one that pushes the rock down the hill and like Al and you, to take them forward. I don't necessarily have to be the one to finish the project, but often I am the one to get it started. If nobody else is starting it, and it is an obvious thing that needs to be done, I will get it started. When something has momentum, often someone else will jump on and help take it. I couldn't have done this without the crew and you.

R: What I would say is THANK YOU for your work, energies and wisdom to save an important part here. I look forward to seeing you on Tuesday at the ribbon cutting after 10 years of rehabilitation work at the ranch.

J: We are very proud.

R: You should be very proud of your contribution and unfortunately a lot of the former Whiter Grassers don't know you personally, but they know what you have done and I can tell you they are very appreciative of you pushing the rock down the hill. You are part of our history.

J: It is such a huge honor and I think any project like this takes a huge team over many years.

R: The old phrase, it takes a village to make things this complicated come together. Again, thank you.

P: You are welcome. It is our pleasure.

See Photos Next Page...



Jon Gerster and Pat Cavicchioni, White Grass Ranch, 2016. Photo courtesy of R. Butterbaugh.

Park Contract Sent to Jon (1990), see below...



United States Department of the Interior
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK
P.O. DRAWER 170
MOOSE, WYOMING 83012



IN REPLY REFER TO:
Contracting Officer

January 3, 1990

Jon B. Gerster, Jr.
Star Route Box 373
Jackson, WY 83001

NOTICE OF CONTRACT AWARD
Contract No. CX-1460-0-S002

Dear Mr. Gerster:

Reference is made to IFB-1460-0-S02 for the sale of several structures at the White Grass Ranch. We are pleased to inform you that you were the successful offeror on Item 3, the log barn, Building No. 1175 in the total amount of \$1.00. Enclosed for your records is your copy of Contract No. CX-1460-0-S002.

In accordance with the terms of that contract, you are required to submit a Performance Bond in the amount of \$200.00 to assure cleanup of the site. The bond, and payment for the barn, are required to be submitted within 15 calendar days of your receipt of this notice in accordance with Clause 13 of the Special Terms and Conditions.

The site, as anticipated, is snowed in and will not be accessible until approximately June 1, 1990. Therefore, we will establish the final date for removal and cleanup operations to be complete as of July 30, 1990.

Please call the undersigned at (307)733-2880 if you have any questions regarding the terms or conditions of the contract.

Sincerely,

Rande L. Simon
Contracting Officer