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Plains Edition



Spring's testimonial of color

Linda Jones of Benkelman, Neb., sent us this photo of daffodils blooming in her front yard. Thanks Linda for sharing your photo with our readers.

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A 1941 trail drive through western Nebraska

Told by Alex Lobner to his daughter, Garnet Storer, April 2005

Early on an April morning in 1941 a trail crew made up of Mike Neilson, Victor (Vic) Rice, Pete Fischer, Everett McCormick, Alex Lobner, Bill Connors, and Bill Fischer took off with about 600 cows, calves, and yearlings heading for the Sunny Slope Ranch, previously owned by Governor McKelvie, outside Valentine, Neb. Bill Fischer was the trail boss. Bill Connors was trail cook and drove a pickup with a shell-like cover over it. This was the chuck wagon. He laid down the tailgate and used that for his table. He had a kerosene stove and some type of oven because he was able to bake cakes while we were on the trail. He fixed lots of biscuits, beans, and canned food. Bill was a good cook and had learned the trade in the army. Everett McCormick drove a team of six horses that pulled a hay sled carrying cake to feed the cattle. There was a small pen on the back to carry the little calves that were born on the trail. The rolled up mattresses that the crew slept on were also on the hay sled. Pete Fischer was Bill's brother. Vic Rice and Mike Neilson were hired to help move the cattle.

Since Fischer's and Lobner's were close friends, Bill asked me to help on the cattle drive. In return, Bill Fischer sent his hired man with a tractor and planter to plant the corn for my dad, Herman Lobner, since I wouldn't be there to do it. This was my pay for helping with the cattle drive.

Bill Fischer and his brothers, Albert and Ernie, owned the cattle and needed to get them to the new ranch. Each cowboy had two of his own horses for the drive. My two horses were Dusty and Omaha. Dusty was a fast walker, so if the cattle strung out, Dusty and I took one side of the herd.

Early that morning in April, we left the Frank Barber place and headed north on the Keith/Garden County line road east of Lewellen. There were problems getting started. The cows would go fine, but the little calves would run back to where they had been and go under fences. We had to take some cows back



Alex Lobner at age 13 with the family's hired man, Paul Klingbell of Germany.

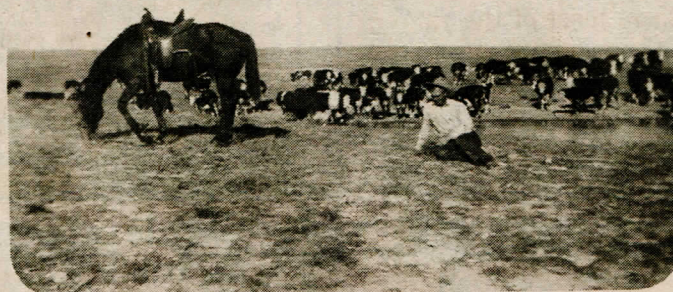
to get the calves to come with the herd. The extra horses followed the cows usually along the sides of the herd. Only about seven miles was accomplished that day.

That first night we stopped at the Valegot place east of Jake Huniger's. There were corrals, but no one lived on the place. We paired up the cattle for the night and bedded them down. The next morning we were up and ready to go at first light. The herd continued north to the George Schamel place and on to the main road now County Road 203. Following the road to the ranch owned by

Vernie Kemping, we arrived around noon. Here, we ran into a problem. The renter came along and got angry because we were on his land. Bill had to pay \$25 to noon there. We hurriedly ate and turned the herd east into the George Williams ranch (now owned by Conrad Lobner). Here we camped for the night, pairing up the herd, which was a nightly job. Virgil Valentine, who worked for Williams, had a deck of cards that we borrowed so we could while

away the evening playing cards. The family gave us the tattered deck of cards to take with us.

The next morning the cattle were pushed north-



A rare moment - a short-lived rest while checking cattle on the home ranch.

northeast to a ranch run by foreman Knight Lowe who also owned several hounds. Knight with his hounds was sitting around and talking when sixteen-year-old Pete Fischer started whining and howling. The hound dogs got into a terrible fight. Knight was pretty upset with Pete for that incident! It proved to be our excitement for that day and night.

Several evenings and nights, thunderstorms came up. If it looked like a possible storm was coming, we would try to find an east fence and bunch the cattle along the fence to keep them from drifting during the storm. Lightning flashed and streaked to the

ground; thunder crashed! It was scary! We were out in the storm on our horses watching the cattle. I would get off my horse and stand beside it during the storm letting the horse shield me from the weather. One night a rainstorm came up after we had crawled into



"bed." We slept on the thin mattresses in a row with a tarp thrown over us for a cover. It rained; the water collected on the top of the tarp between us and began to soak through. One by one, we abandoned our beds. Bill Connors was at the end and the water ran off him, so he was not bothered. When I jumped out, I stepped right on him!

If the rain continued during the day, we hunkered down in our slickers and pulled our hats down around our ears trying to keep most of the rain off. There was a period of about three days of steady rain. During that time we never took our boots off. If we removed the boots, we couldn't pull them back on.

If the weather was stormy, each of us took turns at night watch, which lasted about two hours. We slept in our clothes so it didn't take us long to get ready for our watches. I always had the first shift. When my time was up, I returned to camp and woke up Everett McCormick. Often I returned to the herd

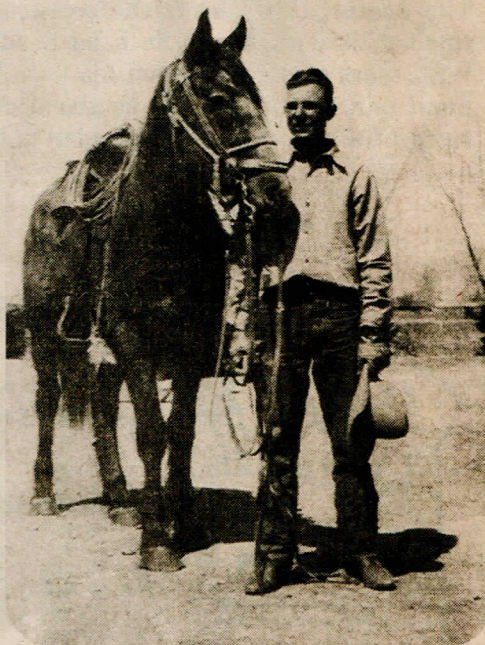
with Everett and rode around the cattle with him so it wasn't so lonely. Mike Neilson always got up very early, so he had the last watch until the herd was ready to leave in the morning. When the weather was nice, we bedded the cattle down and all of us could get some sleep.

We crossed through several ranches. I remember crossing the Herman Ranch and the Wolfinden Ranch. One night we stopped at another ranch owned by an older woman. She offered us the bunkhouse for the night as well as coffee and rolls. We were pretty cold so we snapped up that offer!

Bill Fischer always rode ahead and laid out the trail. He had to contact the ranchers whose land we were to cross. Sometimes the ranchers, themselves, rode across their ranch with us cowboys and the herd, or they sent a hired hand to ride with us. One rancher rode across his ranch with me. He told about raising Morgan horses. Someone's work stud got into his herd of Morgan horses. The two stallions fought. The rancher worried that his Morgan stallion might not survive the wounds received in the fight.

When we arrived at the South Loup River (a little creek) the cattle, hay sled, and pickup crossed with ease. However, when we reached the Middle Loup or North Loup (not sure which one), we had a terrible time finding a place where everything could get down to the water to cross. The banks were too steep for the hay sled and the pickup. After some diligent searching, a crossing was discovered and everything made it safely to the other side.

Soon we arrived at the railroad that ran through the Monahan Ranch and we crossed it east of Whitman, Nebraska. Bill Fischer headed into Mullen to replenish the supplies.



See Page 6

Alex Lobner was a true cowboy including the gear for working cattle on the trail drive. He also had some favorite horses like Satin pictured here.

A 1941 trail drive Continued from Page 5

One day Everett McCormick had an accident. He borrowed a knife from Vic Rice who had a habit of always sharpening his knife. Everett was trimming his horse's tail. He pulled down, the knife stuck; when it came loose, it slashed down, cutting a deep hole in his thigh. Bill Fischer took him to the doctor in Hyannis where clamps were used to close the wound. When he arrived in Valentine, he was to see the doctor and have the clamps removed. While in Hyannis, Bill replenished our supplies, which were running short.

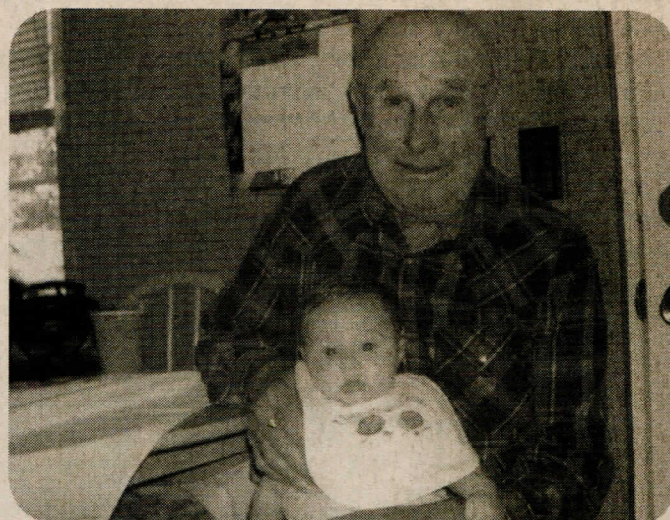
Another day I noticed first one cow and then another turned out and walked around a certain spot in the trail. Riding over I found two large rattlesnakes lying there. I grabbed my rope and beat them to death.

We passed the Kennedy Post Office and schoolhouse. The teacher and her students were out on the step watching us go by. I stayed by the step and visited with them as the cattle passed.

If the herd stopped early near any blowouts, I would search the blowouts for arrowheads WHEN I wasn't working. I only found a part of one arrowhead.

Finally, on the twentieth day of the drive, the herd arrived at the Sunny Slope Ranch on a Saturday with the loss of only one cow that had wandered off and had not been missed. Some rancher ended up with an extra cow in their spring round up!

Bill Fischer took us into Valentine for supper and bowling. While there, Everett, with me along for support, went to the doctor to get the clamps removed. The doctor didn't have the correct tool needed to remove the clamps, so he used needle nosed pliers. With tears streaming down his face, he squeezed my hand and I squeezed his as the doctor twisted and turned the clamps prying them out of his thigh.



Alex Lobner posing with great grandson, Trevor Storer in 2004.

Sunday, Bill took us to the Harms Ranch, neighbors to his new ranch. We visited quite awhile before returning to the Sunny Slope Ranch to rest. Monday, Chet Reich arrived with the bulls in his semi. Everett and I had planned to lead the horses back home; but since the semi and trailer were there, the horses were shipped back by truck.

Of these seven cowboys on that April cattle drive, only I am still living. I enjoyed the experience and camaraderie of my fellow cowboys. It was a pleasant enough trip, except during the thunderstorms. I enjoy talking about this trip to my children, grandchildren, and anyone who asks. There aren't too many left who can say they went on a real trail drive, braving storms, sleeping outside on the ground, and eating chuck wagon food. It was quite an experience!

WE'RE BACK UNDER THE TENT! FOR THE 66TH ANNUAL CONVENTION

Sandhills



cattle association

THURSDAY, MAY 26 • Valentine, Nebraska

All Activities at the Cherry County Fairgrounds • Registration Begins at 9:00 a.m. CDT

Featuring these Presentations: (Beginning at 10:00 a.m. CDT)

Competition & Opportunity in the Cow/Calf Business • Legal Issues Surrounding Alternative Income Enterprises • Using Goats for Weed Control • Drug Dog Demonstration • BQA Certification • Sandhills Cattle Trax Demo

Registration Fee Includes All Activities, 2 Meals & a Social Hour

TRADE SHOW OPENS AT 3:30 WITH OVER 70 EXHIBITORS • BENEFIT LIVE AUCTION AT 7:00

Pre-Register by Contacting the Office: 402-376-2310 or 1-800-658-0551 • www.sandhillscattle.com

SCA Members \$40/person Non-members \$55/person