

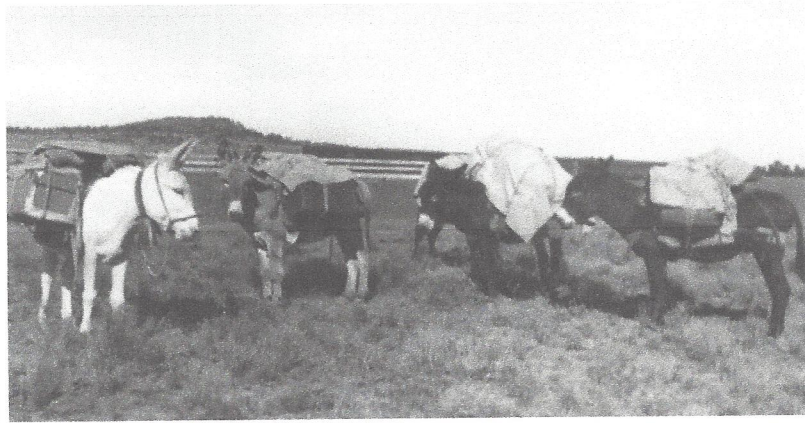
#### Where Have all the Sheep Gone?

The AGWA has a little information about another Pouquette, Joseph's brother Leon. Mrs. Edith Pouquette wrote the author that Leon and Joseph married two sisters. Leon married Amilie. Leon and Amilie had two children, Yvonne and Felix. Yvonne married Pete Espil, another sheep rancher. Leon ran an outfit with John Aleman called the Aleman Pouquette Sheep Company. When Leon died in 1942, John Aleman ran the five thousand sheep outfit with Felix helping during school holidays and summer vacations. A letter to the Wool Growers Association written November 19, 1945, requested that Felix be discharged from active service as he was needed to take over the sheep business since John was in bad health. It is unknown whether Felix was discharged. Edith Pouquette remembered when she and Felix played as children, but doesn't remember him working for Mr. Aleman.

#### **The Basque**

Many nationalities participated in the sheep industry, but none more so than the Basque, who arrived both from the area of the Spanish and French Pyrenees. While Basque herders were probably in the state from the 1860s to the 1890s, most were probably herders for other sheepmen. During the 1890s, Basque names begin to appear in the literature, and many of the Basque families in the state today can trace their families arrival beginning in the late 1880s. The Basque (from an adjacent area of Spain and France) have been part of the Phoenix metropolitan landscape for the past hundred years and further back in time in the state. "Not all woolgrowers are Basque, but Western

Statehood to the Present: Families' Stories



Pouquette's donkeys loaded before heading out on the trail. Tents were draped over the boxes and then other protective shielding added. *Photograph courtesy of Edith Pouquette.*

woolgrowers could not operate apart from the skill and sheep savvy of Spanish and Basque shepherds."<sup>134</sup> And, in fact it has been recognized by some historians that *Arizona* is a Basque word. It is widely believed that *Arizona* is derived from two Basque words meaning the "good oaks."<sup>135</sup>

The Basque came to the Americas, the United States, and Arizona for many reasons. Up until the civil wars in the 1800s, the Basque were isolated from the politics of either France or Spain. With the wars, the Basque began to be inducted into the military. Rather than serve, many

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134 Ruth Nourse, "First Lady of Sheep-Growing Clan Thinks and Cooks in Two Languages," *The Arizona Farmer-Ranchman* (October 19, 1968), 36.

135 Jim Turner, "How Arizona did NOT Get its Name," Arizona Historical Society. Archived from the original on August 1, 2007. Retrieved May 15, 2016. Donald Garate, "Arizona, a twentieth-century myth," *Journal of Arizona History* 46(2), (2005): 161-184

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of them emigrated or deserted. Some Basque left after serving. Lack of tillable land, a drought in the first part of the 1900s, overpopulation, and poverty are all functions of a small land area, and as families grew, the eldest son was the only one to inherit the land, forcing younger brothers to migrate. They first immigrated to South America, taking a variety of jobs not always associated with sheep. With news of California's gold rush, many decided to make their fortunes in the American West. Many from Argentina left for California by the way of ships departing from the west coast of South America. Those who left Europe for the United States had to sail by ship around the tip of South America to reach California. Unfortunately, they were discriminated against in the mines, and many found it easier to become shepherds who sold mutton to the miners.<sup>136</sup>

Two other reasons brought different ethnic groups to the United States: the Homestead Act of 1862 and the Desert Land Act of 1877. These offered immigrants the prospects of land and prosperity. The Homestead Act of 1862 encouraged individuals, families, and immigrants who intended to be naturalized to move westward and claim 160 acres of public domain. Within five years, improvements had to have been made, and they had to live on the land. If both criteria were met, title was given to the land. The Desert Land Act allowed 360 acres to be purchased at twenty-five cents an acre. It was felt that given the arid conditions in

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136 William Douglas and Jon Bilbao, *Amerikanuak: Basque in the New World* (Reno, Nevada: University of Nevada Press, 1976), 201-212.

the West, the 160 acres of the Homestead Act was too small for an individual or family to make a living. The land had to be irrigated within three years. Many of the sheepmen that were researched used one or both of these to acquire land in the United States.

Before the continental railroad was finished in 1869, the Basque arrived in the American West by way of South America. Preliminary research showed more information has been found concerning those who arrived in the United States via New York. Immigrants faced many challenges, such as crossing the ocean as travel time depended on weather conditions, the process of immigration—health checks being one of the biggest—and a new language. While many Basque spoke their own language and either French or Spanish, or both, English was foreign to them. Some Basque never made it to the West as they were tired of traveling by the time that they arrived in New York. Today, a large population of Basque calls the Brooklyn area home.

When a Basque arrived, he sometimes was met by an employee from the Santa Lucia Hotel shouting in Basque, "Are there any Basque?"<sup>137</sup> Those Basque would then be taken to the hotel and would receive help in making their preparations to move westward. Those who spoke no English or only a word or two would have instructions pinned on their clothes for conductors to help them to move along the rail line from train to train to get to their final destinations. Some of the Basque families interviewed

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137 Ibid.

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stated that their forefathers only knew a word or two of English, usually food related. They could say "hamburger" or "ham and eggs," and that would be what they ate for the entire trip across the country! One family stated that their father never ate hamburger again! One Basque was unable to eat the whole trip across as he did not have a tie, a requirement to eat in the dining car on the train. He could not make himself understood so he went without. The men came one or two at a time with empty pockets and hope within their hearts, seeking a new beginning in new land far from all they knew!

#### Jean Pierre "Pete" Espil

One of the earliest Basque to arrive in Arizona after spending seven years in California was Jean Pierre "Pete" Espil. Many Basque would work for Pete during the years and get their start in the sheep business because of him. Like other Basque, Pete left his home in France with his cousin, Martin, as the prospects were not good for either one of them. Pete had been born in Bagnères-de-Bigorre, Hautes Pyrenees, France, in 1870. Neither one was the oldest, so they would not inherit the family farmstead. The family told the author that their grandfather, Pete, never knew his correct age. He may have been eight, ten, or twelve when he and Martin stowed away on a ship heading to New Orleans, a logical place to arrive in the United States since there would be other French speakers. (Another story says the two worked their way across the ocean on a cargo ship.) They traveled to Los Angeles by train and then took a stagecoach to Sacramento. The