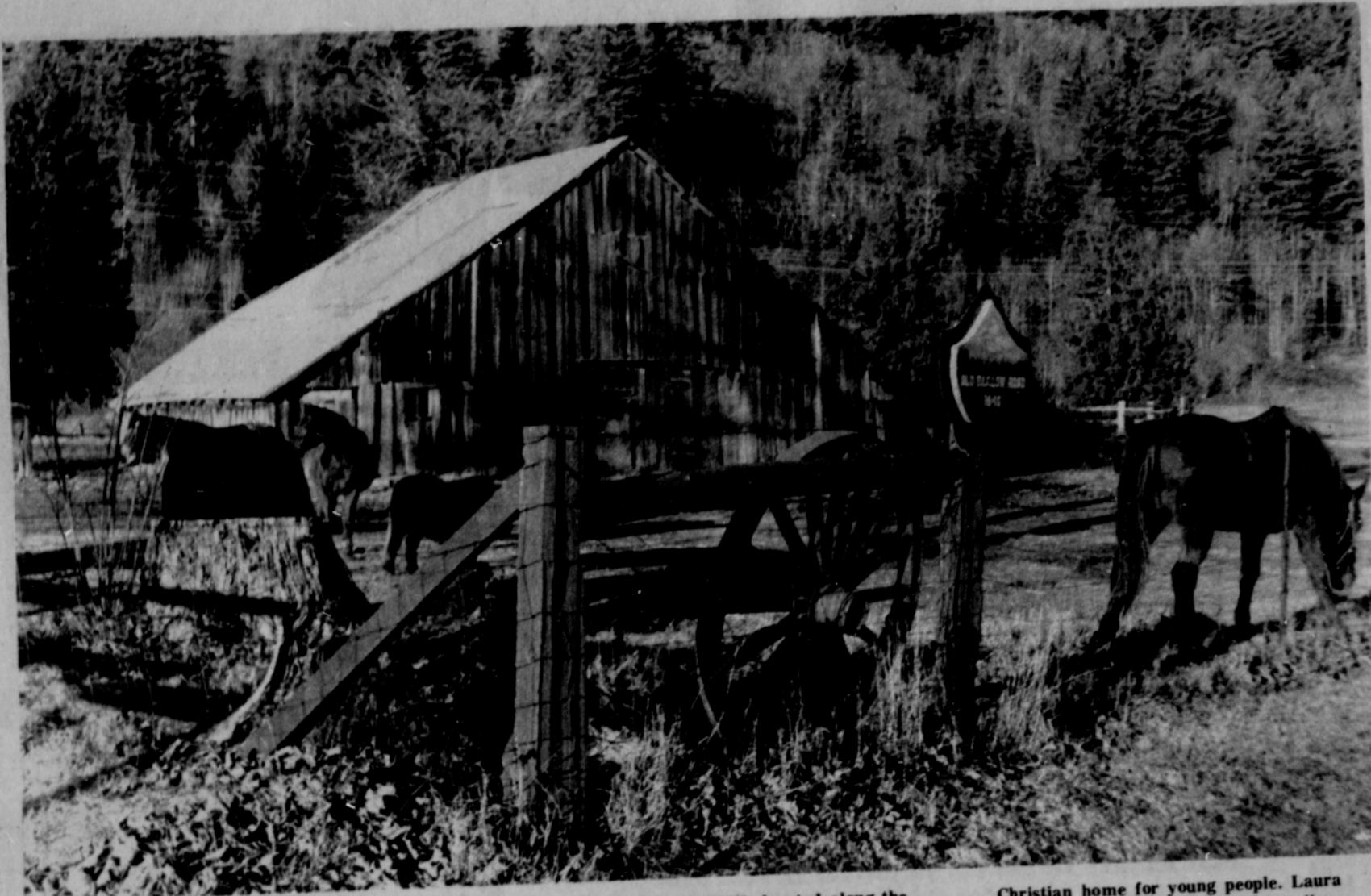




THE COOKE RANCH, located along the Old Barlow Road, is now the site of a

Christian home for young people. Laura Cooke calls it a "spiritual greenhouse."

The soul-searchers

Cookes take on second 'family'

"Some people think we're crazy to be doing something like this," said 73-year-old Laura Cooke as she sat in the living room of the Cooke Ranch near Marmot.

After raising six children of their own, she and her husband, Ernest, 74, have opened their home to young people who are seeking to learn more about the Christian faith.

The Cookes inherited the 200-acre ranch about 15 years ago and started taking young people, who have ranged from the ages of 16 to 37-years-old, about a year and a half ago. Approximately 15 young people have lived with them during that time.

Right now five people live with the couple, in an atmosphere Mrs. Cooke describes as "sort of a spiritual greenhouse."

"After coming out of other cultures, it takes awhile to get

established in the Christian faith," she said of those who have found their home there.

Nancy Keller, 25, said she came to the ranch looking for a sure foundation in the Christian faith.

"I had been searching, like most young people, for the truth."

She claims she has found that truth at the ranch.

"I wanted to go all the way in my commitment with the Lord Jesus," she said. "I don't think I could do it out in the world. Too many things pull me away."

Nancy nodded to the Cookes and added, "We're a family and you're our mother and father."

Her dream was to have a large family and Nancy said the ranch has provided her with that.

Women living at the ranch help Mrs. Cooke with kitchen

and household chores — not a small task when there are 30 people for dinner like there were on Christmas day.

The men help with ranch work. The Cookes board horses and rent horses for riding to supplement the income.

The ranch also receives financial support from the Mountain Fellowship, an independent Full Gospel Pentecostal church run by the Cookes.

The Mountain Fellowship has 10 a.m. services on Sundays and informal Sunday evening Bible studies at the Cooke's home.

There is a Bible study for women one day a week and Cooke is beginning a series of sermons on faith at the Wednesday night services. Those staying at the ranch help with the church work.

Mrs. Cooke said the get-

togethers of those on the ranch between church activities are "old fashioned prayer and share times."

The group goes through verses and prays together, said Nancy. "It's a real warm feeling to have us all together," she said.

Mrs. Cooke described the ranch as having a "Bible school atmosphere on an informal basis."

The Mountain Fellowship stresses "salvation through Christ" and a firm belief in the Bible or the word of God," said Cooke. He also said the church "encourages people to seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit."

Those who come to the ranch have varied backgrounds, noted Nancy.

Some have had college education; others haven't. Some come from as far away as Kentucky or California; others are native

Oregonians.

Most have been into either drugs or alcohol before their conversion to Christianity and coming to the ranch.

"Some of these young people dropped former habits before they came," Mrs. Cooke said.

Nancy said she gave her "heart to the Lord on a Friday" and "the next day didn't want a cigarette."

She was heading to Hawaii at one time but changed those plans upon finding out that an operation was needed for her leg. She eventually ended up at the ranch.

"God knows how to work with us in different ways," Nancy said.

Residents Joe Farrell and John French met while French was hitchhiking in Canada. Both ended up sharing a house on Lolo Pass Road. Farrell came to the ranch first and French ended up there sometime later.

Nancy first met another ranch resident, Mary McCann, when she was taking Mary to a doctor appointment at the request of a friend. During that trip their car was hit by a logging truck but they "miraculously" came out of the wreck with only minor injuries. Several months later they met again at the ranch.

"Our favorite expression is that it's a small world," Mrs. Cooke said and smiled.

All agreed that Christian training, or discipline, is one of the keys to life at the ranch.

"Some find the discipline too strict," laughed Mrs. Cooke.

Farrell cited a verse from Hebrews 5:8 as a description of what he has learned during his stay. That verse says, "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered."

"As soon as we accept Christ, we become a new creature. But we still have to learn

obedience," Farrell said. "Discipline is merely tilling the ground of my heart so the seed of Christ can grow up in me."

French said he "had to come to a place where I could find out what God could offer me."

He added, "We need authority" and quoted Christ's words, "If you love me you'll keep my commandments."

Nancy said she has "learned to be submissive" at the ranch. Cooke likened the training at the ranch to training a horse.

A horse, he said, isn't good for anything until it is trained and its self will has been submitted to authority.

Nancy admitted that old friends sometimes don't understand why she stays at the ranch and the commitment she has made to God.

But she added that she doesn't believe her beliefs can be forced upon anyone else. Cooke, an ordained minister,

has never used the title of "reverend." Being a minister was an avocation during the 22 years he drove a truck for the Sylvan Brick Company. During that time he and his wife were active in the West Hills Full Gospel Fellowship on SW Canyon Lane in West Slope.

Mrs. Cooke said the couple have long been interested in youth work.

"But without the power of the Holy Spirit, I could not deal with the young people," she sighed.

Cooke said he received a prophecy before the couple opened their home to youth that the "Lord said He had something so big that we'd never get out of it."

Mrs. Cooke said their fellowship is small, but they are waiting "on the Lord's timing" concerning growth.

"Evidently the Lord thinks it's not time to retire," she added.

Story/photos

by Sue Lafky

UPPER LEFT: Sign identifies the ranch, located on Marmot Road. MIDDLE: Nancy Keller stands by small lake on ranch where she was baptized in November. LOWER LEFT: Ernest Cooke, Joe Farrell, John French and Nancy view landscape of 200-acre ranch



BELOW: COOKE is a retired truck driver who now serves as pastor for the Mountain Fellowship, a Full Gospel Church located near the ranch. LEFT: A group at the ranch gathers for an informal Bible study. BOTTOM: Laura Cooke and friend.

