

1921



McAllister family at "Claim Shack" in 1921, Kenton, OK: Bulger, the dog (left), Doran Nathaniel McAllister, father, Earl, John, Ruth (1 year-old), and May (Grabeel) McAllister, mother.

By Dan R. Manning  
I heard many stories from my granddad before he died at the age of 86. His remarkable accounts were about growing up in the Missouri Ozarks, homesteading in the Oklahoma Panhandle and preaching in Western Kansas during the Great Depression. Like all grandchildren, I'm sorry that I failed to ask more questions.

Doran Nathaniel McAllister was a fourth-generation Methodist preacher. His father and grandfather, the latter of whom who ended his ministry in 1900 as a missionary in Indian Territory, were circuit-riding preachers when they were not tending Ozark farms. Before them, Doran's great grandfather had been a preacher in Georgia before bringing his family to Missouri after the Civil War.

In the woods along McAllister Branch, Doran spent his youthful days. With lots of brothers and sisters he picked berries, gathered paw paws, shot wild turkeys, caught fish, located bee trees and worked in the fields.

Between preaching excursions and revival meetings, his father needed all of the family to help him make sorghum molasses for them and their neighbors on shares. They raised a large vegetable garden and tended hundreds of fruit trees. The McAllisters also ran pigs, sheep and cattle on open range. They traded at Squire's Store, where they bought coffee, sugar and salt -- everything else was provided by hard work and the will of God.

During teenage years, Doran and his younger brother, Ray worked for Colonel Louis Erb on a 1,000-acre fruit farm near Cedar Gap, MO. Doran's job was packing apples into barrels. He and Ray also helped with the construction of Powersite Dam on White River. It was completed in May of 1913, and created Lake Taneycomo near Branson.

Doran married Katie May Grabeel at her parents' home on Christmas Day in 1915. Four years later they left Missouri with two young sons in search of work in West-

# LIFE'S FULL CIRCLE

ern Kansas. Doran anticipated a job in the oil fields near Augusta, but his plans changed when he found that industry at a standstill. After taking his family on to Colorado in a horse-drawn wagon, he found little work there. Learning about free land being given away in the Oklahoma Panhandle, they headed for Kenton. Near Oklahoma's highest point, known as Black Mesa, Doran registered for a homestead at the far end of No Man's Land. It was mostly a rocky desert region except for several acres of bottomland next to the Cimarron River. Butting up against the arid borders of Texas, Colorado, New Mexico and Kansas, Kenton was a far cry from the lush meadows and flowing streams of southern Missouri.

Vernie, May's younger sister who had married Doran's brother, Ray, wrote in 1980 about moving from the Ozarks to Kenton, OK. She remembered that they rented an abandoned schoolhouse on a ranch owned by the Easley brothers. Not far from the Santa Fe Trail's Cimarron cut-off, it was once part of the old 101 Ranch. During the early 1870s, as an English syndicate under its principals Doss, Taylor and Horn, this open rangeland had been purchased from Jose and Benito Baca. The Western Land and Cattle Co. in London gained control of the 101 and V1 ranches on the Cimarron River in 1882.

Albert Cox Easley, a rawhide tough range man, was born in 1859 at Lone Jack near Kansas City, MO, a hotbed of guerilla activity during the Civil War period. Recalling his cowboy career, he said: "I worked with not less than a hundred outlaws -- lined up with them at the chuck wagon for 15 years without changing base." He watched open range herding diminish as large ranchers put up miles of barbed wire fences. Deciding that "if you can't whip 'em, jine 'em," he began working on the XIT ranch in the Texas Panhandle. He and his brother Lee started managing their own operation by buying and shipping



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trainloads of Mexican cattle from the old Company M ranch south of Boise City, OK, about 30 miles east of Kenton. When he died February 6, 1945, Easley was considered the "oldest pioneer settler of the area."

Vernie wrote that Doran and Ray found a number of ways to make a living for their families. "Life on the Easley Ranch, as I look back on it now, was fast-paced. Besides the routine work of raising cattle, the McAllister brothers began a farming operation. So much good, river-bottom land that had never been farmed. Other ranchers came from miles around to look and comment. Samples of corn, melons, etc. were displayed in store windows and bank windows."

When ranch work was slow in the winter, Ray helped drill water wells

and put up windmills. For extra money, he and Doran ran trap-lines on saddle horses and sold pelts. Together, they constructed a small home

point of reference.

During the 1990s, Doran and May's children, John, Ruth and Tom, along with his wife, Donna made several trips to Kenton. While searching for their parents' old claim shack, they talked with many long-time residents. However, no one was able to direct them to it. It was not until the spring of 2001 that John McAllister and his daughter, Jo were able to locate the site.

"We'd been hiking up and down the road near Hoot Owl Ranch," recalls Jo. "At that time, no one was living there, and it was in bad condition. Dad had been

asking everyone if they remembered the McAllister homestead. One time we were visiting the museum in Kenton when he asked Asa Jones, and he said that he and his friends pushed



"Found at Last" June, 2001, photo taken by John McAllister seated on crumbled foundation of McAllister Claim Shack. (Left to right) are Doran and May McAllister's grandchildren and great grandchildren, Cheryl, Nathan, Jo and Amanda.

for Doran so he could prove-up his claim. Beside a free-flowing spring at the end of a box canyon, the one-room rock house was located about a mile north of Old Maid Rock, an early

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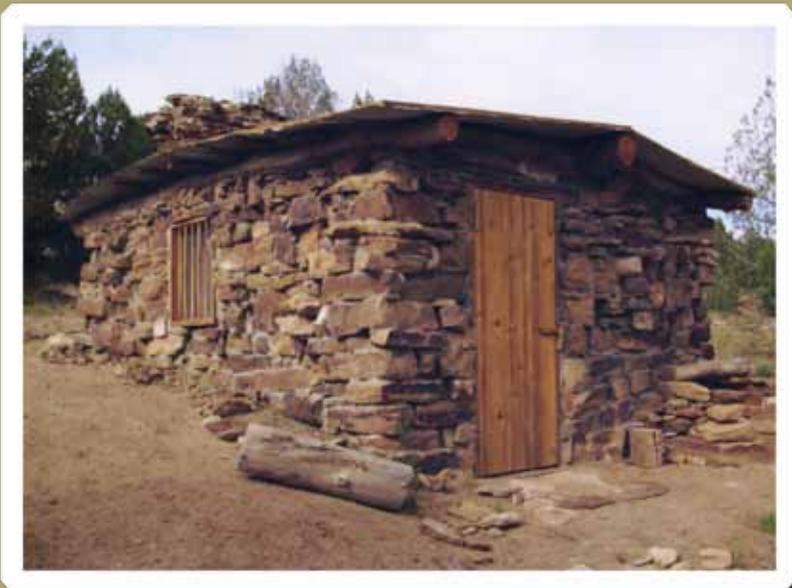
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2004, Tom McAllister before Doran's Claim Shack was restored.



2006, Steve McAllister during restoration of Doran and May McAllister Claim Shack, Kenton, OK. Photo taken by Marilyn McAllister.



The restored McAllister Claim Shack.

its rock walls in when they were kids. We hiked up the canyon the next day, and just as we were about to give up hope, we found it. My dad was thrilled. He just sat there and was as happy as I ever had seen him. Aunt Ruth had sent me the book, **The Lords of the Valley**, along with the old picture of the homestead. I kept the picture with me as we were looking around. Of course when we found the foundation that distinctive rock was behind it. We knew we had the right place.”

Steve, Earl McAllister's youngest son and his wife, Marilyn began restoring the old claim shack in 2005. According to him, the building's outer dimensions were 12 feet by 16 feet, and it was 7 feet tall. After digging two and a half feet down to the packed dirt floor, they began reconstructing the fieldstone walls on top of original quarried foundation rocks weighing up to 200 pounds, by using hand-mixed mortar. Cottonwood logs were brought in from the Cimarron River to assemble the roof beams. They were covered with corrugated tin, a layer of felt, and four inches of dirt.

About half a mile southwest of the claim shack, presently owned by George “Pard” Collins and his wife, Terry, is a two-story ranch house built in 1889 by Cirt Allen. This structure, along with an early-period horse barn and several newly-constructed buildings, are the headquarters of Hoot Owl Ranch. They offer visitors a bed and breakfast atmosphere, horse riding and round-ups on their working cattle ranch. Adventure seekers also are welcome to re-live what homesteaders truly experienced by sleeping in the restored McAllister claim shack.

According to a warranty deed in the Cimarron County courthouse, Doran sold his proved-up claim in 1923 to Marie, Denton K. and Winona Lord, all of Kenton, OK. It consisted of the South 1/2 of the SW 1/4 and the SW 1/4 of Section 9, Township 5, Range 2. According to Steve, the Easleys had intended to buy the acreage; however low cattle prices made them back out of the deal, so the Lords incorporated the relatively small piece of property into their existing ranch land.

With the money, Doran bought a two-story house and livery stable and an adjoining feedlot/wagon yard from William M. Pennack for \$1,750. This land and business known as the Kenton Feed Yard, was located beside an arroyo at the west edge of town.

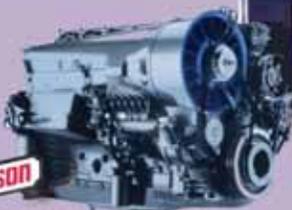
Tom McAllister, born there in 1922, remembered: “When I was a little kid, I used to go into a nearby store and sing for the customers.” While telling about his early performances in the build-

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ing presently known as Kenton Mercantile, he laughed. "I think instead of paying me for singing there, they gave me candy to go somewhere else and sing."

To keep from being beaten up by town bullies, Tom used the arroyo to sneak home from school. One evening Doran had watered a workhorse and was leading it out to pasture. Tom was riding on its back, until he accidentally fell off and broke his nose. A wooden windmill tower is the only sign of where the McAllister family lived and worked in Kenton.

Heeding the Lord's call, as well as McAllister family tradition, Doran became a preacher in 1927. Like his forefathers, Doran entered the ministry as a circuit rider. But instead of a horse, Doran's means of transportation from church to church was a Model T Ford. His first charge in Southwest Kansas was at Wellsford, Hopewell, and a little country church named Maple Leaf. Over a 35-year ministry, Doran and May served at other communities in Kansas: Portis (1930), Luray (1935), Gypsum (1937), Ransom (1941), La-



Restored McAllister Claim Shack, with distinctive rock behind it.

Crosse (1943), Oakley (1945), Satanta (1949), Mulvane (1952) and Belleville (1957). They retired in 1960 and returned to Missouri.

Doran and May bought a house in what was then the small village of Branson at the edge of Table Rock Lake. He fished every day except

Sunday, and substitute-preached on occasion at the United Methodist church. When May died, April 12, 1966, Doran moved to Mulvane, KS where he taught Sunday school and preached sometimes. He was laid to rest beside his wife at the cemetery there, September 13, 1981. **II**




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