

Way We Were

2017

The Osguthorpes and 6000 Dead Sheep

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Does anyone remember the Utah legend from 1968 about the thousands of sheep that mysteriously died in Utah's western Skull Valley? It was Park City's own D.A. "Doc" Osguthorpe who tested the carcasses and uncovered the culprit.

As a special consultant to the Utah Department of Agriculture, Osguthorpe was tasked by Governor Calvin Rampton to investigate the sheep deaths. Doc flew in on his own private plane and tested the carcasses. He eventually determined that the sheep had been poisoned by nerve gas.

The valley was not far from the US Army's Dugway Proving Grounds, where chemical agent testing was known to occur. Though the military denied any involvement, Doc stuck to his guns and forced them to admit their culpability. Through his stubbornness, he helped get judgments for the ranchers to compensate their losses.

According to his *New York Times* obituary, his investigation and proof that nerve gas killed the 6,000 sheep was lauded as a turning point in the early efforts of the environmental movement. Inadvertently, his involvement and eventual Congressional testimony influenced President Nixon to call a halt to the chemical weapons testing program.

Throughout his life, Doc focused on conservation efforts. He served on the Weber River Water Rights Commission for twenty-seven years. His son, Steve, likewise worked toward conservation and served as Summit County's representative on the Weber Basin Water Conservancy Board for sixteen years.

Doc received numerous awards for his efforts. In 2004, the Utah Association of Conservation Districts declared him Forest Landowner of the Year. In 2005, he received the Utah Farm Bureau Federation Farm Stewardship Award and he was a Leopold Conservation Award finalist in 2007. Colorado State University's alumni association presented him their Distinguished Alumni Award in 1999.

He believed that Park City would someday become as famous for outdoor recreation as Estes Park, which he was familiar with from veterinary study at CSU. He was quoted many times throughout the paper as wanting to keep his land as open space for farming and recreation.

His son Steve agreed. Though the family continues to ranch and farm throughout Utah, most of their land in Summit County has been sold for public convenience or is preserved as restricted open space.

Park City was fortunate to be able to purchase the McPolin Osguthorpe farm when UDOT exercised eminent domain and acquired a large swath of the farm to widen SR-224 in 1990. The Osguthorpes, concluding that dairy farming in that location was no longer feasible, agreed to sell the remained of the farm, considerable water rights, and the PC hill to the city.

The Osguthorpe family continues to reside in Park City, having relocated just up White Pine Canyon to a new home from which they continue to enjoy watching residents and guests hike and cross-country ski on their old land, now forever preserved.



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Credit: Park City Historical Society and Museum, Himes-Buck Digital Collection

Caption: Thanks to the lifelong preservation efforts of the Osguthorpe family, the McPolin farm remains public open space.