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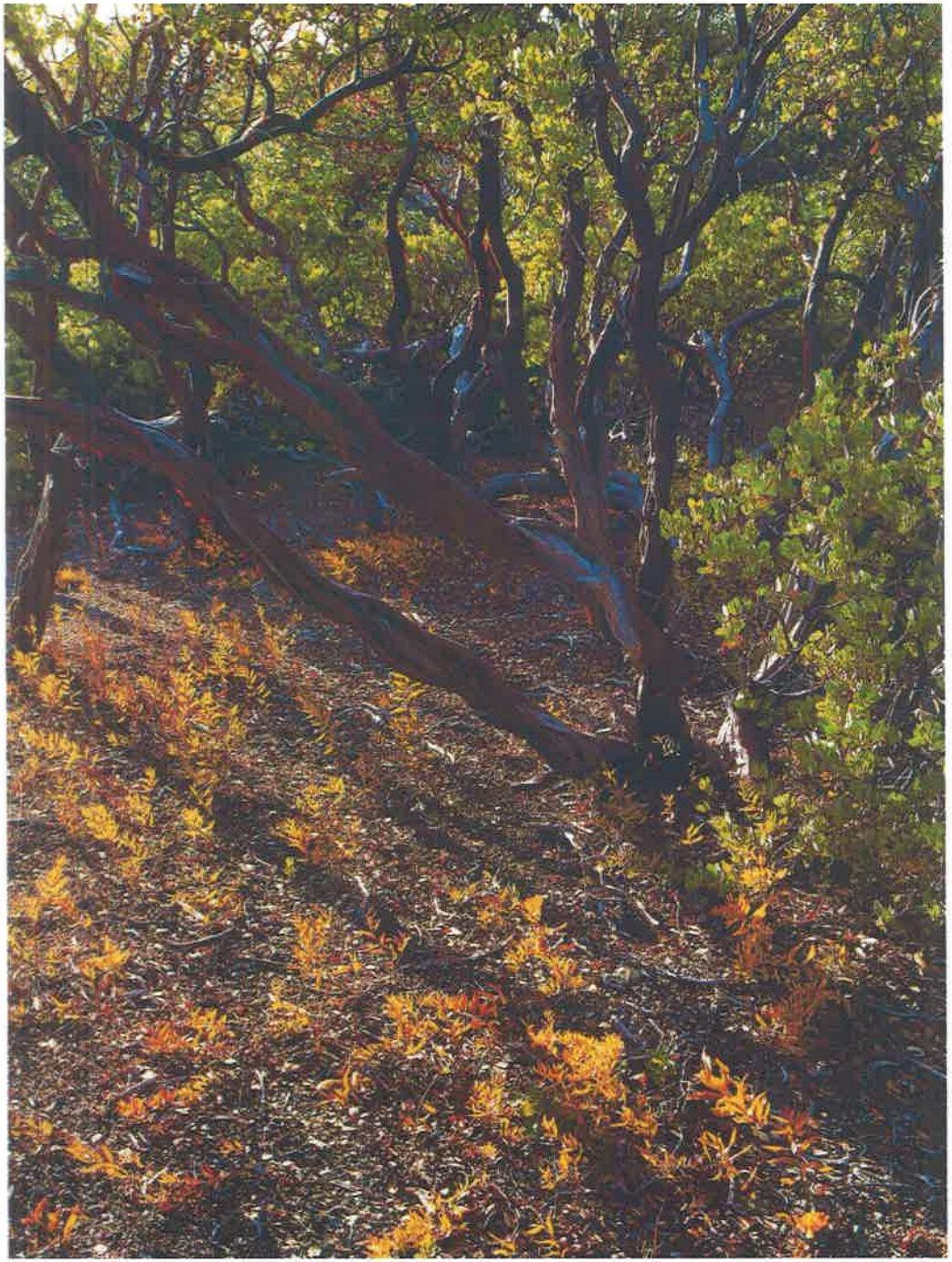

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(OPPOSITE PAGE) *Manzanita is supposed to spend its life as a modest shrub, but sometimes the plant sprouts more than just delusions of grandeur, as our author discovers on a back road trek into the Mazatzal Mountains near Phoenix. See story on page 50.* JERRY SIEVE

(FRONT COVER) *The shadow of legendary lawman Wyatt Earp looms large in Tombstone, a town so shrouded in mythology that the reality of life in its frontier heyday will astonish aficionados of the "Town Too Tough to Die." See story on page 4.* BOB BOZE BELL

(BACK COVER) *Waterfalls tumble down a rocky terrace below vivid bigtooth maple and velvet ash trees in Ramsey Canyon, an artist's palette of autumn color. See portfolio on page 24.* MARK S. THALER

POINTS OF INTEREST FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE

THE ASTONISHING DOUBLE LIFE OF FRONTIER RANCHER

Cecil Creswell

BY BOB THOMAS

Looking at the remains of Cecil Creswell's old homestead and buffeted by the ever-present wind that whistles down from Sunset Pass, I realized what the old-timers meant when they called life here "hardscrabble."

The burned-out house with its plastered walls of lath and chicken wire fallen inward sits in a little bowl of red earth surrounded by a few sickly looking sagebrush clumps and windblown piles of dried tumbleweeds for decoration.

It's a spare, unattractive setting, somehow fitting for the scene of so much fighting, shooting, rustling, and, in the end, the death of Juanita Gale Creswell, known around Winslow as Cecil.

As I poked about the ruins with Janice Griffith, director of the Old Trails Museum in Winslow, I marveled at the hard labor that Cecil went through building her home.

She did all the work: mixed cement and river sand for the concrete floor and porch, laid the red sandstone walls for part of the house and plastered walls for the rest, and engineered a complicated roof gutter system that led to a handmade cistern that held the precious rainwater so necessary if a woman wanted to wash her clothes or shampoo her hair.

There were no conveniences such as running water or electricity on Cecil's lonely spread. She read her books by the light of a Coleman lantern and had to carry water for cooking and drinking from Clear Creek a half mile away.

"Gee, you don't really get an idea of what she must have gone through living out here until you visit this place," said Griffith. "She must have been one tough lady."

Cecil — no one knows why she called herself by that name — is a legend among the residents in Winslow.

As a decorous young woman, she had worked as a Harvey Girl at the Winslow Harvey House. When she died March 5, 1954, she was under arrest as a cattle rustler, quite probably the only 20th-century woman rustler in Arizona.

The women who knew Cecil are united in saying she was a kind, gentle, fun-loving person who was forced into a life of crime by local ranchers who resented her arrogance and independence, the way she dressed as a man, and her unusual skill with a horse, a lariat, and a gun.

"The men of this town wanted to teach her to keep her place," Inis Myers of Winslow confided to me. "That's the way they were, and still are, if you ask me."

Men who had run-ins with Cecil, especially those involved in shooting scrapes with her, called her "a criminal, a cattle rustler, a mean, rough old lady."

While Janice Griffith and I were examining Cecil's homestead, six miles southeast of Winslow, in the summer of '93, John Thompson, whose ranch adjoined Cecil's homestead, happened to drive up and stopped to ask what the two of us were doing there.

Thompson, 82, also is a Winslow legend. Reputed to have been the

(OPPOSITE PAGE) *A woman's options were few in the early 1900's when Cecil Creswell struggled to survive in a harsh land dominated by males. But survive she did, transforming herself from a proper Harvey Girl to a hard-riding, gun-toting cattle rustler. It was her thieving that led to a confrontation with the law and a final tragedy.* NAVAJO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
(ABOVE) *Though of slight stature, Creswell was strong and athletic, qualities that enabled her to do a man's work on her hardscrabble ranch. The corral that Creswell made of tree limbs and railroad ties still stands next to her barn. A deputy sheriff who knew her said that Creswell loved horses and could break wild mustangs better than the toughest cowboys.* RICHARD MAACK

Cecil Creswell

richest man in the area — some believed him to be a millionaire — and notoriously close with his money ("He could squeeze a dollar and come up with 99 cents," one man said). Thompson was Cecil's greatest enemy.

"She was a witch, about as worse a witch as you could meet," Thompson told me standing beside his battered pickup truck a few feet from where Cecil died.

Thompson, a life-long bachelor with some odd habits, had a small house beside Interstate 40 on the outskirts of Winslow, but he never slept there. Instead he spent his entire life, winter and summer, sleeping outdoors on the hard ground. In November, 1993, he was found dead of natural causes out on his range.

A small, wizened man with trail dirt ingrained in the wrinkles of his face, Thompson caught fire when I asked him about Cecil.

"She was a troublemaker, I tell you," he said, his small sunken eyes blazing in memory.

"She was half Sioux Indian and half German Dutch. That's a heck of a combination. You ought to have seen her loping her horse along, her hair flying in the wind like a wild woman.

"She shot at me quite a bit. Once I got a complaint against her for felonious assault for shooting at me. [Cecil, according to accounts, shot the horn off his saddle while he was sitting on it.]

"She'd jaw at me at the gate in my fence, but I'd just ride through [her land]. Once, when I was riding back, she was hiding in the brush, and she called out to me, 'Hey, John,'" recalled Thompson.

"I just froze. I knew who it was. I just kept on riding like I didn't hear her. Then she started firing, and those big old bullets went past so close I could have reached out and caught them," he said.

"I could sit here all day and talk about her. And I'm just telling you good things, not what she was really like," he said.

"But I don't want to get involved with all that again. She was a woman, and it comes out bad if you say things against a woman. You can't fight a woman. You just as well fight your hat," Thompson said, shuffling his worn cowboy boots in the red dust of the road.

He acknowledged, however, that many in Winslow blamed him for Cecil's death.

"After the shooting, a lot of people in Winslow thought I was the bad guy," Thompson told me. "I was flying to Phoenix one day, and a woman who had the seat beside me asked if I was the Thompson in the Winslow shooting. I didn't say anything. But she knew. After a while she got up and moved to another seat, so you know she didn't like me."

But Thompson wasn't the only man who ducked Cecil's bullets. Cowboys and hunters complained that whenever they neared her ranch, rifle bullets would zing past their ears.

Dale Hancock, 57, a prominent Winslow contractor, as a youth had several shooting incidents with Cecil.

Once he and several other Thompson employees ran afoul of Cecil while they were building a barbed wire fence between the Thompson ranch and her spread.

"We saw her driving a small herd of Thompson's cattle toward her ranch, and when she saw us she grabbed her gun and started shooting," Hancock said in an interview.

"She kept us pinned down all day," he said. "Every time we started to move, she'd take a shot at us until it got too dark to see."

Because of past troubles with Cecil, Thompson had advised his workers to carry guns when building the fence. Each complied, said Hancock, but it was difficult to work, keep an eye out for Cecil, and still keep a rifle handy. Often, he said, they laid their weapons down and gradually moved away from them as they worked.

"That's when she'd ride up with a big knife on her hip and her rifle aimed at you over the saddle," Hancock said.

The intimidation continued during the whole fence-building episode. Often the men returned to the site in the morning to find that Cecil had roped the posts and used her horse to pull them down, forcing the crew to repeat the work.

"She'd shoot at us nearly every day, usually from about a quarter of a mile away. That's a long ways, I know, but it's close enough when somebody is shooting at you. I can tell you she kept us scared all the time," he said.

"She was a character, tougher than any man. She wore a man's clothing. I think she wanted everyone to think she was a man. But I tell you, she was a criminal, a cattle rustler, a mean, rough old lady," he said.

"If she wanted to hit the men, she would have," said a friend, Mary May Bailey of Winslow. "Cecil was a perfect shot."

Bailey, a native of the area, remembers when Cecil, tanned leather-brown and dressed in Levi's, a man's shirt, and wearing cowboy hat and boots, would ride her horse, Pig, into Winslow, tie him to a parking meter, and go into Babbitt's Store to do her grocery shopping.

Most of the time, Cecil didn't have much money and bartered fresh beef to Babbitt's in exchange for groceries. The beef, of course, was rustled.

"If she didn't have any beef, she shot and butchered a burro — they were running free all over the range — and sold the meat to Babbitt's as beef," Bailey told me. "Cecil would laugh about it when she told us."

But Cecil was not always that way. People in Winslow remember her as a gentle, feminine girl, friendly and with a warm interest in small children.

"I first met her in 1934 or 1935," said Myers. "I knew of her when she was a Harvey Girl, and later, when she moved to her ranch, my husband and I lived nearby on another ranch. She was always a good neighbor, a frequent guest in my home, and was always a perfect lady.

"Cecil never got out of line. She took an interest in my two small girls, who were two and three at the time, and would play with them when she came to the house," Myers said.

Mack and Stella Hughes, of the tiny community of Eagle Creek in eastern Arizona, lived next to Cecil's ranch for a time, and Cecil would often ride over to visit.

"She was a good neighbor," said Stella Hughes. "But I think Cecil should have been born at an earlier time. She thought of herself as a woman of the Wild West, and I think she would have been perfectly at home in the times of Pearl Hart and Calamity Jane."

Mack Hughes, who started riding for the Hashknife Ranch in 1922, said many in Winslow knew Cecil was rustling cows, but it was considered to be for the purpose of meat, rather than profit, and thus forgivable under the old tradition of the range.

"I knew Cecil when she was still a Harvey Girl," he said. "She'd change into some Western clothes and come down to our barn and try to get us to let her ride one of our horses. She was a pretty good rider."

Cecil's birth name was Olive Dove Van Zoast, and she lived on a farm near the small town of Olivet, South Dakota. Sheriff's records say she ran away from home when she was 14. She came to Winslow as a Harvey Girl about 1918.

Harvey Girls were waitresses renowned for their good breeding, high morals, and steadfast devotion to hard work. They were often a dream come true for the lonely cowboys, miners, and railroad men in the West. Many girls found romance and exchanged their black-and-white Harvey Girl uniforms for a wedding ring.

Cecil was one of them.

Mary May Bailey, whose father, Jot Stiles, ran three trading posts on the Navajo and Hopi Indian reservations, recalled that she first met Cecil in Tuba City, where she and her husband, George Creswell, a Bureau of Indian Affairs livestock inspector, had a home.

"Cecil was very attractive, sort of blond hair and about 5 feet, 4 inches and slim. But she had a lot of strength and a lot of athletic ability," said Bailey. "She was very friendly then and knew everyone and loved to go to dances. She was probably in her late 30s when George died."

Something died in Cecil about the same time. She experienced a sharp drop in her comfortable, even prosperous, life-style.

"You've got to remember that in those days a single woman did not have much choice. Careers were few. If you had an education, you became a schoolteacher or worked as a secretary. If you didn't — and Cecil didn't — you took in boarders or did washing or you made pies," said Bailey.

At the same time, the Great Depression had chilled the nation with millions of men out of work. There was no welfare, no food stamps, no emergency shelters or halfway houses, no Medicare, and no Social Security. Rural towns like Winslow were especially hard hit.

After the death of her husband, Cecil moved back to Winslow where George Creswell had a 160-acre homestead near Clear Creek and settled on the vacant land.

"Cecil ate a lot of beans in those days. Everyone did during the Depression," said Bailey. "You felt lucky to get a few extras like a little flour, maybe some coffee and sugar, even, maybe some pork fat."

In financial straits, Cecil apparently married one man, a rancher named Moon Mullens who was killed by lightning while riding the range in Lordsburg, New Mexico, and lived in common-law relationships with two other men.

"I think Cecil had some horrendous experience during this time," Bailey told me. "Something that profoundly changed her personality. She was always very guarded in her conversations. She would greet you if she met you on the street, but there was never any small talk," said Bailey.

"I think my father was the only man she had confidence in. She always trusted my

(ABOVE) A photo taken in 1929 shows Creswell, right, with a visiting friend near her ranch. In later years, Creswell became hardened and reclusive, showing only her rough exterior. At the end, people were surprised by how she lived inside her home, which was described as "feminine" and "neat as a pin."

(OPPOSITE PAGE, ABOVE) Creswell, third from the right, posed with fellow employees in front of the Winslow Harvey House sometime after her arrival in Arizona in 1918. Like most of the Harvey Girls, Creswell soon found a husband.

BOTH NAVAJO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

(OPPOSITE PAGE, BELOW) Remnants of Creswell's ranch house sit on a lonely, windswept plain near Winslow.

RICHARD MAACK

Cecil Creswell

father, ever since the trading post days in Tuba City. She gave him all her valuables to keep for her, and when she was in town she would go see him, and they'd have long talks. Cecil knew what was coming long before it happened, and she told my father what would take place."

By this time, Cecil was dressing like a man and doing a man's work.

"She hired out to local ranchers as a working cowboy, and she earned her wages. She could out ride and out rope any cowboy. But it's a rough old life to be a cowboy, and she'd have to work in all kinds of weather just to earn grub money," said Bailey.

Trying to survive on her little ranch, the 120-pound woman performed backbreaking work. With her own hands, she built her house, a chicken coop, a 40-foot-long sandstone wall with stones so heavy that two men could hardly lift them.

Cecil also built a 100- by 200-foot corral out of eight-foot-tall mesquite limbs wired together. Then, using just a pick and shovel on the stony ground, she dug a large water catchment basin, or tank, to water her livestock. A hand-dug well beside her home failed to reach water.

"She was an unbelievable woman," said former Deputy Sheriff Jim Brisendine, who was present when Cecil died and who now lives in Fruitland Park, Florida.

"Her real love was horses," Brisendine said in an account of Cecil's life and death deposited in the Old Trails Museum.

"She would go up in the mountains in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest and catch wild mustangs and break them to ride. She broke wild horses the best cowboys in the country would shy away from," Brisendine said.

"Cecil rode a huge black stallion that she had trapped, broke gentle, and kept for her own. She always rode like a champion and treated her horse like it was a child," he said.

She also was rustling cattle, a fact that was common knowledge and the source of endless talk in cowboy bars.

But, being a woman, Cecil did her rustling a little bit differently than a man.

Needing a bull for her cows, she rustled Tombo Kaufman's big light-colored bull and herded it to her ranch. There she roped and threw the 800-pound animal, marking it with her Rafter 3 brand. Then she took a bottle of red Henna hair dye and proceeded to dye the hide of the entire bull a dark reddish brown that resembled the color of a Hereford.

Kaufman, for a full year, rode past Creswell's ranch — and his bull — and never recognized it.

She also stole Fred Stubblefield's fishing boat, which he had tied up in Clear Creek. Using a lariat and her horse, Cecil dragged the boat overland to her ranch and used it as a cattle watering trough. Stubblefield, a Winslow resident, never found out who stole his boat until Cecil's death.

"Cecil had no one to speak up for her. I'll grant you that she was a renegade and troublemaker, but she was a survivor and everything she did was done to survive," said Mary May Bailey.

"Her whole life after she became a widow was based on survival. No woman would go out on the range and work like a cowboy unless she had to. Think about it. Here was a woman who was very rebellious because she was never able to earn a good living like she did as a Harvey Girl."

Some ranchers overlooked Cecil's rustling of a few head here and there because they knew she was living in poverty.

Other ranchers, led by Thompson, complained repeatedly to authorities about Cecil's depredations. The law, records show, was reluctant to crack down on a woman. Cecil was warned, hauled before a judge, lectured, and put on probation time after time.

Most people in the area knew she was stealing in order to eat. At least four retired cowboys told me that there wasn't a jackrabbit alive for miles around Cecil's spread because she shot them all for food.

Someone — Winslow rumor said it was the late Ben Pearson, Navajo County sheriff — would take boxes full of groceries and supplies to Cecil's house knowing she was almost starving and too proud to ask for help.

But fate and tragedy were gathering about Cecil like circling vultures.

She was arrested in 1949 and placed under a peace bond for shooting at the late Sam Duran, a cowboy working on the Kaufman Ranch. Then in July of 1952, she was charged with fence cutting and trespassing and fined $300. In August of the same year, she was charged with cruelty to animals for shooting a bull owned by Thompson. She was fined $150 and given a suspended jail sentence.

In 1954, after an 18-month investigation by the Livestock Sanitary Board, Cecil, now 62 and her hair completely white, was accused of rustling.

However, the charge was kept secret by sheriff's deputies until Cecil could be lured to Winslow on a pretext.

While she was in town, deputies went out to her home and confiscated all her guns. But one, her favorite .30-30, remained hidden away.

The next day, Sheriff Pearson and Deputy Brisendine, Livestock Sanitary Board inspectors, and a number of local ranchers arrived at Cecil's place.

"I had never been in Cecil's home before," said Brisendine, "and was really impressed with how well it had been kept. The room was as clean and neat as a pin. The walls . . . were covered with pictures she had painted. They looked as though they had been painted by a professional artist. She had painted landscapes, desert scenes, and pictures of wildlife that were absolutely fantastic."

(ABOVE) *Creswell rode a big black stallion she called Pig. She had caught and broken the wild horse herself, and folks said she treated it "like a child."*

(OPPOSITE PAGE, ABOVE) *Local stock inspectors examine a calf Creswell had marked with her Bar 3 Bar brand. Previously the calf bore the Four Dart brand registered to another rancher. Today both of the Creswell brands, Bar 3 Bar and Rafter 3, are registered to other ranchers, and they can be spotted on cattle roaming the range near Winslow and Holbrook.*

NAVAJO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

(OPPOSITE PAGE, BELOW) *With no money to buy supplies, Creswell had to travel great distances to find the materials to build her corral fence. That it is still standing testifies to the quality of her workmanship.*

RICHARD MAACK

Cecil slept in the kitchen. The room containing her paintings was "very feminine and furnished with fairly new and good blond [colored] furniture." She had used a hot iron to carefully burn in her Rafter 3 brand on each piece of furniture.

Evidence of Cecil's rustling was irrefutable. Twenty-one head of stolen cattle and one stolen horse were found on her ranch. They came from five different ranches. Also found were the remains of 10 butchered cows.

Pearson told Cecil she was under arrest for rustling.

Brisendine said, "I was leaning against the fence when she came over and asked, 'Jim, would it be all right if I walked up to the house and used the bathroom?'"

Brisendine gave her permission, and "she had no sooner left . . . when it dawned on me that she had no bathroom in her house. A bunch of men can't follow a woman to the rest room; [and] we did not bring a matron [a woman deputy] along with us. It was one of the biggest mistakes we could have made.

"I was beginning to feel a little nervous, not knowing what was going through her mind. I was expecting to hear the crack of her .30-30 carbine any second, and from that distance she could pick us off one at a time."

Then the men heard the muffled shot of a rifle. "I thought to myself, 'This is it. We will have to shoot her, or she will shoot us,'" said Brisendine.

The men waited for a few minutes then went to the front door, which was locked. They called out to Cecil several times without an answer, and Pearson decided to kick in the door.

"I was not eager to do this because we could be looking at the bad end of her .30-30 rifle when we got inside," Brisendine said.

But Cecil was dead. "She was kneeling on a chair that was near her bed like she had been praying. It was one of the most sickening sights that I had ever seen. An old woman that had worked like a dog all her life was now dead because we had failed to bring a matron with us when we came to the ranch," Brisendine said.

Cecil's suicide created a sensation in Winslow and a backlash of anger against the officers. There is still anger.

"I rode for the old Hashknife outfit for 40 years, and everyone — those who knew her and knew of her circumstances — said she should of been just left alone. She was just trying to live, to get by," Nelson Goldsberry, a retired Winslow cowboy, told me.

"The old-timers in Winslow were so outraged at Cecil's death that they threatened to kill the officers," said Goldsberry.

A search of Cecil's home disclosed a number of manuscripts of poetry and Western fiction written in longhand. There was no money found on Cecil's body or in the house. A bank book showed that her account had been emptied four years earlier.

There was not one item of women's clothing in the house. But under her bed were dozens of worn-out Levi's rolled up and wrapped with barbed wire.

Brisendine said there were no groceries in the house at all, not even a box of salt or pepper. The only food was a pot of beef — rustled beef — simmering on the back of the stove.

Postscript: Cecil's will left her ranch to a friend, lawyer Dewey McCauley of Winslow. Cecil's sister, Mrs. Ruth Moore, her only living relative, was located in Ogden, Kansas. Although the sisters had been estranged for 20 years, and Moore avowed to Brisendine that she had no love for Cecil, McCauley turned over Cecil's ranch to her in order to keep it in the family.

Moore promptly sold it to John Thompson, Cecil Creswell's hated enemy. ✪

Bob Thomas, a longtime Arizona journalist, says that if Cecil Creswell had lived in the 1880s, she would have been enshrined in Old West lore with the likes of Belle Starr and Calamity Jane. He also wrote the "Along the Way" column in this issue.