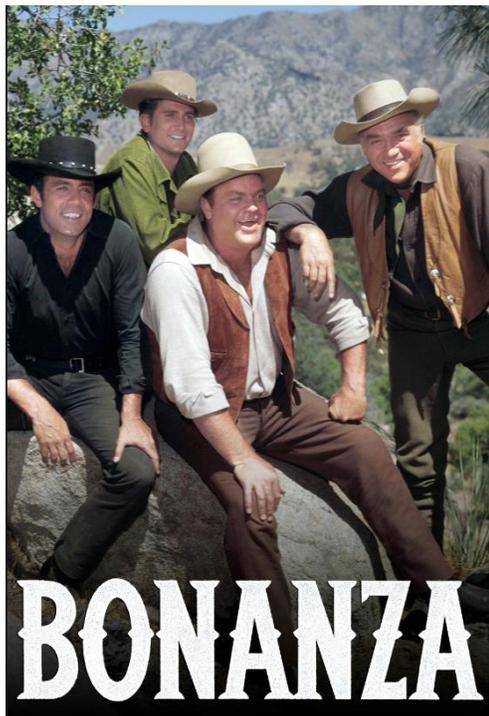


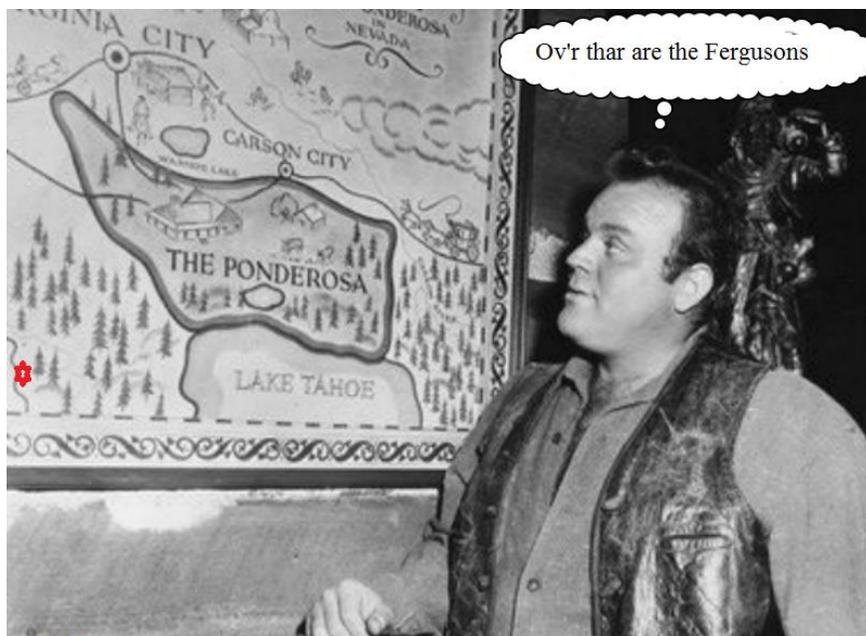
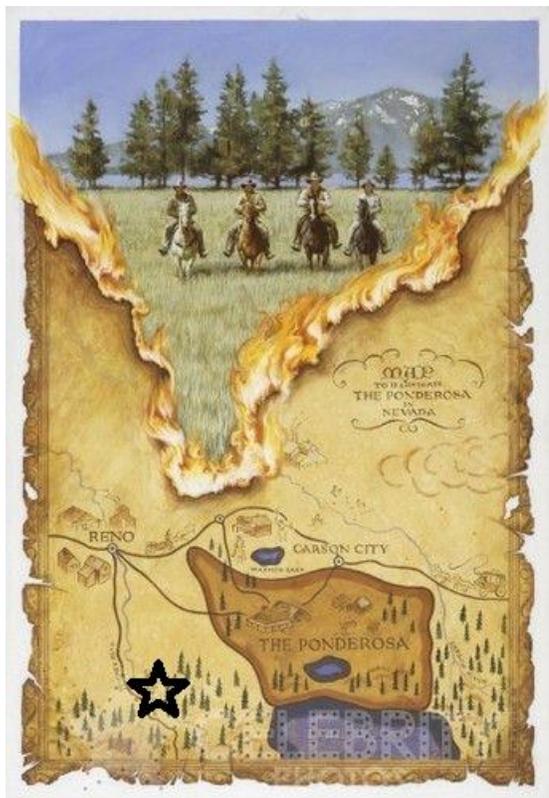
# My Ponderosa Fergusons

By SVP Eric Ferguson email: knight@fastmail.fm



While growing up in the 1960's, often staying with my Ferguson grandparents waiting for Mom to pick me up, I would watch Bonanza on TV on Sunday evenings. It was sort of my bonding time with my grandparents sitting around on the sofa, watching an episode of the Cartwrights; Ben, Joe, Adam, and Hoss. Bonanza is still is one of my favorite shows.

Nearly 50 years later I would find in amazement that my Ferguson ancestral cousins actually lived in the Ponderosa area just north of Lake Tahoe and near the Sierra Mountains. They lived in the same time era in real life, as what the fictional TV show portrayed, the 1800s Wild West days.



The star represents where RP Ferguson approximate location of his home compared to the fictional Bonanza TV show map would appear. For Bonanza fans trivia, the producers put the map in the wrong direction. On TV the Ponderosa's correct way on the map should be west of Lake Tahoe direction, not North. In reality California and Nevada is west and east, not north and south.

They were the Robert Pierce & Elizabeth Ferguson family who moved to the Truckee /Reno area near the California and Nevada border. They came a long ways from Andes, New York in about 1870 from a Scottish ancestry. In those days, Truckee was a wild town as much known as the infamous Tombstone Arizona shootouts, much in the same ways you would see on western TV shows. In the Bonanza show and the real life events, the Chinese were underpaid immigrants there to work on railroad projects.

Robert P Ferguson was a veteran of the U.S. Civil War. He served in the 144<sup>th</sup> New York Infantry Regiment from 1862 to 1865. He was discharged for a disability. His brother John D Ferguson also served with him during those years and after the war both of them came to Truckee Nevada. Robert became a well-regarded man of the community, a member of the masonic lodge, and a part owner of a shingling mill. He had a wonderful wife and 4 children. The local newspaper would often record his where-abouts as someone of importance.

Unfortunately, fate would have its day just like an episode of Bonanza. On March 23, 1881, Robert P Ferguson would lose his life to drowning in the river. Recorded in the Reno newspapers is his drowning event and his 11-year-old son accounts, in which RP Ferguson attempted to save a man who fell into the river, but both would lose their life. David Ferguson at 11 years old and his brother make a daring attempt to rescue his father going down the river almost going over a dam. By reading the newspaper accounts, it was a heart-breaking day for the Fergusons. After this tragic accident, Elizabeth and her young family moved to eastern Nebraska.

It is an interesting account of RP Ferguson and even for those who loved the Bonanza show, as the character of Hoss is ended when the actor Don Blocker dies in real life in 1972. Bonanza would not be the same. In Bonanza: The Next Generation (1988), it was mentioned Hoss



drowned trying to save another man's life. Coincidence? Well RP Ferguson died in 1881, and on Hoss's grave marker his death is 1881! It makes you wonder if the writers of Bonanza were getting notes from the local historical society or reading up on the Fergusons and newspapers archives.



**John D Ferguson pictured above, brother of Robert Ferguson, went heartbroken back home to Andes NY after his brothers death but continued a successful journey as a merchant in Delhi, NY and a respected man of the community.**

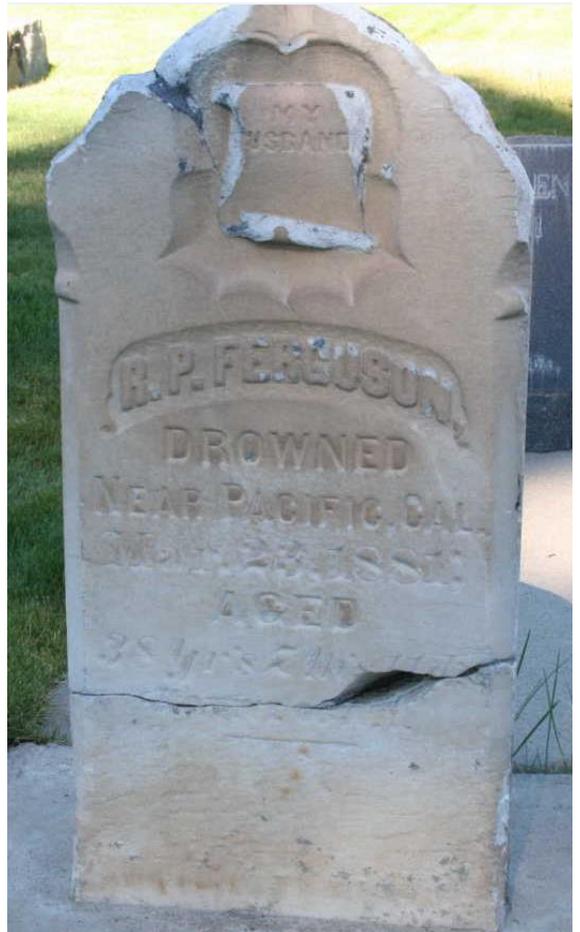
**(Right) the tombstone of R.P. Ferguson in Truckee California, where it says in the heartbreaking tone "My Husband ... Drowned".**

Newspaper account

Reno Evening Gazette, March 24, 1881

"Greater Love Hath no man Than This, That He Lay Down His Life for a Friend"

The sad news announced in yesterday's Gazette that R.P. Ferguson had lost his life in the vain attempt to save a man who had accidentally fallen into the river is confirmed this morning. Mr. Ferguson was owner, with J.S. Thompson, of Nevada City, of the Pacific Shingle Mill at Camp 16, two miles above Boca. The mill is run by waterpower and a dam crosses just below the mill, to form a pond, which catches the shingle blocks as the float down the river. Mr. Ferguson had hired a stranger named Frank Childs to help him make some repairs on the dam, and yesterday afternoon, about 3 o'clock, Childs fell into the river. To rescue him Ferguson jumped in immediately after and both were drowned. Whether the cold water gave him a cramp or whether Childs seized him and dragged him to the bottom is not known. While he was struggling in the water, his little boy saw him and plunged in to help him, but he was taken out safely. A man was sent to Tahoe this morning to shut the water off at the dam and let the river run down, so the bodies can be recovered. Mr. Ferguson was a New Yorker about 42 years of age. He leaves a wife and four children, the eldest aged about 11 years. he has been on the river ever since the railroad was built and has done a large business. He was a man of very generous nature and habits, and had a great many warm friends. The manner of his death certainly shows a brave and tender heart. To spring to the relief of a drowning fellow man, in a swift and dangerous stream like the Truckee, shows the stuff of which he was made. Mr. Ferguson was a member of the Masonic Lodge and Chapter at Truckee.



**(Left) Eric Ferguson at the tombstone of R.P. Ferguson in Truckee California, with the much assistance from the Truckee Donner Historical Society President, Chaun L. Owens-Mortier in Sept 2016 after Eric visited the Pleasanton CA Scottish games.**

**(Right) Eric respectfully decorates his ancestral cousin's grave. Who is to say a long time before someone made tribute.**



# The Fergusons on Bonanza

By SVP Eric Ferguson email: knight@fastmail.fm

After weighing in on seeing my Fergusons having a coincidence of being in Ponderosa territory, I pondered to find the episodes that had Fergusons in it.

In an episode Something Hurt, Something Wild had Fergusons in them both as characters and an actor named Jed Ferguson. It aired 11 Sept 1966. The story line goes as found on IMBD.com website:

## Storyline

“Laurie Ferguson, daughter of a friend and neighboring landowner to The Ponderosa, is home after years of attending school in the East. First, she accuses Little Joe of taking liberties, causing trouble between the Fergusons and the Cartwrights. Two days later, Laurie similarly accuses one of her father's best ranch hands, Brett, and vanquishes him from the property. Either normal young men are suddenly acting like rakes or else there is something very, very wrong with Laurie Ferguson. *Written by LA-Lawyer*”

## Guest Stars

Lynn Loring (Laurie Ferguson), Lyle Bettger (Jed Ferguson), Ron Foster (Stark), Erik Holland (Cleve Ferguson), David Pritchard (Bret), Bruno Ve Sota (Sam - Bartender), Bruce MacFarlane (Will - Clerk).



Frank Ferguson



J R Ridley

Another frequent visitor to the western screens and Andy Griffith was actor Frank Ferguson. He played in the episode “The Fear Merchants” 1960 as J.R. Ridley.

Sources: Wikipedia  
movie-dude.co.uk  
Bonanza television show.