

Banks History

Banks, ID



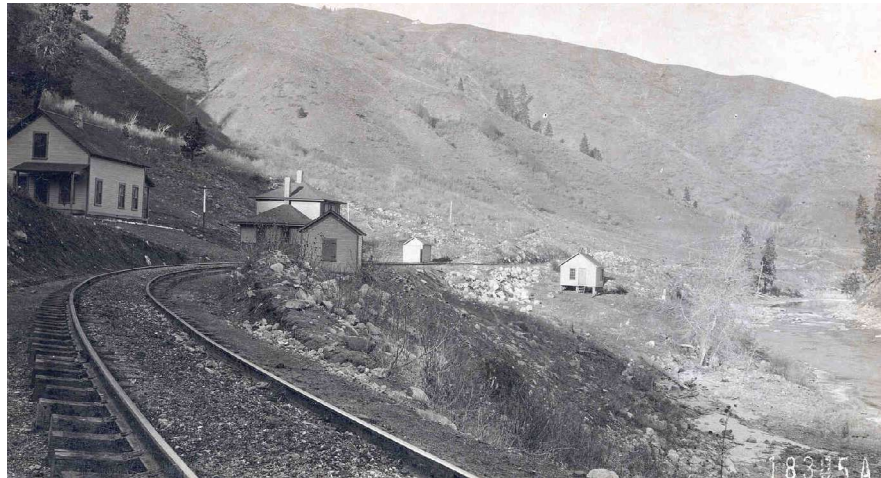
Merle Banks cabin
Forest Service photograph

In 1908, a young rancher named Merle Banks filed a homestead claim on the Payette River below its north and south fork tributaries. He filed under the Forest Homestead Act of 1906 because his claim was located inside the Payette National Forest. The act opened agricultural lands in national forests for settlement. Homesteaders could apply for 160 acre parcels on the condition they cultivate the lands.

Banks was a rancher, not a farmer. His modest cabin aroused the suspicions of Forest Supervisor Guy B. Mains, who believed that Banks' interest in the claim originated with the lumber industry's plans to build a

railroad up the river to haul timber out of Long Valley. Banks and other ranchers wanted the railroad to ship their livestock to Emmett stockyards on the Oregon Short Line, a subsidiary of the Union Pacific Railroad. Otherwise, they had to trail their livestock into town, taking "meat off the hoof."

In 1911, the Oregon Short Line began construction on the Idaho Northern Railroad from Emmett to Long Valley. That year, the federal government withdrew all of the public domain lands not covered by pending homestead claims within a quarter mile of the



Banks, 1913
Forest Service photograph

Payette River for power site purposes. The reason? Reclamation Service engineers and farmers on the lower Payette Valley feared that private power companies would build a dam on the river restricting their access to the water.

The railroad was completed in 1913, and Banks leased the Oregon Short Line a right-of-way through his claim. The Forest Service finally approved his homestead application after he planted crops on the claim. The General Land Office issued Banks a patent for the land in 1914. In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson issued an executive order withdrawing the town site of Banks from the public domain. Although a survey in 1920 laid out ambitious plans for the town, it never developed much beyond a railroad station.



Banks townsite plans dated
February 8, 1920
Courtesy Bureau of Land Management