

The Superstition Mountain highlands have produced some interesting stories about Arizona pioneers. One such pioneer was William George Knight.

Knight was born in Carpella, Cornwall, England on November 18, 1875. He arrived in America in 1882. The first home Knight remembered as a child in America was the Silver King Mine, four miles north of modern-day Superior.

Billy Knight, as he was known to his friends, learned about livestock working with Mexican woodcutters around the Silver King Mine and working for Gene Middleton, who owned and operated the Silver King Livery Stable.

Knight found his way to the Reavis Ranch in 1892 with a group of friends. John J. Fraser, who ran the ranch, took a liking to the 17-year-old and he never returned to the Silver King Mine. For the next twenty-three years he lived on the Reavis Ranch and learned the cattle business and became ranch foreman for Fraser.

A newspaper article dated October 2, 1897, reported that Knight suffered from severe rheumatism even as a youth. This young man was cured from the very haunting disease by rigors of ranch life, the outdoors and determination. Billy Knight became a loyal friend of John J. Fraser for this opportunity.

During those years, Knight met the old "Hermit of Superstition Mountain" on the trail many times. He told stories about old man Elisha Reavis, the "hermit".

One story that created a lot of interest was the story about Reavis and the bear. According to Knight, Reavis was quite a hunter and a sure shot with his 45-70 Winchester repeating rifle. While riding through the timber south of his dugout, Reavis came upon a sow bear. The bear refused to give way to Reavis and his burro.

Reavis jacked a round into the chamber of his Winchester and pulled the trigger. The primer popped and the bullet went a short distance down the barrel of his rifle. The sow bear then took a look at Reavis and with a grin on her face casually walked off into the brush.

Another story Billy Knight like to tell about old man Reavis was the time in 1881 when ten heavily armed Apaches camped across the creek from his dugout planning to kill him. They respected his ability with a rifle and decided to wait him out.

Old man Reavis turned the tables on the Apaches by stripping off his clothes and, in the nude, with a flaming red beard and two knives, he charged the Apache camp screaming and swinging his knives wildly. The Apaches saddled up and rode off, never to molest old man Reavis again. Reavis' demeanor that day convinced the Apaches he was insane, and Apaches believed they should never bother a crazy person.

By the turn of the 20th century, William George "Billy" Knight, though only 25 years old, had created quite a reputation as a cowboy in the Superstition Mountains. But his life changed forever when he met Eunice Ann Riggs.

Knight's future wife came to the Reavis Ranch to visit her aunt, Edith May Clemans and remained in Arizona, teaching school in Mesa. Eunice and Billy were married in St. Marys, West Virginia, on December 9, 1913. He brought his bride back to the Reavis Ranch on horseback in January, 1914.

When John J. Fraser sold the Reavis Ranch to W.J. Clemans in 1909, Billy Knight remained on as foreman, with the privilege to run some of his own cattle. When the sale occurred, there was no deed to the property. Both Fraser and Knight were aliens and could not homestead public land in the United States, so Knight's wife Eunice homesteaded the Reavis for Clemans and acquired a deed to the property in 1919.

It was about this time that Dick Trevathan and old Herman Petrasch rebuilt the interior of the old log house. They laid a wooden floor and put up heavy wallpaper. The kitchen still had a dirt floor with a cook stove, cupboard and water bench at one end.

Knight had cowboied on the Reavis since 1892, and was very familiar with the range. He worked with top hands such as William Harding Martin Sr., Eas Brown, Frosty Cullom, Jack Martin, old Esubio Lopez, Gabriel Robles and Chino Celaya. All of these men could take a packhorse and work for weeks on the open range caring for cattle. They were real cowboys.

Knight told stories about working 6,000 head of mother cows on the Reavis range. He talked about farming in the Reavis Valley and told stories about how rough and brushy the Reavis Range was. He said it would challenge the best cowboys in the Southwest. He often said that one good cow dog was better than a half-a-dozen cowboys working cattle in the brush.

When Knight left the Reavis in 1915, eventually moving to Florence, he placed the ranch in the hands of another top hand, William Harding Martin Sr.

Knight formed another partnership with John J. Fraser and started a large farming and cattle operation near Florence. Knight and his wife raised a fine family and were highly respected citizens in the tri-city area of Florence, Coolidge and Casa Grande. He was an active member of his community and was the past Master Mason of Gila Valley Lodge #9.

William George Knight died of viral pneumonia in Casa Grande on April 28, 1956 at the age of 81. He was buried in the Cole and Maude Cemetery east of town. The "Emigrant Knight of Cornwall" made quite an impact on the history of the Superstition Mountain area and his community.

Stories of the old Upper Fraser Ranch (Reavis Ranch) will continue for decades because of Eunice Riggs Knight's dedication to recording the adventures and stories of living on the Reavis at the turn of the century.

*Note: Credit must be given to Ann Rose Knight for much of the information in this story.*



The Reavis Ranchhouse, circa 1920



William George Knight,



Cowboys on the Reavis during the winter

The "Hermit of Superstition Mountain," Elisha Reavis

