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DEAN OF THE RANGE:
GEORGE EDWARD LEMMON, OPEN RANGE CATTLE RANCHING AND THE
DEVELOPMENT OF THE NORTHERN GREAT PLAINS

by

Nathan B. Sanderson

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: History

Under the Supervision of Professor Andrew R. Graybill

Lincoln, Nebraska

June, 2011

DEAN OF THE RANGE: GEORGE EDWARD LEMMON, OPEN RANGE CATTLE
RANCHING AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NORTHERN GREAT PLAINS

Nathan B. Sanderson, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2011

Advisor: Andrew R. Graybill

George Edward Lemmon (1857-1945) lived a life full of significant achievements and played an integral role in the growth and settlement of the northern Great Plains. A renowned cowboy and cattleman, Lemmon saddle-handled more cattle than any man who ever lived, bossed one of the nation's largest roundups, operated an 865,000-acre lease on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation and later became an inaugural member of the National Cowboy Hall of Fame. Part of his early success came as a result of trespassing—illegally grazing thousands of cattle—on the Great Sioux Reservation. Due to his unparalleled cattle-handling skills and reputation as one of the region's most important stockmen, Lemmon came to be known as the “Dean of the Range.” In later life he became a town builder, guiding the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad west across the Missouri River and founding several communities. From the 1880s to the 1920s, Lemmon was *the* central figure on the northern Great Plains and left his mark on the entire region. He was a juncture between two eras, one rooted in the nineteenth century, the other in the twentieth. He represents the meeting point between Indians and whites, between humans and the land, between cowboys and cattlemen and between the dusty days on a western cattle trail and the development of settlements and “civilization.” At the end of his life, the Great Plains—like Lemmon himself—was different from the start: not better, not worse, but distinctly changed.

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If not for my father-in-law, Chuck Anderson, I would not have written a dissertation about Ed Lemmon. Chuck and his wife Koreen ranch seven miles south of Lemmon, South Dakota, and their ancestors have been living in the northwest part of the state since just after the turn of the twentieth century. During his travels on sheep shearing crews and as a rancher and carpenter, Chuck has developed an uncanny knowledge of the countryside. He also has a keen interest in western history. More than ten years ago he started telling me about all of the things “Dad” Lemmon had done as a cowboy and cattleman, how important he was to the region. At the time I did not even consider writing about Lemmon, but a few years later when I began looking for a dissertation topic, Lemmon was suggested to me by another University of Nebraska-trained historian, Chuck Vollan, who had used Lemmon’s writings in his dissertation on the early years of Cheyenne, Wyoming. As I began researching the man, it became obvious that not only did he have a good story, Lemmon’s life and experiences offered new insight into the development of the northern Great Plains. Many thanks.

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Ed Texley of Hettinger, North Dakota, generously allowed me to borrow and copy his collection of Lemmon's original typed stories. He discovered them in about 1958, while playing in the Lemmon CPA office where his dad Shorty worked with Ed Lemmon's eldest son, James. The office was on the first floor of the old First National Bank building on Main Street. James had an apartment upstairs, where Ed Lemmon had lived on and off during his final years. While playing in the building's nooks and

crannies, Texley climbed to the top of the bank vault, where he saw an old filing cabinet. He looked inside and found a stack of dusty papers, which he took to James. James recognized them as his father's stories and stored them in a safe place. Texley never saw them again until forty-five years later. Not long after Shorty passed away, Texley was looking through his father's papers and came across a packet of documents that he instantly recognized as the stories he had found on top of the bank vault decades earlier. Ed, thanks for sharing.

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Nathan Sanderson
Pierre, South Dakota
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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	ii
Table of Contents	vi
List of Maps and Images	vii
Introduction	1
Chapter I: Beginnings	9
Chapter II: Following the Union Pacific	45
Chapter III: Cowboy	62
Chapter IV: Trespasser	90
Chapter V: Roundup Boss	121
Chapter VI: Cattleman	157
Chapter VII: The Largest Fenced Pasture in the World	194
Chapter VIII: Town Builder	234
Chapter IX: Legacy	269
Appendix: Timeline	288
Bibliography	294

List of Maps and Images

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
0.1 George Edward Lemmon, Founder of Lemmon, South Dakota.	viii
1.1 Freighting Routes in Southeast Nebraska.	25
4.1 The Reorganization of the Great Sioux Reservation, 1868-Present.	92
7.1 South Dakota at the Turn of the Twentieth Century.	198
7.2 The Standing Rock and Cheyenne River Indian Reservations, including Ed Lemmon's 865,000 acre lease, 1904.	216
8.1 The Milwaukee Railroad Network at the Turn of the Twentieth Century.	237
8.2 The Milwaukee Railroad Network in the Northern Great Plains (1930s).	255
9.1 Dad Lemmon as He Appeared in <i>Life</i> Magazine, 1941.	284

Figure 0.1. George Edward Lemmon, Founder of Lemmon, South Dakota.



Source: August Schatz, *Longhorns Bring Culture* (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1961), figure 3a.

Introduction

Perhaps no character in American history is as celebrated as the cowboy. Although his heyday lasted for little more than a half-century, roughly 1850 to 1910, the cowboy has become a lasting part of the culture of the United States. Westerns are fixtures of American cinema. Cowboy boots and hats remain staples of modern fashion. Even in the twenty-first century, many boys and girls grow up wanting to ride the range as cowboys or cowgirls. Most of the folks who watch the films, buy the clothes or long for a birthday pony forget just how difficult life in the saddle could be. Long, hot, dusty days on a sweaty horse, trailing a herd of skittish, stubborn cattle probably did not seem very romantic to the young men who woke several hours before dawn to the prospect of spending twenty hours in the saddle. Cowboy life is an abstract fantasy for many Americans, and individual cowboys have captured our imaginations and informed our nostalgic view of life on the open ranges of the American West. The Marlboro Man. John Wayne. Will Rogers. Gene Autry. These men were not “real” cowboys, but they made the difficult reality of life on the open range look heroic, fun, even sexy. As tough, rugged men ready, willing and able to handle problems swiftly and justly without assistance from anyone aside from a trusty horse, cowboys reflect many of the qualities we would like to see in ourselves. Indeed, we Americans trust our firefighters, respect our police officers and honor our soldiers. But we *revere* our cowboys.

Take, for instance, Charles Goodnight and Oliver Loving, cattle ranchers and trailblazers who built their reputations gathering thousands of mavericks—wild, unbranded cattle—on the West Texas ranges and delivering them to market. They have achieved almost mythical status as pioneers of the American West, larger-than-life

figures who defined what a cowboy should be. These men popularized some of the tools and tradecraft used by cowboys when trailing cattle—Goodnight invented the chuck wagon and the duo are credited with founding the famous Goodnight-Loving trail, which ran more than 2,000 miles from Texas to Wyoming—and established practices further developed by the innovative cattlemen who followed them, including George Edward Lemmon.¹

Despite being one of the most widely recognized cattlemen on the northern Great Plains during the late 1800s and entering the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum's Hall of Fame as a member of its second class—in 1958, along with Loving, Stephen F. Austin, John Chisum and 'Buffalo Bill' Cody—in the twenty-first century Ed Lemmon's name is virtually unknown outside the small, rural community of Lemmon, South Dakota. Those who recognize his name tend to associate it with the town and its school (appropriately, its mascot is the Cowboys), tucked in the middle of nowhere in the far northwest corner of the state, almost 100 miles from the nearest stoplight. In spite of Ed Lemmon's relative obscurity, he led a life filled with significant accomplishments. He helped found several towns, guided the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad west across the Missouri River, operated the world's largest fenced pasture, bossed one of the nation's largest cattle roundups and personally saddle-handled more cattle than any man who ever lived. From the 1880s through the first decade of the 1900s, Lemmon was *the*

¹ J. Evetts Haley, *Charles Goodnight: Cowman & Plainsman* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949), 122, 198-216. Although the trail was named for Goodnight and Loving, historian William T. Hagan notes that the trail route had already been established sometime before the famous cattlemen travelled it. William Thomas Hagan, *Charles Goodnight: Father of the Texas Panhandle* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 14.

central figure in the open range cattle industry on northern Great Plains and like his more famous counterparts, left his mark on an entire region.

Lemmon's accomplishments in and of themselves are worthy of recognition, but his story is more than a series of interesting anecdotes. Many of the common themes that define the plains—among them, cattle ranching, buffalo, Indians, cowboys, railroads, and boomtowns—are reflected in his life and experiences. Born in 1857, Lemmon played an integral role in the growth and settlement of the region stretching from southern Nebraska north to the Canadian prairie provinces and from the Missouri River west into Wyoming and Montana. In his twilight Lemmon began recording his thoughts, insights, and experiences on a wide range of topics, including Indian-white relations, railroad construction, the nuances of proper cattle handling, banking and business, town founding, relationships with women and family, the sheep industry, statehood, county seat battles, temperance, the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, the shift from open range cattle ranching to fenced pastures, World War I, the Great Depression and World War II. In many ways his life paralleled the early development of the northern Great Plains.

By the time of Lemmon's death in 1945, historians had already attempted to assess and interpret the significance of the region he had called home. In recent years, scholars have engaged in an interesting debate regarding the American West—specifically, the question has been whether “the West” is a geographical place or part of a process that has helped to define the United States as a nation. Such a debate would no doubt appear frivolous to many Great Plains residents; most could produce a map and point out the West as easily as they could the Grand Canyon, the Rocky Mountains or the

Missouri River. Historians have a unique perspective, however, and in their company even the geographical definition quickly becomes convoluted. Where exactly was the American West in 1776? 1803? 1893? 1959? Have its boundaries remained constant or have they changed over time? Such questions do not come with easy answers.

The debate between process and place originated in 1893 when a young historian named Frederick Jackson Turner delivered an essay at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago titled, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." In his essay Turner argued that the unsettled frontier had been the defining characteristic in American History. The process of civilizing a "savage" land and its people had produced a unique American identity. Further, the American frontier had officially closed as of the 1890 census, since the entire country now had a population density of at least two people per square mile (the threshold, according to Turner) so the next chapter of American history would be written—for the first time—without the backdrop of the frontier experience.

Since that moment historians have struggled to assess the validity of Turner's thesis. In the 1930s historian Walter Prescott Webb outlined clear boundaries for the Great Plains, but also described processes that gave the region its character. Beginning in the 1980s New Western historians such as Patricia Nelson Limerick, Donald Worster, William Cronon, Richard White and Elliott West came to embrace the West as a place rather than a process. Limerick was among the first to suggest such an approach, asserting that Turner's model overlooked the contributions of a number of important actors, including women, Indians and ethnic groups. Worster and Cronon have also argued for the West as a place, citing the role of the environment in how Americans used the land and its resources. White and Elliott West have deepened this focus, spinning

complex webs of interactions built from a wide variety of sources to provide multifaceted interpretations of the West. During the exercise of determining the relationship between process and place, the Great Plains has emerged as a fulcrum of the West's evolution. As the geographic midpoint of North America, it marks the transition between the tallgrass prairies east of the 100th meridian and the shortgrass prairies to the west. It was home to Indians and habitat for buffalo, but became a haven for cowboys and grazing lands for cattle. For many people, the Great Plains *are* the West. Ed Lemmon put a human perspective on the changes that converged there.²

Lemmon's experiences as a cowboy and cattleman taught him many things, including the value of using Indian lands for personal gain. In the 1880s he and his fellow cattlemen were among the few local non-Indians who opposed, rather than supported, opening "excess" land on Indian reservations to white settlement. Lemmon and others grazed thousands of cattle illegally on the Great Sioux Reservation in the western half of what is now South Dakota, because the grass was free and they could avoid paying taxes on cattle that were not grazing in an organized county. An "open" reservation would end these activities. He also noted that rather than serving as a conduit for the development of the territory, large cattle ranchers made a concerted effort to prevent settlers from entering the Great Plains. They tried to restrict settlement because,

² William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991); Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987); Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, Edited by Harold P. Simonson (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1963); Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Plains* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1931); Elliott West, *The Way to the West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995); Richard White, "It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own:" *A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); and Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

like the Indians, the cattlemen knew the arrival of homesteaders would lead to the end of their way of life.

Even though Lemmon had thousands of cattle trespassing on the reservation, he enjoyed an amicable relationship with the Oglala Lakota Sioux Indians in the southern part of the Great Sioux Reservation. Lakotas (Teton)—one of the three divisions of the Sioux nation, including the Dakotas (Santee) and Nakotas (Yankton)—were comprised of seven different bands, the Oglala, Hunkpapa, Sihasapa (Blackfoot), Miniconjou, Sicangu (Brule), Itazipco (Sans Arc) and Oohenumpa (Two Kettles).³ Lemmon knew and interacted with members of several Lakota bands. His dealings with Oglalas were unique for a cattleman illegally using reservation grass, and his friendships with chiefs Red Cloud and Young Man Afraid of His Horses enabled him to utilize their lands with little formal opposition. A few years later he also won a lease of more than 800,000 acres on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in the extreme northeastern portion of the old Great Sioux Reservation, which became the world's largest fenced pasture. Although he faced initial opposition from the Hunkpapa and Sihasapa Lakotas who called it home, Lemmon again developed a relationship with the Indians and earned their respect.

His contacts extended into the railroad industry as well. Lemmon's intimate knowledge of the landscape made finding an appropriate route for a railroad line west of the Missouri River an easy task; for his assistance, Lemmon received a choice town site and gleaned knowledge of the railroad's proposed route, which facilitated his expansion into other business ventures, including banking and real estate. Lemmon's intelligence, hard work and charisma earned him a substantial personal fortune as he helped guide the

³ Donovan Arleigh Sprague, *Images of America: Standing Rock Sioux* (Great Britain: Arcadia Publishing, 2004), 7.

development of the northern Great Plains. But in the end, his personal success was fleeting. Like many old cowboys he died penniless, though the effects of Lemmon's role in building the region can be seen to this day.

Throughout his life, Lemmon was known by a number of different nicknames. As a child, his friends called him "Dutch" because he was "about as broad as I was long" and "Buckskin Ed" for the fringed buckskin suit he wore. As an adult, Red Cloud dubbed him *Huste* (meaning "lame" in Lakota), or "Crooked Hip" as Lemmon translated it, because of his severely crippled right leg, which he broke several times. Some of his cowboys corrupted the name *Huste* into "Usta," while many of his friends and peers simply called him Ed. Sioux Indians on the Standing Rock Reservation referred to Lemmon as *Taspaze* (meaning "yellow apple"), since the Lakota language had no word for "lemon."⁴ His children and the citizens of the town he founded called him "Dad," because just as he was a father to his three sons, he was the father of the town as well (even in the twenty-first century, many residents still refer to "Dad" Lemmon). Later he came to be known as the "Dean of the Range" for his renowned cattle-handling skills and because he was "easily the most widely known cattleman on the western range." And since the 1969 publication of Nellie Snyder Yost's collection of Ed's stories, titled *Boss Cowman*, some refer to Lemmon by that appellation, even though he never used it while alive.⁵

⁴ In Lakota, the phrase is "t'aspán zi p'a." "T'aspán" means apple and "zi" means "yellow," thus the Americanized version became, *Taspaze*, or "Yellow Apple."

⁵ Bert L. Hall, *Roundup Years: Black Hills to Big Muddy*, Western South Dakota Buck-A-Roos Limited Centennial Edition, (Pierre, SD: State Publishing Company, 2000), 19, 300-301. Yost came up with the term, "Boss Cowman" on her own. No evidence suggests that Lemmon was ever referred to by this title at any time and no other source refers to Lemmon as such. The city of Lemmon hosts a "Boss Cowman" celebration and rodeo each year, in honor of G.E. Lemmon. This event began after Yost published Lemmon's writings and took its name from the book.

The variety of monikers bestowed upon Ed Lemmon speak volumes about his life and legacy. He was a cowboy, cattleman, reservation trespasser, guide, town builder, land speculator, banker, sheep rancher and eventually, a pauper. Yet above all, Lemmon was a crossroads. He was a juncture between two eras, one rooted in the nineteenth century, the other in the twentieth. He represents the meeting point between Indians and whites, between humans and the land, between cowboys and cattlemen and between the dusty days on a western cattle trail and the development of settlements and “civilization.” His life reflected the growth and changes of the Great Plains—overcoming adversity, the roots to a certain place, violent conflict, the triumph that comes with hard work and the devastating failures that accompany bad decisions—and he was one of the most important individuals guiding its progress. At the end of his life, the Great Plains—like Lemmon himself—were different from the start: not better, not worse, but distinctly changed. Lemmon was the process in the place.

Chapter I: Beginnings

As George Edward Lemmon guided his horse-drawn buggy toward the top of a tall butte in south-central North Dakota in early May 1902, he basked in the glory of his wealth and power. A few weeks earlier the seasoned cattleman had secured a private meeting with President Theodore Roosevelt to request a cattle grazing lease on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, which straddled the North Dakota-South Dakota state line. Early on that spring morning, Lemmon harnessed a team and headed out for Leaf-on-the-Hill Creek to survey his new empire: 800,000 acres of prime grassland, to which he had acquired grazing rights for the next five years. As he drove to the top of the butte, Lemmon took in the grandeur of his hard-earned kingdom, which extended in every direction as far as the eye could see. Rolling grasslands, steep draws, wooded river-bottoms, broken badlands, and majestic buttes caught his eye as he slowly made his way to the summit. Once on top, he stopped his team, “stood up in my buggy, drew a long breath of fresh air and shouted to the universe that I was Lord of all.”¹

Lemmon had good reason to celebrate his achievements. His lease, which covered an area larger than the state of Rhode Island, was the culmination of a thirty-year rise from poor cowboy to respected cattleman. Lemmon’s success was a product of his unlimited ambition, steadfast determination, strenuous effort and natural talent. He had a

¹ *Belle Fourche Bee (BFB)*, 13 January 1933. Lemmon wrote more than 800 articles about his life, many of which were published in the *Bee* during the 1930s and 1940s under the heading, “Developing the West.” As Lemmon was a poor typist—he never used a typewriter until he was in his sixties—and often wrote multiple copies of the same story for various other purposes, the versions published in the *Bee* are the ones I cite. His papers, which include hundreds of sheets of typed stories, are located at the American Heritage Center at the University of Wyoming, the Wyoming State Historical Society, the Nebraska State Historical Society, the Chester Fritz Library at the University of North Dakota, the Kansas State Historical Society and in a private collection owned by Ed Texley of Hettinger, North Dakota. The *Bee* articles Lemmon wrote between 1932 and 1936 are collected in Phyllis Schmidt, Editor, *The West As I Lived It: Stories by Ed Lemmon* (Pierre: State Publishing Company, 2007).

sixth sense about cattle—Lemmon always seemed to know how they would act in a particular situation—and he was a hard worker. He started in the cattle business at thirteen and by age twenty, had earned a position as a trail boss for a large cattle outfit. In this capacity he demonstrated another talent: leading men.

Throughout his twenties Lemmon regularly led and directed teams of cowboys several years older than himself. Standing only 5'5" and weighing no more than 150 pounds, Lemmon did not have the physical size to garner immediate respect from his men, but he displayed a determined intensity that quickly compensated for his small stature. In addition to his modest size, Lemmon had a baby face, which combined with his slight build made him appear much younger than his years. His thinning hair may have hinted at his real age, but since he wore a hat for more than 18 hours on most days, even as he approached the age of thirty few men thought him much older than a teenager. Despite these physical limitations, Lemmon proved an effective leader who demonstrated a powerful work ethic and natural, likable attitude. His even temper and cattle-handling skill earned him widespread recognition as a capable leader and cattleman. Ed, as most of his white friends called him, was intelligent, thoughtful and fun-loving. As one of his cowboys noted, "his horses were fast, and so was he, and those of us young fellows who were a little on the 'wild cowboy' order enjoyed working with Ed Lemmon's outfit. Everyone liked him."²

This likeability was more than a product of his engaging personality; his achievements in the cattle industry were almost unequalled among cowboys. In 1897 Lemmon "bossed" one of the largest roundups ever staged. This huge undertaking—held

² Ike Blasingame, *Dakota Cowboy: My Life in the Old Days* (Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1958), 222; and *BFB*, 16 February 1934.

on the Peno Flats near the Bad River in west-central South Dakota—including twenty roundup wagons, 500 men and 50,000 cattle. On another occasion he “cut” (separated them from the main herd) 900 cattle in a single day, “riding 8 horses to near exhaustion in so doing.” At the 1905 National Live Stock Association annual meeting in Denver, Association Secretary Charles Martin recognized Lemmon for having saddle-handled more cattle than any other man who ever lived—over one million head.³ By the early 1900s Lemmon owned a fifteen percent interest in 53,000 cattle, grazing them on what was then the world’s largest fenced pasture.⁴

Lemmon’s accomplishments were especially remarkable in light of his physical condition, which in addition to his small size and youthful appearance included a severely crippled right leg. The result of three separate breaks over thirty years in the saddle, Lemmon’s shrunken, contorted appendage prevented him from achieving anything faster than an unsightly hobble. The disfigured limb was apparent to all who met him, and led the famous Oglala Sioux Chief Red Cloud to dub Lemmon *Huste*—meaning lame in

³ According to Lemmon’s own account, this recognition took place in the corridor of the Brown Palace Hotel, though it is not noted in any official National Live Stock Association documents. Lemmon restated this assertion numerous times in his various writings and was never challenged on this point. Lemmon would respond vigorously to claims that his public writings were inaccurate. Since his claim was printed on at least four different occasions, it seems reasonable to assume that he received no public challenge over these statements, or Lemmon would have responded in kind (he never did). In addition, Ike Blasingame asserted that “Ed is said to have ‘saddle handled’ more cattle than any man in like position,” which supports Lemmon’s contention. See G.E. Lemmon as told to Usher L. Burdick, *History of the Range Cattle Trade of the Dakotas* (Unpublished Manuscript, in “Boss Cowman Ca. 1960-1969,” Call No. 01667, American Heritage Center, Laramie, WY), 192; Wyoming State Archives (WSA) “Developing the West” collection, MSS 691, Vol. 13, p. 5; and Blasingame, *Dakota Cowboy*, 221.

⁴ Nellie Snyder Yost, *Boss Cowman: The Recollections of Ed Lemmon, 1857-1946* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), vii; Blasingame, *Dakota Cowboy*, 221-223; Mrs. Lloyd I. Sudlow, Editor, *Homestead Years, 1908-1968* (Bison, SD: The Bison Courier, 1968), 178; WSA, Vol. 13, p. 5; *BFB*, 31 January 1936; *BFB*, 7 January 1938; and *Life Magazine*, Vol. 11, No. 14, 6 October 1941, 108-109. Though Yost’s work is based on Lemmon’s personal papers, it is so heavily edited that it can only be relied on for general reference.

Lakota—or as Lemmon translated it, “Crooked Hip.”⁵ Although slow on his feet, when in the saddle he rode with a controlled recklessness that impressed other horsemen. One cowboy said later, “Lemmon rode horses that were high-headed and thrashed around in a roundup more than most cowmen liked.” But they kept a roundup moving quickly, and “Ed Lemmon got the job done to [a] cowboy’s satisfaction . . . he was an easy man to work with.”⁶

Although he would surely have preferred two sound legs, Lemmon’s crippled condition probably made him a better leader. He first broke his leg as a seventeen-year-old in 1874. The break, which resulted from an accident on horseback, was a severe compound fracture, which crushed the upper portion of his right leg. While still on crutches from the previous year’s mishap, in 1875 Lemmon broke the leg again. This second break—also the result of a riding accident—made him a permanent cripple; in addition to crushing his partially healed leg once again, rheumatism set in and contorted his leg into an unusual shape.⁷ These accidents forced him to adapt in order to complete many of the ground-based tasks a sound young cowboy could handle.

During roundups, for example, a horsebound cowboy roped a calf around its neck and dragged it to the branding fire. While the fire heated the branding irons, one or two other men wrestled the calf to the ground to position it for branding and/or castration. These ground-based men also removed the rope from the calf, so the roper could catch

⁵ Blasingame notes, “The Indians called him Hoostay, which simply means ‘crippled’ and they held him in high regard. Gradually everyone began calling him Hoostay and the name stuck with him always.” The locality of Usta, in Perkins County, South Dakota is a corruption of Lemmon’s nickname. He occasionally camped near the site, which is on the Moreau River. Faith Historical Committee, *Faith Country Heritage, 1910-1985* (Pierre, SD: State Publishing Company, 1985), 364; *BFB*, 9 November 1934; *BFB*, 1 March 1955; Eugene Buechel and Paul Manhart, Editors, *Lakota Dictionary: New Comprehensive Edition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002); and Blasingame, *Dakota Cowboy*, 222.

⁶ Blasingame, *Dakota Cowboy*, 222.

⁷ *BFB*, 16 February 1934.

another while they attended to the animal. As the ground cowboy(s) held the calf as still as possible, another man applied a red-hot branding iron to the ribs or hip of the calf, scorching the hair and leaving a permanent identification mark (brand) on the hide. If the calf was a bull (male), a third cowboy castrated it, after which they turned it back into the herd. This dusty, tiring process—rope, drag, wrestle, hold, brand, castrate—was repeated hundreds of times per day. Lemmon’s small size and crippled leg would have made wrestling difficult, but he demonstrated great skill in castrating calves.⁸ This was a valuable asset for a cowboy, because proper castration was essential to ensuring the health of the calf. In this process, a cowboy used a sharp knife to cut the end off of the young bull’s scrotum. He then pulled the testicles from the sack and cut them away. This procedure prevented unwanted reproduction, improved fattening and meat production and made the castrated animals—called steers—more docile and thus easier to handle.⁹

Such physically taxing work proved strenuous for men with two good legs, but in Lemmon’s crippled state, he had to work harder to keep up. Cowboys were noted for avoiding ground jobs, if possible, but Lemmon’s infirmity made him shy away from them even more than the average cowhand. So instead of being a ground cowboy at roundups, he worked as a “cutter” (horsebound cowboy who removed individual animals from the larger herd) and roper. Lemmon excelled at these skills, and while on horseback he gleaned a great deal of information about how to properly conduct roundups and brandings; this knowledge would serve him well in future years as a roundup boss.

⁸ Ed Texley Collection, George E. Lemmon Papers.

⁹ Russel Gum, George Ruyle, and Richard Rice, Eds. *Arizona Rancher’s Management Guide*, Arizona Cooperative Extension, 1993.

Lemmon also felt the need to prove himself by working harder and longer than other men. As a trail or roundup boss he regularly put in twenty hours per day during the peak of the spring through fall cattle-handling season. As Ed noted years later, he regularly rose at 2:45 a.m., worked until 9:00 p.m. and sliced out a two-hour night guard relief as well.¹⁰ Lemmon was known for his uncommon physical energy. He was always on the move, playing practical jokes on other cowboys or riding at a break-neck pace (which probably contributed to his numerous leg fractures), but his capacity for work was the product of more than his deep reserves of pent-up energy. At first glance the small, young-looking cripple seemed less capable than other men so he needed to find some way to set himself apart. Lemmon's intelligence and natural ability with cattle facilitated this separation and his physical limitations inspired a work ethic that helped him overcome any negative first impressions.

* * * * *

Without question, Ed Lemmon's strongest influences came from his family. His father, James H. Lemmon, was born in New York state on August 26, 1820, and moved to Lower Sandusky, Ohio, at age seven.¹¹ As a young man James moved to Indiana and later to northern Illinois, where he worked at odd jobs, including clearing farmland.¹² In 1847 James sought new opportunities in the West. He left Illinois for St. Joseph, Missouri, where he joined an emigrant wagon train headed to Oregon Territory. While on the Oregon Trail, which in the coming years thousands of settlers, miners and adventurers would use to reach the West, James passed through southern Nebraska,

¹⁰ *BFB*, 23 July 1937.

¹¹ Lower Sandusky was renamed Fremont in 1849, after John C. Fremont, who had just helped acquire California for the United States.

¹² Virginia Grabow Collection, unknown newspaper, James Hervey Lemmon, Sr. obituary, 1903.

traveling a route that would later become part of the main thoroughfare for the Pony Express.¹³

Upon arriving in Oregon Territory James established a small store and worked as a freighter.¹⁴ It appears he also participated in the Cayuse War, which followed the famed 1847 killings of Marcus and Narcissa Whitman by members of the Cayuse nation. For almost a decade the Whitmans had served as missionaries in Oregon Territory, spreading the Gospel throughout the Pacific Northwest and helping to develop the Oregon Trail. As settlers spread throughout the region they encroached Cayuse lands and brought new, lethal diseases. These developments, combined with the traditional Cayuse practice of killing doctors whose patients died, created a situation ripe for conflict. In 1847 a measles epidemic among the territory's white settlers spread to the local Indians. Upset over the outbreak and unleashing years of pent-up frustrations, on November 29 Cayuse killed Marcus and Narcissa and touched off a conflict known as the Cayuse War.¹⁵

In later years Ed would proudly recount his father's exploits in the "Great Oregon Indian War of 1848-1849" in several engaging, though likely embellished, war stories. According to Lemmon, on one occasion James faced off against an entire Indian village with nothing but an octagon-barrel Sharps rifle and a pepperbox pistol. An Indian had stolen a few hundred dollars worth of clothing and supplies and James and a friend

¹³ Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 13 and John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Oregon Trail*, Second Edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

¹⁴ WSA, Vol. 13, p. 1.

¹⁵ Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Converting the West: A Biography of Narcissa Whitman* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 217-219; Robert H. Ruby and John A. Brown, *The Cayuse Indians: Imperial Tribesmen of Old Oregon* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 109-112, 128-143; and Robert H. Ruby and John A. Brown, *A Guide to the Indian Tribes of the Pacific Northwest*, Revised Edition (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 13-15.

tracked the thief to a nearby village. While attempting to reclaim their property the duo was confronted by several armed Indians. James and his associate had to make a rapid escape when they saw “Indians by the dozens swarming from the lodges in hot pursuit with every conceivable kind of weapon they could hurriedly grab up.” After killing several Indians, James managed to escape, unhurt.¹⁶ Ed also noted that throughout the course of the conflict his father had several horses shot out from under him, but came out unharmed every time. Ed wrote these stories in the 1920s and 1930s—more than eighty years after James first arrived in Oregon Territory—so even though Ed was blessed with an exceptional memory and these accounts may have some truth in them, they are most likely apocryphal.¹⁷

Despite their fanciful nature, these stories played a key role in the development of Ed Lemmon’s character. As a young boy he listened with awe to his father’s exciting exploits. He looked up to James as a role model and sought out similar adventures for himself. According to Ed, James was the best boxer, wrestler and fighter of anyone he knew; he was an excellent athlete who could make a standing jump as high as his head.¹⁸ His father’s strong, rugged, brave persona inspired Ed to mirror these qualities in himself. James acted decisively, with intelligence, forethought and courage. Ed would display similar traits during his years as a cowboy, in part because of his desire to live up to James’ (real or fabricated) model.

Above all, James’ vivid accounts of his Oregon activities inspired Ed with the power of a well-told story. While in cow camp, Ed entertained his men with tales of

¹⁶ WSA, Vol. 13, pp. 1-2 and *BFB*, 28 January 1938.

¹⁷ WSA, Vol. 7, p. 6; *BFB*, 17 June 1938; *BFB*, 24 June 1938; *BFB*, 1 July 1938; and *BFB*, 21 October 1938.

¹⁸ *BFB*, 22 November 1937.

Indian battles, horse races, fistfights, gunfights, uncommon examples of courage and other manly exploits. Late in his life Ed's recollection of these events inspired him to record them for publication, along with hundreds of tales of his own adventures. He regularly supplemented his firsthand knowledge with information gleaned from history books and newspapers. Ed sought to add his own experiences to the "official record," a desire that occasionally caused him to venture into areas where his expertise was limited. When challenged on his boldest assertions he defended them with vigor, though in the rare instances others presented evidence that differed from his claims, he acknowledged that some of his information came from "hearsay."¹⁹ At times his recollections do not match the historical record; in other instances he added new and interesting details to events that helped shape the development of the American West. Ed did not see a significant difference between the stories he told in cow camp and the memoirs he wrote for publication. For Ed, stories were an integral part of life—an enjoyable pastime that earned the attention and respect of his men, and later the praise and recognition of an interested public.

When word of the California gold strike spread in 1849, James left Oregon Territory and started a lucrative business freighting supplies for miners in the gold fields near Sacramento. Two years later he quit his freighting activities and traveled to San Francisco, where he secured a passage to Central America. After crossing the Isthmus of

¹⁹ In 1934 Ed claimed that the Sioux Indians annually sacrificed a young maiden to the Great Spirit by dropping her from the falls of the Yellowstone River (present-day Wyoming). His assertion was challenged by several individuals, including Dr. Thomas L. Riggs, a missionary to the Sioux for over six decades. When faced with contradictory reports and statements, Ed backed off his claims. *Rapid City Journal (RCJ)*, 5 December 1934; *RCJ*, 4 February 1935; *RCJ*, 5 February 1935; *RCJ*, 7 February 1935; and *Pierre Capital Journal*, 15 February 1935.

Panama he traveled by steam ship to New York City and returned home to northern Illinois.²⁰

In October 1852, James married twenty-six-year-old Lucy Elizabeth Whittemore in Marengo, Illinois, a small town west of Chicago. The newlyweds decided to settle in California and in early 1853 James gathered a group of emigrants to accompany them. For James' second overland journey the wagon train consisted of James and Lucy Lemmon, her brothers Benjamin and Nathaniel, her sister Julia (whom they called Mandana) and several other families. The train also included seventy head of purebred shorthorn cattle which James had purchased from "Uncle Van Meter" of Fremont, Ohio, and enough men to handle the wagon train.²¹ According to Ed's account, his father had acquired several thousand dollars in gold while freighting in California, which he used to purchase the small herd. Apparently James had worked with the animals in Ohio some years earlier and now sought to establish his own herd in Oregon.²²

The small emigrant train moved steadily across the plains, but the shorthorns slowed their progress. The passage was not without incident, as Ed described several adventures his parents faced when crossing what would become Nebraska Territory. Their escapades included a friendly wrestling match between his father and an Indian, a rambling story of his Aunt Mandana's attempted "kidnapping" by Sioux Indians after she mistakenly misled one of the braves into thinking she would marry him and the use of a

²⁰ WSA, Vol. 13, pp. 1, 2-4; WSA, Vol. 8, p. 8; *BFB*, 10 June 1938; and Grabow, unknown newspaper, James Hervey Lemmon, Sr. obituary, 1903.

²¹ There were several Van Meters who owned shorthorn cattle in Ohio during this period, including John I. Van Meter. There is no clear connection between the Van Meters and the Lemmons, so the term "Uncle" may have been used in friendship, rather than as family. See Alvin Howard Sanders, *Shorthorn Cattle* (Chicago: Sanders Publishing Company, 1918), 184.

²² Lucy was born on September 20, 1826 in Rindge, NH. See Grabow Collection, 1861 Utah Territory census document; Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 13; and WSA, Vol. 3, pp. 13-14.

stampeding buffalo herd to pack down a sandy plains riverbed to facilitate a wagon crossing. These stories are unverified, but further indicate the importance of storytelling in the Lemmon household. Overall, they seem to indicate amicable relations with the Indians they encountered, an observation reported by most, but certainly not all, white overland travelers on the Oregon Trail.²³

The Lemmons had only reached Skunk Creek—a small tributary of the North Platte River in western Nebraska—when Lucy gave birth to the couple’s first child on June 20, 1853. Born in a tent pitched near the creek bank, James Hervey Lemmon, Jr.—called Hervey by his family—arrived just eight months after his parents’ marriage and likely slowed the train’s progress even further.²⁴ In the coming years Hervey would become Ed’s best friend and hero.²⁵

When the emigrant train reached Bountiful, Utah, in the fall of 1853 the Lemmons decided Lucy and Hervey would be better off remaining there for the winter. Lucy’s pregnancy had been difficult and probably contributed to the decision to remain at Bountiful. James purchased a small farm, entrusted his shorthorn cattle herd to the care of his brothers-in-law, Benjamin and Nathaniel, and left his wife and infant son behind as he guided the wagon train on to California.²⁶ James Lemmon freighted goods between Utah, Oregon and California several times over the next seven years, including an 1854

²³ Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 13-14; WSA, Vol. 3, pp. 13-14; and Yost, *Boss Cowman*, 7-9; Michael Tate, *Indians and Emigrants: Encounters on the Overland Trails* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006) and John D. Unruh, Jr., *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 156-200. As Unruh notes, “The preoccupation with Indian depredations . . . has resulted in radical distortion of the historical record” (p. 156).

²⁴ Virginia Grabow, “Brief Biography of James Hervey Lemmon,” 5.

²⁵ Grabow Collection, 1861 Utah Territory census document; Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 14; WSA, Vol. 2, p. 14; Yost, *Boss Cowman*, 8; and Nebraska State Historical Society, G.E. Lemmon Collection, MS 0959, box 1, folder 4, “Early and Youthful Remembrances, Aspirations and Devotions.”

²⁶ Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 16 and WSA, Vol. 13, p. 13.

trip to Oregon with Lucy, Hervey and Mandana. While attending a stump pavilion—a dance held on the stump of a giant redwood tree—Mandana may have danced with famed mountain man Kit Carson and provided yet another anecdote that eventually made its way into one of Ed’s stories.²⁷

As James came and went on his various freighting trips, Lucy and their expanding family remained on the Lemmon farm near Bountiful, about ten miles north of Salt Lake City. Lucy gave birth to her second son, Moroni Stowell, on July 19, 1855, and to a third, George Edward, on May 23, 1857. Living in close proximity to Salt Lake City and its Mormon population made a deep impression on the Lemmon family; they had a number of Mormon friends and James often freighted goods for them. This relationship was unique for Gentiles, as some non-Mormons refused to trade with the Latter-day Saints.²⁸ James evidently had no qualms; indeed, he named his second son after the angel who appeared to Joseph Smith in 1823.²⁹

The Lemmon family managed to earn the respect and admiration of Brigham Young as well. On the return leg of one of his California freighting trips, James happened to travel through a valley where local farmers had harvested a bountiful, early wheat crop. Since the Salt Lake City area was in the midst of a serious drought, he loaded several wagons with flour, which he sold to needy citizens at very little profit. James soon left on another trip and upon meeting a starving group of Mormons pulling hand-carts, he helped bring them into Salt Lake City without any compensation. Years

²⁷ Yost, *Boss Cowman*, 9 and Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 16.

²⁸ Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-Day Saints*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 50.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 8 and William Alexander Linn, *The Story of the Mormons: From the Date of their Origin to the year 1901* (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963), 31, 92.

later Ed related a statement by his friend, Joe Lee, who claimed “that Brigham Young just swore by [James], although he was no Mormon, and [Lee] had seen Brigham point [James] out saying he was a better Mormon than any of them, and to just pattern after him and he would be [well] suited.”³⁰ James Lemmon may not have been “a better Mormon than any of them,” but his association with the Latter-day Saints would have a lasting impact on the entire family.

There is anecdotal evidence suggesting the Lemmon family may have actually been Mormon, not Gentile. Ed’s lifelong abstinence from alcohol and tobacco, a violent barroom confrontation between James and an Eastern traveler, during which James kicked him into the street for claiming “every plural wife of a Mormon was a prostitute” and James and Lucy’s decision to name their second son Moroni all suggest the possibility that the Lemmons were Mormon. But despite these connections to the Latter-day Saints, there is no hard evidence the Lemmons practiced Mormonism and no documents exist listing them as Church members. James was a freighter who often left Lucy and the children at home while he traveled. It seems possible James named his second son for the Mormon angel out of respect for those who watched over the family during his many absences. In Ed’s reminiscences, which he started in the 1920s and ended with his death in 1945, he always claimed to be Gentile and described his family as such. He once even questioned Brigham Young’s “polygamous inclinations and teaching.” Yet even if Ed was a Latter-day Saint as a young man, in later life he did not openly embrace any religion and had no time for religious activities. Ed’s religion was

³⁰ *BFB*, 28 December 1934.

cattle and his church was the open range. Though he probably believed in God, the prairie was his passion, his livelihood and his home.³¹

The Lemmon family's connection with the Mormons was so close that it would prompt them to leave Utah and settle elsewhere. On June 25, 1859, Lucy gave birth to her first and only daughter, Alpharetta Elizabeth, whom James and his wife named after an Indian song, "Wild Roves the Indian Girl, Bright Alpharetta."³² Just a few weeks later all six Lemmons and a family friend named Sam Bell headed east on a trip to see family members in Illinois.

While visiting Lucy's parents in Marengo the conversation drifted to recent events in Utah. Two years earlier, in June 1857, an armed dispute known as the Utah or Mormon War had broken out. President James Buchanan sought to quell what he perceived as a Mormon rebellion against the United States by sending the Army into Utah. In response, the Latter-day Saints tried to protect themselves from what they considered an oppressive federal government by using military force to block the Army's entrance to the Salt Lake Valley. For more than a year a Mormon militia known as the Nauvoo Legion engaged in skirmishes and minor confrontations with the Army. The Utah War reached its peak on September 11, 1857, when the Mormon militia with help from Paiute allies attacked the 140 members of the Baker-Fancher emigrant wagon train.

While passing through Utah Territory enroute from Arkansas to California, the wagon train had stopped at an area known as Mountain Meadows to collect fresh water and graze their livestock. The Mormon militia and the Paiute Indians, in a misguided

³¹ WSA, Vol. 9, p. 7 and *BFB*, 8 December 1933.

³² Lucy also bore three other children, two boys named David and a girl named Mandana. None survived past infancy. Yost, *Boss Cowman*, 11 and Grabow Collection, 1861 Utah Territory census document.

attempt to protect their lands, attacked the party without warning. After holding off their attackers for five days the devastated emigrants surrendered under a promise of protection. The following day the Mormons, some disguised as Indians, murdered their captives, sparing only seventeen children under age six—witnesses who would be unable to tell their story. Historian Will Bagley has described the event, known as the Mountain Meadows Massacre, as “a ritual of blood and vengeance.” Despite the attackers’ cover-up efforts, this bloody incident received widespread newspaper coverage. Under federal pressure, in April 1858 Brigham Young surrendered the title of territorial governor to Alfred Cumming and the Utah War ended.³³

Even though the Lemmon family faced no real threat during the war, Lucy’s parents urged their daughter and son-in-law to move their young family to a safer location. With the U.S. Army maintaining a presence in Utah and the potential for additional confrontations, James probably considered his routine freighting expeditions a risky endeavor. On the return trip to Utah in the early fall of 1859 the Lemmon family passed through Nebraska, where James purchased the Liberty Farm stage station, a 160-acre farm with a small assortment of wooden buildings on the Little Blue River.³⁴

Eager to relocate the family before winter, James quickly put his affairs in order. He sold the farm near Bountiful, but left his herd of shorthorn cattle in the care of a Mormon friend named Rideout. With winter fast approaching it seems James did not want to spend the extra time trailing his cattle and opted to return for them at a later

³³ Juanita Brooks, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950) and Will Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets*, 4. For a collection of firsthand accounts, see Douglas Seefeldt, “Horrible Massacre of Emigrants!!” The Mountain Meadows Massacre in Public Discourse, <http://mountainmeadows.unl.edu>.

³⁴ *BFB*, 28 December 1934; *BFB*, 10 November 1933; Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 266; Lyn Ryder, *Road Ranches Along the Oregon Trail: 1858 to 1868* (Niwot, CO: Prairie Lark Publications, 1995); and Lemmon Public Library, George E. Lemmon File, “G.E. ‘Dad’ Lemmon Summary.”

date.³⁵ The Lemmon family packed their belongings in James' freight wagons and within a few weeks of purchasing Liberty Farm they arrived at their new Nebraska home.

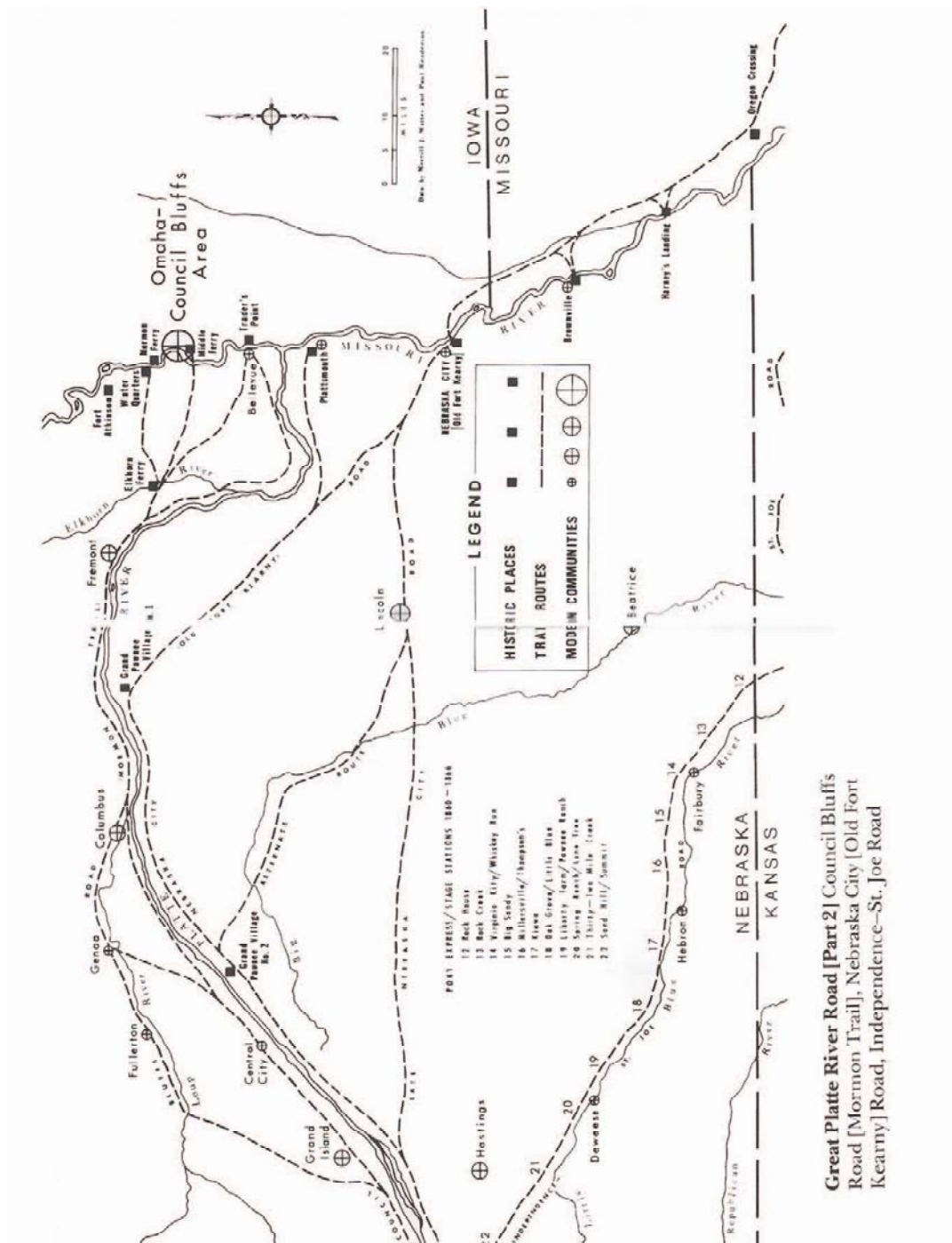
* * * * *

Liberty Farm was a collection of several small log structures located on the north bank of the Little Blue River in south-central Nebraska, a half-mile north of the present-day town of Deweese, near the point where Liberty Creek enters the Little Blue. The Little Blue's riverbanks shallowed at that location, offering several easy crossing points. Liberty Creek's banks were quite steep, however, making a river crossing (or an ambush) impossible on horseback and difficult on foot. The buildings, like many others at stations along the Oregon Trail, featured split-log walls with mud packed between the cracks to keep out the elements. They were constructed from the trees lining the river and provided ample protection against Indian attacks. The surrounding tallgrass prairie was broken by small, intermittent creeks lined with cottonwood trees and the occasional ash or oak. Adequate moisture and fertile soil supported abundant grass for buffalo, cattle and horses. The land north of the river had been cleared of vegetation to accommodate the station, while the south bank featured a thick cover of trees and brush. The origin of the name is unknown, but O. Allen, in his 1859 publication, *Guide Book and Map to the Gold Fields of Kansas and Nebraska*, mentions Liberty Farm as a U.S. mail station.³⁶

³⁵ *BFB*, 18 January 1935 and Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 266.

³⁶ The actual location of the Liberty Farm Station has long since been plowed under, but James' and Ed's descriptions of the topography still hold true today. National Park Service, Historic Resources Study, <http://www.nps.gov/archive/poex/hrs/hrs4c.htm> and WSA, Vol. 6, p. 11.

Figure 1.1. Freighting Routes in Southeast Nebraska.



Source: Merrill J. Mattes, *The Great Platte River Road: The Covered Wagon Mainline Via Fort Kearney to Fort Laramie* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), xxiv-xxv.

Liberty Farm rested on a well-established route, the Oregon Trail; as James later noted, “in the year 1860 there were never less than three hundred and sometimes over five hundred wagons passing over the road every day for over five months, not counting any teams coming from the West.”³⁷ The road was more than 100 yards wide and occasionally carried three wagon trains traveling abreast. “Just imagine five hundred wagons strung out on the same road,” he reflected, “each team taking up at least one hundred feet, making a distance of over nine miles.” It is probable that James, an accomplished freighter, selected the location for this very reason. He had passed over the route on his initial trip west in 1847, an experience that likely influenced his decision to relocate his family to a road ranch on the trail. Sixty years after that initial passage James called the Oregon Trail the greatest thoroughfare ever traveled in any country.³⁸

One of the opportunities James realized in this location was selling teams of wagon-broke oxen—cattle trained to pull a wagon—to fellow freighters and emigrants heading west. He had a systematic method for breaking the animals, which consisted of yoking two young “green” oxen, then tying their tails together to keep them from turning around. James would harness and line up several pairs in this fashion, placing a well-broke set of older oxen in between to help educate the younger ones. Then using two to four horseback riders to push the column along, James would teach the oxen how to work together and follow commands. He would eventually hitch chains and heavy cottonwood logs as training aids, then progress to the front wheels of a cart until they were deemed

³⁷ James H. Lemmon, “Early Days on the Little Blue.” *Proceedings and Collections of the Nebraska State Historical Society*, Vol. 15, Second Series Vol. X (1907), 128.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 127-133 and William E. Lass, *From the Missouri to the Great Salt Lake: An Account of Overland Freighting* (Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1972). Hundreds of freight wagons from Nebraska had traveled to Utah during the Mormon War to supply the U.S. army. James probably sought to capitalize on this trade by selecting a site on their key travel route.

ready to be hitched to a full wagon. Using this method James trained a large number of oxen, which he sold or kept for his own freighting enterprise.³⁹

This main travel route would also host one of the most storied endeavors in American history, the Pony Express. Beginning in April 1860 the Pony Express carried mail overland between California and Missouri in an attempt to reduce mail delivery times and earn organizers William Russell, Alexander Majors and William Waddell an exclusive government contract. The Overland Mail Company, operated by John Butterfield, contracted with the U.S. Postal Service on September 15, 1858, to operate a mail route between Tipton, Missouri, and San Francisco. Butterfield's stages used a 2,795-mile southern route, which required a month or more to traverse, making overland mail delivery slow and unreliable. The "fast mail" system developed by Russell, Majors and Waddell used a series of mounted carriers rather than a stagecoach or wagon and traveled a much shorter 1,966 mile route, reducing delivery times to around ten days. Horseback riders passed mailbags called *mochilas*—Spanish for "pouch"—in relay fashion between carriers based at stations located roughly every twelve miles. Liberty Farm was one of these stations.⁴⁰

Although just shy of three years old in April 1860, Ed would later recall the Pony Express with fondness. His youth limited his firsthand knowledge of the endeavor, but he vividly remembered the character of some of the young men the Pony Express employed. When Majors hired riders he gave each a Bible and required them to sign a

³⁹ *BFB*, 28 December 1934.

⁴⁰ Fred Reinfeld, *Pony Express* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966); Nancy Pope, "The Story of the Pony Express," *En Route: The Story of the Pony Express*, Volume I, Issue 2, April-June 1992; and Merrill Mattes and Paul Henderson, "The Pony Express: Across Nebraska from St. Joseph to Fort Laramie," *Nebraska History* Vol. 41, No. 2 (1960), 83-122.

document pledging not to drink alcohol, fight with other employees or curse. Ed later wrote that, “I have read how the [Pony Express] riders were allowed to use no profanity; however, I am convinced some did not strictly observe the rule, for Bill Trotter, and Jim Moore, especially, would have made poor Sunday School teachers.”⁴¹ Trotter and Moore worked as freighters for James throughout the 1860s and their linguistic tendencies left an indelible mark on the impressionable boy.

In the summer of 1861 an incident occurred that Ed would remember for the rest of his life. Horace G. Wellman, owner of the Rock Creek Pony Express station—located six stops east of Liberty Farm in southeast Nebraska—had purchased the station from David McCanles, but had fallen behind on the payments. On July 12, McCanles, his twelve-year-old son Monroe and two associates, James Woods and James Gordon, rode to Rock Creek and confronted Wellman and his employee, a twenty-four-year-old stagecoach and wagon driver named James Butler Hickok. McCanles sought to collect a payment from Wellman, but he probably wanted to see Hickok as well. McCanles accused Hickok, whom he condescendingly called “Duck Bill” because of his protruding upper lip, of having a sexual relationship with his mistress, Sarah Shull. Details of the event remain unclear, but at some point in their heated verbal exchange gunfire erupted. During the shootout, McCanles, Woods and Gordon were killed, reportedly by Hickok. The next day Wellman, Hickok and another Rock Creek employee, J.W. “Doc” Brink, were indicted for murder in Gage County, Nebraska. At the ensuing trial all three men

⁴¹ WSA, Vol. 5, p. 1.

were acquitted, but this shooting became “Wild Bill” Hickok’s first “confirmed” killings and laid the groundwork for his reputation as a deadly gunfighter.⁴²

Several nights later Hickok may have stopped overnight at Liberty Farm. During his stay, Ed, Moroni—whom the family called Rone (pronounced ROAN’-e)—and Hervey, “three boys aged four, six, and eight, followed him around all evening admiring him as a great hero . . . for ridding the country of such menaces.”⁴³ Ed later claimed he was well acquainted with Wild Bill, having met him several times, but his recollection of these meetings seems false. While Hickok may have stayed at Liberty Farm in 1861, Ed’s description of the other encounters is noticeably vague.⁴⁴ Lemmon may have realized he had stretched the truth on this occasion, once tempering his “relationship” with Hickok by noting that Hervey “was an intimate friend of Bill’s, while I was rather an observant admirer.” Like virtually every topic on which he had some experience, Ed had strong convictions; in this case, about Hickok’s adherence to the Code of the West. He was certain Hickok acted reasonably in the McCandles shooting, claiming that the state of Nebraska should build a monument to Hickok’s “heroic and appreciated act.”⁴⁵

The Lemmon family hosted another famous—or infamous—visitor in the summer of 1861, Edward S. Stokes, a businessman and later an associate of famed railroad magnate James “Jubilee Jim” Fisk. Later in the decade Fisk would gain national

⁴² Another explanation for Hickok being at Rock Creek was to recover from a mauling he received from a bear. Lemmon mirrors this explanation in Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 135. Also see Joseph G. Rosa, *Wild Bill Hickok: The Man and His Myth* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996); Bill O’Neal, *Encyclopedia of Western Gunfighters* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), 136-137; and Nebraska State Historical Society, James Butler “Wild Bill” Hickok, 1837-1876 collection, RG 2603AM.

⁴³ *BFB*, 11 October 1935; *BFB*, 16 August 1927; and Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 135-136.

⁴⁴ *BFB*, 9 June 1933 and *BFB*, 16 August 1927.

⁴⁵ *BFB*, 16 August 1927. For a detailed analysis of Ed’s shortcomings related to Hickok, see “George W. Hansen to A.E. Sheldon,” 8 May 1934 in Nebraska State Historical Society, G.E. Lemmon Collection, MS 0959, box 1, folder 1.

attention for his participation in the Erie War, which pitted Fisk and fellow investors Jay Gould and Daniel Drew against “Commodore” Cornelius Vanderbilt, a railroad and shipping entrepreneur, in a public battle for control of the valuable Erie Railroad.⁴⁶ In 1861 Stokes, who was traveling east from San Francisco via stagecoach, happened to stop at Liberty Farm and mentioned his desire to go on a buffalo hunt. James Lemmon owned a well-broke horse that handled well around buffalo and agreed to take him out. After filling a carriage with supplies and preparing several good pack horses to carry back the trophy, James and a small group of employees and onlookers went in search of buffalo. The “buffalo were so [plentiful] on the Little Blue river . . . that it seemed the whole face of the earth was covered with them” and within two or three miles they came upon a small herd. As James later recalled, Stokes

wanted to kill the buffalo himself. He had two big dragoon revolvers and I had two more in the carriage and a heavy rifle. He started out after the buffalo, and I let my team go and kept pretty close to him. When he got within one hundred yards of the buffalo he commenced to shoot. I told him to let the horse [which was “buffalo-broke”] go up close, but he kept back until he unloaded both his revolvers and came back to the carriage for another. I then told him to go up within twenty feet of the buffalo, but he was still afraid and went up to within about forty feet, and at the seventeenth shot he got him down, and then taking my rifle finished him. I have taken the same horse and a revolver and had three buffalo down before it was empty.⁴⁷

Ed Lemmon recalled that at the sight of Stokes’ “inaccuracy of aim . . . the whole stage load were bursting their sides laughing.” He also claimed that the group used axes and knives to cut off the buffalo’s head, which Stokes took East and placed in one of his saloons. Eleven years later, after attempting to blackmail Fisk with love letters written to

⁴⁶ T. J. Stiles, *The First Tycoon: The Epic Life of Cornelius Vanderbilt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Publishing, 2009), 438-473.

⁴⁷ James Lemmon, *Proceedings and Collections*, 131-132.

showgirl Helen Josephine “Josie” Mansfield, Stokes would earn worldwide recognition—and a four-year prison sentence in Sing-Sing—for shooting Fisk to death.⁴⁸

The excitement Ed experienced during 1860 and 1861 came to an abrupt end on October 26, 1861, when two days after the federal government completed the first transcontinental telegraph connecting Sacramento, California, with Omaha, Nebraska, the Pony Express ceased operations. Russell, Majors and Waddell lost several hundred thousand dollars in their failed endeavor and turned over their assets, including all the stations, to Ben Holladay, the wealthy “Stagecoach King” who had financed much of their operation.⁴⁹

When Holladay took over the old Pony Express line in 1861, he enjoyed a solid reputation as a competent businessman. He had owned and operated a number of successful stage, freighting, and express endeavors and seemed determined to do the same with the route he had just inherited. The Lemmons appreciated Holladay’s commitment to the old Oregon Trail route and family members would always refer to Liberty Farm as a station on the Ben Holladay Stage Line.⁵⁰ This change in operations also brought Ed into contact with a large number of freighters; these whip-cracking, gun-toting, foul-mouthed men gave him his first memorable exposure to the wider world.

Holladay’s various freighting enterprises required a great deal of overhead costs to operate, not the least of which was his feed bill. Holladay owned more than 150 stage stations and each used between forty and eighty tons of hay per year to feed the freighting

⁴⁸ *BFB*, 1 December 1933 and W.A. Swanberg, *Jim Fisk: The Career of an Improbable Rascal*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1959).

⁴⁹ J.V. Frederick, *Ben Holladay, The Stagecoach King: A Chapter in the Development of Transcontinental Transportation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1940), 60-64.

⁵⁰ Ed Lemmon used this phrase in most of his writings. See *BFB*, 21 October 1932; *BFB*, 14 February 1936; and *BFB*, 30 October 1936 for examples.

animals. All told, he had to feed more than 2,000 head each day, which required about 20,000 tons of hay per year at a cost of more than \$500,000. Some of the stations used nearby hayfields to supply their needs, while others had to haul hay from up to 100 miles away.⁵¹ In addition to managing the Liberty Farm station, James had a contract for putting up hay for the stage company.⁵² At prices ranging between \$15 and \$50 per ton, this was a valuable source of additional income for his young family. This venture also demonstrated James' ability to recognize and capitalize on new business opportunities. He taught his sons that business success involved risk, but could bring great rewards. Ed took his father's teachings to heart and showed a lifelong fondness for seeking out new investments. In future years he would engage in a vast array of business dealings—some very successful and others with profoundly negative consequences.

* * * * *

The abundant buffalo near the Little Blue made sport hunts for dignitaries like Stokes easy to organize, but the immense herds also made it difficult for James to find adequate haylands to supply the station. He cut hay on a large river-bottom pasture four miles from the Thirty-Two Mile Creek station, another old Pony Express stop west of Liberty Farm. Buffalo often grazed within a few hundred yards of James as he cut hay, despite his efforts to run them off. In spite of the problems the buffalo posed, he marveled at their incredible numbers. On one occasion, James and two other men left Liberty Farm before daybreak to catch eight wild horses they had seen in the area a few days before. They rode more than fifty miles that day and “never saw an acre of ground but had from twenty to fifty buffalo on it.” As the men rode through the massive herd, the buffalo

⁵¹ J. V. Frederick, *Ben Holladay*, 165.

⁵² James Lemmon, *Proceedings and Collections*, 131.

would make a lane for them to pass “and it would all be closed up one hundred yards behind us.” They did not catch the wild horses and returned to Liberty Farm by another route, where they encountered as many buffalo as the previous day.⁵³

This wild and beautiful setting, highlighted by abundant game, vast prairies, wooded creeks and a winding river, became a special place for Ed Lemmon. Many of his first and most memorable experiences took place near the banks of the Little Blue. At age five or six he embarked on his first “courtship,” involving a neighbor girl named Sadie. Young Ed, nicknamed “Dutch,” worked hard to impress his first love, once riding a trusty horse Old Frank several miles just to see her. Their first date fell short of his lofty expectations, as in rushing to meet Sadie the tip of his copper-toed boots caught on a stone and he “plowed the side hill on my nose and forehead, skinning a place fully as large as my hand.”⁵⁴ Although his initial courtship began unceremoniously, it seems apparent that Ed’s lifelong interest in women began at a young age. Sadie was the first of several young ladies who would attract his attention.

Also during this time he had his first experience with alcohol. While attending a wedding party at Liberty Farm when he was six years old, Ed discovered egg-nog. He “tipped the jug” several times and within a few minutes was “full to overflowing.”⁵⁵ This marked the only time he ever tasted whisky. Years later Ed would drink beer and champagne while on his honeymoon in Mexico, but those instances aside, he completely abstained from drinking alcohol. The reasons for this are unclear, but it seems possible that Ed modeled his behavior on his first employer, cattleman John Wesley Iliff, who

⁵³ Ibid., 131-132.

⁵⁴ WSA, Vol. 9, pp. 11-12.

⁵⁵ Lemmon City Library Packet, 1.

“was noted for his friendliness toward Indians, for his abstinence from drink, and his aversion to [guns].”⁵⁶ Presumably the ill effects of his first drinking experience and his family’s association with the Latter-day Saints were a factor as well.

But these concerns were secondary for Ed, whose primary focus in the early 1860s was an ever-present desire to impress his older brother Hervey. Ed referred to him as his “chum and hero” and spent much of his young life trying to live up to Hervey’s example. This was a difficult proposition, however, because in Ed’s eyes Hervey could do no wrong. He was an “expert trailer of man and beast,” was adept at handling all sorts of weapons, including pistols and rifles, knew “practically all the tactics of both Indians and whites,” was fearless in the face of danger and owned the “fastest and longest winded pony in the country.”⁵⁷ As a boy Ed aspired to become a “man” just like his incomparable twelve-year-old brother. Hervey probably did not possess all of the skills Ed attributed to him, but that did not keep his younger brother from placing him on a figurative pedestal, only “a trifle inferior” to accomplished mountain men Kit Carson and Jim Bridger.⁵⁸ Ed’s youthful portrayal of Hervey’s impossible accomplishments, though embellished, demonstrates a deep respect for his older brother. Of course, few men could achieve in a lifetime what Hervey supposedly managed to accomplish in his first dozen years, but Ed’s admiration for his brother’s talent was genuine. Part of this flattering portrayal probably stems from the recognition Ed received for his own accomplishments as a cowboy and cattleman. Ed put these sentiments to paper decades after his childhood on the Little Blue and his older brother’s premature death in 1886 at age thirty-three. Ed

⁵⁶ Haley, *Charles Goodnight*, 241.

⁵⁷ WSA, Vol. 6, p. 11.

⁵⁸ Nebraska State Historical Society, G.E. Lemmon Collection, MS 0959, box 1, folder 4; *BFB*, 10 February 1939; and WSA, Vol. 6, p. 11.

may have felt guilt over this recognition because he believed that if Hervey had lived he would have eclipsed his accomplishments and then some. Ed was a sentimental man and his boyhood at Liberty Farm was among his happiest memories.

During his years at Liberty Farm Ed also began learning to read and write. James placed a high value on education, often moving the family closer to towns with schools while he traveled on his various freighting trips. The closest school to Liberty Farm sat near Cub Creek, a small stream about twelve miles west of Beatrice, Nebraska, and eighty miles east of Liberty Farm. The Lemmons occasionally stayed at the nearby Samuel Kilpatrick farm so the boys could attend classes.⁵⁹ James once moved the entire family to Nebraska City for several weeks while he hauled freight to Salt Lake City; in Nebraska City Ed had his first experience in a one-room school. The teacher, Miss Doffett, insisted that he attend classes even though he was only five years old. During school hours she made Ed sit on the edge of the teachers' platform and would instruct him while the other children completed their assignments. Like many young boys, Ed did not appreciate being stuck in class when he would rather be outside playing. As a result he did not hold Miss Doffett in high regard, calling her an "old maid, and of very mannish type." This boyhood contempt lingered into adulthood, as he later learned that "she remained in single blessedness through her long and very uneventful life."⁶⁰ Hervey, Moroni and Ed later attended school in Beatrice as well, again staying with a nearby family.

⁵⁹ *BFB*, 28 December 1934 and J. Sterling Morton, *Illustrated History of Nebraska: A History of Nebraska From the Earliest Explorations of the Trans-Mississippi Region with Steel Engravings, Photogravures, Copper Plates, Maps and Tables*, Third Ed., Volume I (Lincoln: Western Publishing and Engraving Company, 1911), 684.

⁶⁰ *BFB*, 28 December 1934.

When James traveled west during his regular freighting trips he often leased Liberty Farm to local men who farmed his 160 acres and operated the station. In the early 1860s when the family stayed in Nebraska City, he rented Liberty Farm to George M. Comstock, a family friend and his young daughter Alpharetta's future father-in-law. In the summer of 1864 James again leased his land, this time to a local freighter named Charles Emory. James had organized what he hoped would be a lucrative freighting venture hauling heavy quartz mining equipment to the Pike's Peak area in Colorado.

Miners had discovered gold near Pike's Peak in 1858; the subsequent Colorado Gold Rush lasted for several years and brought more than 100,000 fortune seekers to the area. After the gold ran out miners began searching for other valuable ore, including silver, copper and quartz. The Pike's Peak area had a number of minerals with some monetary value and James' heavy mining equipment was destined to help with their extraction. While James started his freight train for the mines, the rest of the family moved to Marysville, Kansas, so the children could attend school.⁶¹

Classes in Marysville were held in an abandoned store building, and the children were often distracted from their lessons. One day Ed's teacher reached his breaking point with the inattentive boy and was "wearing out all his willow switches on me, and had begun turning the butts to beat me with, [when] brother Hervey, eleven and a half years old, resented the abuse and [threw] a double folding slate at the teacher's head, which the teacher dodged . . . the slate shattering a section of the plaster from the wall." This ended

⁶¹ Following the end of the Colorado Gold Rush in the early 1860s, the quartz mining industry became a big business. Hubert Howe Bancroft and Frances Fuller Victor, *History of Nevada, Colorado, and Wyoming, 1540-1888* (San Francisco: The History Company, 1890); *BFB*, 21 October 1932; *BFB*, 28 December 1934; *BFB*, 19 November 1937; *WSA*, Vol. 11, p. 20; Lyn Ryder, *Road Ranches Along the Oregon Trail* and Elliott West, *The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to Colorado* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998).

the whipping for the time being and Ed asserted that regardless of the punishment's severity, the teacher "never succeeded in making me cry." Ed was uncommonly stubborn and proud of his toughness, so he was probably not exaggerating, especially given his intense desire to please his brother, who was in the same room the entire time.⁶²

James' decision to embark on the Colorado freighting trip probably saved the lives of the entire Lemmon family, even though he would lose thousands of dollars in the endeavor. For four years the Lemmons had lived and worked along the Little Blue River without any trouble from Indians. As James noted, "[w]e did not mind them any more than we did the birds that were flying about us."⁶³ They interacted on occasion and no hostility existed between the family and the local tribes; in fact, Ed's only contact with Indians to that point was vicariously through his father's exciting stories. Yet he would soon experience some excitement of his own because the family's peaceful coexistence with the Indians ended in 1864, when Cheyennes, Arapahoes and Sioux launched a series of violent raids along the old Oregon Trail.

The widespread violence in Nebraska during the summer of 1864 had its origins two years earlier and more than 300 miles north. In August 1862 several bands of Dakotas under the leadership of Chief Little Crow started an armed conflict in southern Minnesota known as the Dakota War. The conflict began when four Indians returning from a hunting expedition killed five white homesteaders. They acted out of frustration over numerous treaty violations and unkept promises by the United States, the loss of traditional hunting grounds, constant pressure to abandon their culture and assimilate into white society, increasing encroachment by settlers and a general "dissatisfaction among

⁶² *BFB*, 28 December 1934.

⁶³ James Lemmon, *Proceedings and Collections*, 128.

the Indians over many things the whites did.”⁶⁴ Later that evening the Dakota Sioux decided to attack other settlements throughout the region in an attempt to expel the whites. Over the next several months Little Crow’s warriors killed more than 500 white settlers, prompting the federal government to send thousands of troops to restore order.⁶⁵ Soldiers were stationed in Minnesota, Nebraska and other places throughout the Central Plains, including outposts on the Missouri, Arkansas and Platte rivers. The attacks continued during 1862 and 1863, causing more than a quarter of the white population in Dakota Territory to flee. By 1864 the dissatisfaction of the Indians had only increased. Parties of white hunters were at work slaughtering buffalo on Indian hunting lands, primarily for their hides; with the passage of the 1862 Homestead Act, thousands of new settlers began arriving on the Nebraska plains, placing additional pressure on Indian lands and resources; and gold strikes in Montana and Idaho provided further incentive for military campaigns to drive the Sioux from the region. These developments sparked a series of retaliatory attacks in Nebraska and elsewhere.⁶⁶

In mid-summer 1864 bands of Sioux, Cheyennes and Arapahoes began raiding white settlements throughout central and southern Nebraska. On August 7 well-coordinated groups of Indian warriors launched an assault on outposts along the old

⁶⁴ Gary Clayton Anderson and Alan R. Woolworth, Editors, *Through Dakota Eyes: Narrative Accounts of the Minnesota Indian War of 1862* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988), 23.

⁶⁵ Kenneth Carley, *The Dakota War of 1862: Minnesota’s Other Civil War* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1976), 1-8; Gary Clayton Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind: Dakota-White Relations in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1650-1862* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1997), 261-279; and Michael Clodfelter, *The Dakota War: The United States Army Versus the Sioux, 1862-1865* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998), 66-67.

⁶⁶ George E. Hyde, *Red Cloud’s Folk: A History of the Oglala Sioux Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1937), 101-113; Frederick, *Ben Holladay*, 190-193; Robert W. Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Lakota Sioux* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 80-82; and Clodfelter, *The Dakota War*, 155-158.

Oregon Trail. More than thirty freighting stations and 150 ranches were hit. The raiders burned scores of buildings, killed or ran off livestock and left a path of destruction in their wake. Dozens of individuals died; dozens more were taken captive. Liberty Farm escaped the first strike, but two days later on August 9 Indians attacked the Lemmon family's station as well. Two Denver-bound wagon trains—one loaded with crockery and hardware and valued at \$22,000, the other filled with liquor—were destroyed. Nine men died in the Liberty Farm attacks, more than twenty wagons burned, 150 oxen were scattered and many of the goods were taken.⁶⁷

On August 10 refugees from the various raids reached Marysville, Kansas, one of the closest large settlements and the Lemmon family's temporary home. As historian William G. Cutler noted, "teams of wagons filled with settlers, station-keepers, and ranchmen, with their families, flowed into the town, each bringing stories of the outrageous murders and torture of men, women and children, and beseeching aid in recovering their captured friends."⁶⁸ The local militia mustered in response and several men borrowed horses from Lucy Lemmon, who had a number of available mounts which the family had brought to Kansas from Liberty Farm.⁶⁹ The hostilities continued for the

⁶⁷ According to James, during the attacks, 23 people died within 35 miles of Liberty Farm. James Lemmon, *Proceedings and Collections*, 128; Frank Albert Root and William Elsey Connelley, *The Overland Stage to California* (Topeka: Crane and Co., 1901), 353-360; and John G. Ellenbecker, *Oak Grove Massacre: Indian Raids on the Little Blue River in 1864, As printed in the Marysville Advocate-Democrat*, Marysville, Kan. [1927?]. Electronic access, <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~wynkoop/webdocs/oakgrove.htm>.

⁶⁸ William G. Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1883), Marshall County, Part II.

⁶⁹ Ed Lemmon is uncharacteristically inaccurate about most of the events surrounding the raid, citing the incorrect date and attributing it to Red Cloud, who had no part in the events near the Little Blue. On one point Ed is remarkably accurate, however, given his youth and the fact that he was living in Marysville, Kansas, at the time. He notes that "the day of the raid there were encamped two large trains, one bulls and one mules . . .," an observation that matches the historical record. He incorrectly states that these trains "whipped the Indians," a further indication that his knowledge of these events is secondhand at

next several months, exacerbated by the November 1864 Sand Creek Massacre, in which Colonel John M. Chivington and his two Colorado cavalry regiments killed more than 100 women and children in Black Kettle's band of Southern Cheyenne Indians. Enraged, several tribes responded with a series of attacks from Montana to Texas, including a raid on Julesburg, Colorado, in which the city burned to the ground. The Dakota War finally ended in the fall of 1865 after three years of fighting. Both sides signed treaties pledging to end the violence, though the result was only "a makeshift and very provisional peace."⁷⁰ Had the Lemmons not been in Marysville in 1864, they might have been victims of the attacks as well.

This providence was little consolation for James, who realized a near total loss on his Colorado freighting enterprise. During the raids several of his hired freighters abandoned their loads in fear of the Indians. As a result much of the freight, including the expensive mining equipment, had to be abandoned near Julesburg. Although James later returned to claim the heavy pieces, they had been stolen.⁷¹ He was not alone in his misfortune, as dozens of families lost buildings and equipment; others lost their lives. Stagecoach King Ben Holladay suffered extraordinary financial losses along his stage line, including thirty-seven horses, fifty-five sets of harnesses, 331 tons of hay, 3,143 sacks of corn and scores of barns, corrals and warehouses. All told he claimed almost \$250,000 in damages during the raids.⁷²

best. See WSA, Vol. 11, p. 20 and James C. Olson, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 25.

⁷⁰ Michael Clodfelter, *The Dakota War*, 202-213 and Duane Schultz, *Month of the Freezing Moon: The Sand Creek Massacre November 1864* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

⁷¹ Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 338-339 and Ed Texley Collection, George E. Lemmon Papers.

⁷² Frederick, *Ben Holladay*, 191-192.

The following spring, just days before Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered to Union General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House to end the Civil War, the Lemmons returned to what was left of Liberty Farm. Like most families in Nebraska Territory the Lemmons had avoided the death and terror caused by guerilla raiders in “Bleeding Kansas” during the bloody four-year war, including William Quantrill’s August 1863 “Lawrence Massacre” in which almost 200 men were slaughtered and more than 80 buildings burned.⁷³ Still, the Platte River conflict with the Sioux, Cheyennes and Arapahoes proved almost as destructive. Indians had burned the Liberty Farm station and all the other buildings, except a string of log corn-cribs that were too rough and ramshackle to ignite easily. Without useable structures Liberty Farm could not serve as a regular stop on the Holladay stage line, so James set out to rebuild the farm, hiring men to plant a corn crop and reconstruct the buildings. During the growing season guards kept watch for Indians while others tended the fields. Sometimes even the young Lemmon boys would stand watch with rifles. Again Hervey, Moroni and Ed spent some time away from Liberty Farm, attending school in Beatrice while staying with their uncle, Lucy Lemmon’s brother Volney Whittemore.⁷⁴

By early 1866 nearly all the old ranchmen had returned to the Little Blue River and things were going along nicely for James and his family. They had managed to rebuild several structures and plant 155 acres of corn during the “fine growing spring.”⁷⁵ Within a few months the crop was doing well and after James’ hired men finished

⁷³ Nichole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 234-240 and Paul R. Petersen, *Quantrill of Missouri: The Man, the Myth, the Soldier* (Nashville: Cumberland House Publishing, 2003), 274-302.

⁷⁴ *BFB*, 6 August 1937; *BFB*, 28 December 1934; WSA, Vol. 5, p. 3; and James Lemmon, *Proceedings and Collections*, 128-131.

⁷⁵ James Lemmon, *Proceedings and Collections*, 128.

cultivating the fields for a second time they requested leave to register some property at the land office in Brownville, Nebraska, located 140 miles east on the Missouri River. James took three teams and went with them to bring back a large load of grain for his livestock. The trip to Brownville and back went well until they reached Big Sandy Creek, a wooded stream about forty-five miles east of Liberty Farm. The settlers there reported another series of Indian attacks near the town of Oak, less than twenty miles from the Lemmon family farm. One man had been killed and several families were preparing to leave the country again for the larger settlements farther east.

James was not inclined to abandon Liberty Farm a second time and implored the others to stay and fight, saying: "Let's go out and give those Indians a good drubbing and then they will let us alone. We can whip all the Indians in the Sioux and Cheyenne nations with the advantage we have in arms." When he offered to provide food for the men and feed for their horses several settlers volunteered to meet at Liberty Farm in two days. When mustering day arrived, however, none of the volunteers showed up. A passing stagecoach brought word that "every ranchman and all the settlement at Sandy had left the country except at the stage stations where [there] were a dozen soldiers as a guard." James and his three hired men decided to stay and defend the farm. He wanted Lucy and the children to go to Beatrice, but she refused to leave so the entire family stayed.⁷⁶

For several days the men had sporadic contact with Indians, once pursuing three warriors to a thick stand of trees four miles from the farm. On the Fourth of July a lone Indian rode down the south side of Liberty Creek to a high piece of ground and sat on his

⁷⁶ Ibid., 129.

horse watching the men. At the same time sixteen concealed warriors snuck across Liberty Creek on foot, the banks being too steep for their horses to cross. One of James' hired men spotted the group; as he galloped toward the draw the Indians began to fire. The men quickly headed to the house, managing to kill one of their attackers on the way. Hervey, Moroni and Ed took up pistols as well, but the Indians did not attempt to assault the well-defended house and the incident ended as quickly as it began.⁷⁷ Once again the Lemmon family managed to escape unharmed.

The Independence Day encounter marked the last confrontation between the Lemmon family and Indians. Ed was just nine years old during these raids and later claimed to be exhilarated by the danger. Over the next several decades these harrowing experiences would serve as fodder for the many stories he told in cow-camp. He boasted that he “never even went out for the Milk-Cows, one mile distant from [the] Ranch without a Six-Shooter belted around me” and claimed he always carried pistols when working in the fields or traveling along the Little Blue—tales which kept his cowboys entertained and boosted his reputation as skilled in the ways of Indians and weapons.⁷⁸

All through his childhood Ed traveled widely with his family, from Utah to Nebraska, Illinois, Kansas and a number of places in between, which made his later journeys throughout the Great Plains and the rest of the country seem like a natural part of life. He was not rooted to any one place. During his early years Ed had been exposed to danger on several occasions, interacted with famous figures such as Wild Bill Hickok,

⁷⁷ Although this story lacks corroboration, James' recollection of these events seems genuine. Ed's portrayal is slightly different, but many of the details are similar to James' account. James Lemmon, *Proceedings and Collections*, 130-131 and WSA, Vol. 11, pp. 6-7. For an analysis of James' interpretation, see “George W. Hansen to A. E. Sheldon,” 14 November 1933 in Nebraska State Historical Society, G.E. Lemmon Collection, MS 0959, box 1, folder 1.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Ed Stokes and Ben Holladay and enjoyed several years of schooling. He had “battles” against Indians, close contact with Mormons and witnessed firsthand the rise and fall of the Pony Express. These unique experiences set the tone for his entire life. They also proved valuable during the next several years, when Ed and his family left Liberty Farm to join the construction crews of the Union Pacific Railroad.

Chapter II: Following the Union Pacific

On August 20, 1866, just six weeks after the Independence Day Indian raids on Liberty Farm, the Union Pacific Railroad reached Fort Kearney, causing a sudden end to the Ben Holladay stage line's lucrative freighting enterprise in eastern Nebraska. Just as the completion of the telegraph line in 1861 rendered the Pony Express obsolete, the arrival of the railroad signaled the end of overland freighting. With his profits falling due to Indian raids and competition with the railroad, on November 1, 1866, Holladay sold his holdings to Wells, Fargo and Company and retired from the overland stage business.¹

Incorporated as a result of the Pacific Railroad Act of 1862, the Union Pacific Railroad Company began building what would become the nation's first transcontinental railroad in Omaha, Nebraska Territory, on December 2, 1863. The initial groundbreaking was a ceremonial act, as financial difficulties and corporate mismanagement delayed its actual construction by almost eighteen months. Work crews hammered the first iron rail spike into a wooden support tie at Omaha on July 10, 1865, and had not yet reached Fremont, just forty miles west, when construction ended for the winter. The line grew rapidly in 1866, however, with 191 total miles of track completed when the railroad reached Kearney in August.²

As the railroad moved westward, James and the other managers of stage stations on the old Oregon Trail realized the era of overland freighting was over. The lack of future overland traffic, the devastation caused by the 1864 Indian attacks, the potential for good wages from the railroad and the general desire of most other area families to

¹ Frederick, *Ben Holladay*, 252-262.

² Charles Edgar Ames, *Pioneering the Union Pacific: A Reappraisal of the Builders of the Railroad* (New York: Meredith Corporation, 1969), 98-103, 119, 122.

move on prompted the Lemmons to leave Liberty Farm.³ Several other families did likewise, as “practically from the Hackney ranch at the west foot of the eighteen mile bridge, near the present city of Hebron, Nebr., to Kearney [all the station managers and their families] joined U.P. construction.”⁴

James owned several heavy freight wagons and had a number of good oxen teams and he soon found work freighting for the Union Pacific Railroad. The family gathered a few belongings and traveled 110 miles northwest to Kearney, where they joined the Union Pacific construction crews. Before he left Liberty Farm James collected all of the family’s nonperishable goods, including furniture and tools that could not be taken along, and placed them in an underground cellar. He padlocked the wooden door and sealed the structure with well-packed dirt in anticipation of returning to his property at a later date.⁵

As the Lemmon family prepared to leave after five years on the Little Blue, James hired two men, Maurice Law and Jack Wilson, to stay and tend the corn crop. It was just a few weeks away from harvest and sometime later James sold the crop (together with several thousand bushels of corn bought from farmers near DeWitt) to the railroad to feed its construction crews.⁶ This sale—another example of James capitalizing on a business opportunity—supplemented his regular freighting income, which included contracts to cut and haul wooden ties for the construction crews. As Charles Edgar Ames noted in *Pioneering the Union Pacific*, high quality “lumber for the crossties, bridges, and other purposes, including fuel, was very scarce and costly, and was to remain one of the UP’s

³ Robert G. Athearn, *Union Pacific Country* (Lincoln: Bison Books, 1971), 42-43.

⁴ WSA, Vol. 2, p. 2 and *BFB*, 11 May 1939.

⁵ WSA, Vol. 2, p. 3.

⁶ WSA, Vol. 11, pp. 6-7; WSA, Vol. 5, p. 3; *BFB*, 6 August 1937; *BFB*, 21 December 1939; and Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 263-264.

chief difficulties.” Construction required about 2,500 ties per mile, “of which only a third were of sound oak and walnut, and the balance of cheaper cottonwood. The latter, which skirted many of the streams, was in fair supply, but was very perishable, soft, and yielding. It would not hold spikes well, and the rail would wear its way into the wood, making the track unsafe.”⁷ Cottonwood remained the cheapest, most abundant option, however, and with ample money to be made cutting and hauling timber, James spent much of the next three years supplying the Union Pacific with ties.⁸

The Lemmon family followed the construction crews westward, camping at junctions and moving forward as the building advanced. James and his son Hervey (now a teenager), worked to cut and deliver ties ahead of the tracks, traveling with the construction crews each day while the rest of the family remained in camp. Hervey regularly worked alongside his father and from a young age shouldered important responsibilities in the family’s business ventures. For his part, Ed loathed life in camp, which was “very tame” compared to his adventures at Liberty Farm.⁹ The U.P. reached North Platte, a townsite 305 miles west of Omaha, on December 3, 1866. When construction shut down for the winter the Lemmons spent several months in the town, a rough amalgamation of cloth tents and crude wooden structures one Irish resident called “a place where people suffer for a time before going to hell.” Like many of the larger towns established during the railroad’s construction, North Platte was a wild place, featuring multiple saloons where drinking, gambling, gunfights and prostitution were the

⁷ Ames, *Pioneering the Union Pacific*, 118.

⁸ Tie cutting rates varied, but some individuals could command \$49 per month, plus a twenty-nine-cent bonus for every tie cut above fifteen per day. See Athearn, *Union Pacific Country*, 44 and Nebraska State Historical Society, Union Pacific Railroad Collection, MS3761, Samuel B. Reed Papers.

⁹ WSA, Vol. 11, p. 11.

primary forms of entertainment. During their stay the Lemmon children—especially Moroni, Ed and Alpharetta—had their first, but not their last, exposure to such activities.¹⁰

Construction resumed in the spring of 1867 and the Lemmon family continued to follow the railroad. It reached the city of Cheyenne, in what is now Wyoming, on November 13, 1867. General Grenville M. Dodge, the Union Pacific's chief engineer, had staked out the town that summer and named it for the Cheyenne Indians inhabiting the area. Like North Platte, Cheyenne became the railroad's winter headquarters, housing thousands of construction workers, freighters and their families. "Stores, saloons, and haunts of vice" abounded and Cheyenne emerged as the "third burgeoning 'Hell-on-Wheels.'"¹¹ One eastern traveler was shocked at the activities taking place on a Sunday. After a quick stroll around the city he rushed back to his hotel, horrified at the discovery that saloons, restaurants and billiard rooms were open and "in full blast on the Sabbath as well as on a week-day."¹² In December James settled the family in Cheyenne, where they would remain for several years.

Just ten-years-old, Ed had an unforgettable experience during the first day in his exciting new hometown. He and Hervey were traveling through the "underworld of Cheyenne" so Hervey could find several of James' teamsters to deliver their wages. The brothers entered a dance and drink emporium, where all manner of "painted girls" lounged about. As they entered the door Hervey saw one of the teamsters he wanted to consult and left his brother alone for a few moments. A buxom prostitute sauntered over

¹⁰ Athearn, *Union Pacific Country*, 61.

¹¹ Ames, *Pioneering the Union Pacific*, 234.

¹² *Wyoming Weekly Leader*, 13 March 1869 page 1.

to Ed and barked, “You little snot-nose, get out of here or I’ll sit on you and smother you.” The woman frightened the naïve youngster and he anxiously started looking around for Hervey. Ed’s older brother came to his rescue and they managed to escape without getting smothered.¹³

Although only fourteen, Hervey was already a well-respected young man. He regularly collected payments and distributed wages for his father’s teamsters, sent important messages and acted as James’ representative in business dealings. The Saturday, March 7, 1868, edition of the *Cheyenne Leader* included “Lemon, Hervey” in its list of individuals with mail to collect at the post office.¹⁴ James received mail as well, suggesting that Hervey had begun conducting business under his own name. His independence and level of responsibility became a model for Ed, who continued to idolize his brother. Hervey may not have lived up to Ed’s flattering portrayals, but James obviously deemed him competent and trustworthy. This trustworthiness earned Hervey the right to carry pistols as well. Whereas the city of North Platte had quickly established a rigid system for enforcing law and order, Cheyenne remained a rough place for several years.¹⁵ Between 1867 and 1869 the *Cheyenne Leader* documented more than a dozen murders and shootings, so when Hervey traveled into its less desirable areas he did so armed with two .36 caliber Colt revolvers.¹⁶ Although Cheyenne passed an ordinance on September 30, 1867, banning the carrying of firearms and dangerous weapons, few

¹³ *BFB*, 22 July 1938 and WSA, WPA Collection, “Pioneer Cabinet,” Articles by G.E. Lemmon, “My First Night in Cheyenne, Wyoming, December 10, 1867.”

¹⁴ *Cheyenne Leader*, 7 March 1868 “List of Letters.”

¹⁵ Mark Ellis, *Law and Order in Buffalo Bill’s Country: Legal Culture and Community on the Great Plains, 1867-1910* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

¹⁶ Ed described the revolvers as “Colts—Navy Cap and Ball Guns,” so Hervey’s pistols were likely 1851 Colt Navy Revolvers, a popular gun among Westerners. *BFB*, 22 July 1938 and WSA, WPA Collection, “Pioneer Cabinet,” Articles by G.E. Lemmon, “Ed Lemmon to State Historical Society of Wyoming,” undated. For reports on the shootings, see the *Cheyenne Leader*, 1868 and 1869.

citizens observed the rule. The lack of respect for this law was so blatant that the *Leader* pleaded for authorities to “Enforce the Laws or Repeal Them.”¹⁷

Members of the Lemmon family experienced Cheyenne’s violence firsthand on March 21, 1868. They awoke that morning to see the remains of Charles Martin dangling at the west end of Cheyenne Street in plain sight of the Lemmon home, which was on the west bank of Crow Creek in the western suburbs.¹⁸ Martin had recently been acquitted of murder by a local jury and celebrated his freedom by cavorting at the Keystone Dance Hall. Around 1:00 a.m. “a man heavily muffled about the head and face” asked Michael Hanchy, a friend of Martin’s, to call Martin outside. Hanchy did not suspect any ulterior motives and complied. When Martin came to the door he was immediately struck on the head with a pistol and dragged away. The local Vigilance Committee hauled Martin to a quiet location in western Cheyenne, tied a noose from a clothesline and strung him up on a tripod made of three clothesline poles fastened together. Residents found Martin and a suspected mule thief, Charles Morgan, “hanging by the neck on three poles in the rear of the Elephant Corral” later that morning. As Ed recalled, “the Vigilantes were then cleaning up Cheyenne . . . and they made quite a thorough job of it.” He claimed that Asahel Collins Beckwith, a wealthy family acquaintance and later would-be U.S. Senator, led these vigilantes, though historian Charles Vollan lists J.P. Ward as the group’s captain.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Cheyenne Leader*, 14 February 1868 “Enforce the Laws or Repeal Them” and Charles Vollan, “Hell on Wheels: Community, Respectability, and Violence in Cheyenne, Wyoming, 1867-1869” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Nebraska, 2004), 78-79.

¹⁸ The similarity between the Charles Martin hung in Cheyenne and the Charles Martin who served as Secretary of the National Live Stock Association is coincidence. *BFB*, 10 November 1933 and *BFB*, 11 May 1934.

¹⁹ *Cheyenne Leader*, 21 March 1868 “Vigilantees Again – Two Men Hung;” *Cheyenne Leader*, 23 March 1868 page 1; *BFB*, 10 November 1933; and Vollan, “Hell on Wheels,” 261. For information on

Rather than being appalled or scared by these events, Ed reveled in the town's danger. In his view the bad guys had been lynched by the good guys and the victims deserved what they got. Cheyenne was a welcome change from the boredom of the railroad camp and regularly offered some new or unusual event to satisfy his inherent need for adventure.

Throughout 1868 and 1869 the Vigilance Committee, a group that dispensed frontier-style justice to suspected murderers, thieves and other ruffians, hanged several men in similar fashion to Martin and Morgan. The "Cheyenne Business Directory" published in 1867 defended the vigilantes, stating that

People living in old settled communities may at first think that the Vigilance Committees of the Rocky Mountain region are a source of evil, but on a moment's consideration they will recognize the necessity of having either an extraordinary powerful city government, or in lieu thereof, a power that will make crime hide its head and give a feeling of security to law abiding citizens. Such a power is the Vigilantes. They restrain desperadoes from practicing their lawless work, and give an assurance of safety to the honest man who desires to make this region his home.²⁰

The directory listed several instances of vigilante justice, designed to offer potential businessmen and travelers a measure of comfort. It seems likely that this flattering portrait was due, at least in part, to members of the Cheyenne business community participating in the Vigilance Committee's activities, although public support for this organization varied.²¹ The committee's activities had a tremendous influence on

Beckwith, see the digital collection "Wyoming Tales and Trails," <http://www.wyomingtalesandtrails.com/evanston3.html>. Ed Lemmon provides a detailed outline of Beckwith's early years in WSA, WPA Collection, "Pioneer Cabinet," Articles by G.E. Lemmon, "A.C. Beckwith—Hero."

²⁰ WSA, "Cheyenne Business Directory, 1867," p. 23.

²¹ Vollan, "Hell on Wheels," 272-274. See also, Frederick Allen, *A Decent, Ordinary Lynching: The Montana Vigilantes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004).

Cheyenne's adolescent boys, who took it upon themselves to form a "juvenile militia" to protect the town. The group, which included Moroni and Ed Lemmon,

had a habit of drilling at the race track about a mile from town and in the direction of Lodge Pole Creek where there was practically always hostiles camped, so it was a rule for a number [of the boy militia members] to keep guns loaded with solid shot. One night a rider came from the direction of the hostiles and when he arrived in hailing distance of our drilling the Captain, whose name was Bell, issued the usual command to halt three times, with no response, when the Capt. ordered one half of the solid shots to fire and apparently with no results, only a swerve to the left [by the rider] and to dash on for town. Next morning a dead man was found south of the R.R. track lying beneath the neck of a horse that answered the description of the one ridden by the rider. There was no identity found, but thereafter the Mayor would not allow us to drill at the Race Track. Very likely the rider was an outlaw from the hostiles spying out the lay of things with a view of a successful raid of the freighters encamped nearby. At any rate, our Race Track drilling was at an end. Brother Moroni was one of those who discharged his gun, he being one of the oldest boys and an expert shot.²²

No documentation exists to corroborate Ed's account, but given Cheyenne's widespread violence and the community's active Vigilance Committee, such an event is not beyond possibility.²³

* * * * *

In the spring of 1868, about the time the U.S. Army and the Sioux Indians were signing a treaty at Fort Laramie designating a large portion of western Dakota Territory as a permanent reservation for the Sioux, James Lemmon partnered with a Nebraska acquaintance named Ute Metcalf to subcontract for tie-cutting with the Coe and Carter Company, which had a large contract to provide ties for the Union Pacific and Denver

²² WSA, WPA Collection, "Pioneer Cabinet," Articles by G.E. Lemmon.

²³ Vollan also relates Lemmon's account in "Hell on Wheels," 276-277.

Pacific railroads.²⁴ James had known Metcalf for some time and considered him very resourceful, if a little untrustworthy. James and Metcalf established a tie hauling camp near present-day Rawlins, Wyoming, where they worked for several months in the Medicine Bow Mountains cutting and hauling lodgepole pines. The pair employed several men, including Hervey, and had a number of freight wagons to transport the ties. After a few months in the mountains James returned to Cheyenne to visit Lucy and his other children, whom he had not seen for some time. Hervey and Metcalf remained with the camp and in James' absence, Metcalf collected payment from Coe and Carter for their tie-cutting services. A short time later Metcalf abandoned the camp, taking several thousand dollars of James' hard-earned money.²⁵

When Hervey discovered Metcalf's theft he wired James in Cheyenne, who immediately boarded a train in pursuit. During an evening stop at a road ranch and saloon James carelessly handed his handgun, a unique pistol with four rotating barrels, to the bartender, who allowed another patron to examine the strange weapon. While admiring the pistol the man accidentally cocked the hammer. James took back the weapon and as he attempted to lower the hammer, which had a very stiff spring, the gun went off, shooting him through the left index finger. The bullet tore the bone out for more than an inch, a permanent injury which rendered the finger practically useless. This painful wound did not slow James down, however, and the next morning he resumed the

²⁴ The Company founded by General Isaac Coe and Levi Carter provided a large portion of the ties used for the Union Pacific construction in western Nebraska and Wyoming. See Scott Thybony, Robert G. Rosenberg and Elizabeth Mullett Rosenberg, *The Medicine Bows: Wyoming's Mountain Country* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Press, 1985), 61-63.

²⁵ WSA, Vol. 3, p. 3.

chase. He ended his efforts a few days later after receiving information that Metcalf had murdered a rich mine prospector and been hung for the crime.²⁶

When James returned to the Medicine Bow Mountains to gather his wagons and equipment, he learned that Metcalf had failed to pay wages for any of their employees and left a large bill for groceries, feed and other supplies. James sold a number of his wagons and teams to pay these debts, leaving him with just three freight wagons, a fraction of his earlier fleet. In addition to months of back-breaking work for no profit, Metcalf's theft cost James most of his equipment and, indirectly, the use of his left index finger. In typical Lemmon style he moved on from his losses and acquired another tie-cutting contract, but with much less equipment he was unable to secure large, lucrative contracts as before. Twenty years later Ed learned that Ute Metcalf had not been hung, but fabricated the story of his death to throw James off his trail.²⁷

* * * * *

While James and Hervey worked cutting railroad ties, Moroni, Ed and Alpharetta attended school in Cheyenne. Outside of school and a few odd jobs, including capturing prairie dogs to sell to eastern tourists, the Lemmon brothers had a great deal of spare time and the boys occupied themselves in various boyhood pursuits.²⁸ One of these activities involved honing their skills with bullwhips. Moroni and Ed had been around whips their entire lives, having lived on a major freighting thoroughfare, and picked up some skill practicing with small whips cut down from old, larger ones used by their father and the "bullwhackers" on the Ben Holladay stage line. In and around Cheyenne there were so

²⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

²⁷ Ibid. and *BFB*, 24 December 1937.

²⁸ WSA, WPA Collection, "Pioneer Cabinet," Articles by G.E. Lemmon, "Prairie Dog Arnold of Cheyenne, 1868-1870" and *BFB*, 25 May 1934.

many freighters that “the whip craze seemed to strike the [entire] boy population and soon every boy of the whip age was in possession of one.” Moroni and Ed practiced regularly and according to Ed, “became very expert in their manipulation,” even winning “trophies” from their friends during neighborhood competitions.²⁹

Their extensive free time also enabled them to take notice of the city’s beautiful young women. In Ed’s estimation the belle of Cheyenne was a sixteen-year-old beauty named Rosie Kelley. Like many young ladies, Rosie wore the latest local fashion: Indian-made buckskins. Throughout the city it was not unusual to see women dressed head to toe in smoke-tanned buckskins, undergarments and all. One afternoon Ed and his friends were playing baseball in a fenced field near the school grounds when Rosie rode by on her bicycle. She was dressed in “full porcupine trimmed buckskin, moccasins and all, including leggings, underskirt, short overskirt, jacket and headdress.” Rosie “presented such a fascinating figure and appearance that the game halted, and we all stood staring in openmouthed admiration.” As she glanced at the gawking boys, Rosie immediately lost control of her bike, flying over the handlebars and into the wooden fence. Both of her legs slid into a crack between the planks, which peeled her outer garments up above her waist and exposed the lower half of her torso.³⁰

The boys got a good view of Rosie’s “good-old-smoke-tanned-Ute-[under]garments” and “perfectly tapered legs” and instantly christened her: Rosie Kelley with the Buckskin Belly. The boys even composed a song and went howling through the streets of Cheyenne for weeks, very much to the discomfort of Rosie, her boyfriend

²⁹ *BFB*, 24 December 1937.

³⁰ WSA, WPA Collection, “Pioneer Cabinet,” Articles by G.E. Lemmon, “Rosie Kelley with the Buckskin Belle of Cheyenne.”

Johnny Gline and their parents. Rosie's mother threatened to have the young composers arrested for their "slanderous ditty" and they were forced to stop signing it—at least around adults. They continued to hum their jingle in secret, however, and "the law could not keep us from twitting Johnny . . ." ³¹

While the two younger Lemmon boys continued their adventures in Cheyenne, Hervey helped the Union Pacific celebrate an important milestone. On May 10, 1869, the Union Pacific's tracks reached the terminus of the Central Pacific Railroad outside of Promontory Point, Utah, completing the nation's first transcontinental railroad. The meeting marked the end of an ambitious multi-year construction project in which the Union Pacific had started construction from the east while the Central Pacific built from the west in a lucrative competition to lay the most miles of track. Leland Stanford, president of the Central Pacific and later founder of Stanford University, used a silver maul to drive a symbolic golden spike, finishing the line. James Lemmon witnessed the driving of the golden spike and probably felt a great sense of pride being associated with the historic endeavor. But he also lost the tie-hauling job that had been his primary source of income for the previous three years. ³²

The meeting point was about seventy-five miles northwest of James' old farm near Bountiful and on the return trip to Cheyenne he stopped to inquire about the seventy head of shorthorn cattle he left in Rideout's care when the family had moved to Nebraska almost ten years earlier. James discovered that Brigham Young had sent Rideout on a foreign evangelical mission, leaving the herd neglected. Unable to restore James' cattle

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ed wrote on numerous occasions that James and Hervey followed the Union Pacific to its completion at Promontory Point. See *BFB*, 14 August 1936; *BFB*, 22 July 1938; and Schmidt, *The West As I Lived It*, 365.

herd, Young compensated him with fifty-two horses from the Church's large Antelope Island herd.³³ The horses on Antelope Island—also known as Church Island because the Latter-day Saints used it to graze their herds of cattle, sheep and horses—were well-known for their quality, serving as mounts during the Utah War and for the Pony Express.³⁴ These fine “Church Island horses,” as the Lemmon family called them, more than made up for the loss of the seventy shorthorn cattle and provided James with a new source of income. James, Hervey and a Mormon boy named Ruben “Rube” Taylor trailed the horses back home to Cheyenne, along with about twenty head of work stock used during the Union Pacific's construction.³⁵

A short time after returning from Utah, Hervey went to work for John Wesley Iliff, a wealthy cattleman with a huge ranch in northeastern Colorado.³⁶ Iliff was one of the region's first cattle ranchers; he owned or controlled thousands of acres of grassland on ranges stretching from Julesburg to Greeley, Colorado, a distance of more than 150 miles. He employed between twelve and thirty-five men, depending on the time of the year (many cowboys were let go before winter, as the cattle required far less tending

³³ The Church's horse herd roamed on what is today's Antelope Island State Park. A sandbar on the island's southeast side provided a ready access point for herders to trail livestock on and off. No records exist to verify this transaction, however, Ed Lemmon mentions the “Church Island horses” numerous times in his writings, and the circumstances regarding Young's compensation of horses is consistent with earlier uses of the Antelope Island herd. *BFB*, 8 December 1933; Michael W. Homer, “An Immigrant Story: Three Orphaned Italians in Early Utah Territory,” *Utah Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 70, Number 3, 2002, p. 205-206; and James H. Beckstead, *Cowboying: A Tough Job in a Hard Land*, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991), 11, 13, 53, 55.

³⁴ Homer, “An Immigrant Story,” 205-206; Hazel Noble Boyack, *A Nobleman in Israel: A Biographical Sketch of Joseph Bates Noble, Pioneer to Utah in 1847* (Cheyenne: Pioneer Printing Co., 1962), 29; and Beckstead, *Cowboying*, 53, 55.

³⁵ WSA, WPA Collection, “Pioneer Cabinet,” Articles by G.E. Lemmon, “After Completion of the Union Pacific Railroad, 1869, and Driving of the Golden Spike at Promontory Point, Utah, in May 1869” and *BFB*, 18 January 1935.

³⁶ J.W. Iliff (1831-1878) is the namesake of the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado.

during those cold months), who looked after more than 20,000 head.³⁷ While Hervey started work “punching cows” under Iliff’s Bar F brand, Ed—now twelve—also joined Iliff’s crew as a part-time courier. Iliff owned a retail meat market in Cheyenne and also had beef contracts with several area forts, including Laramie, Fetterman and D.A. Russell. Ed regularly traveled between the ranch headquarters—located south of Sidney, Wyoming, near the present-day town of Iliff—and these places delivering messages.³⁸

When not working for Iliff Ed looked after his father’s fifty-two Church Island horses at the Chalk Bluffs, a unique geological formation about thirteen miles south of Cheyenne in the present-day Pawnee National Grassland.³⁹ Ed stayed in a cramped cabin with a crew of wood-choppers, many of whom had worked as freighters for James Lemmon. Rube Taylor assisted Ed in retrieving strays, which happened quite often as the “hot-blooded ponies” had a strong “homing” instinct and sought to return to Utah. One day, Ed and Rube tracked several stray horses to an area more than twenty miles from the wood-choppers’ camp. By the time they gathered the horses it was too dark to make the return trip so they cached their saddles, hobbled the animals (tied their front legs together so the horses could graze, but not travel very far) and prepared to spend the night in a deserted trapper’s cabin not far from a known Indian winter camp. The cabin was

only 12 by 14 [feet] and had a wall bunk in the southeast corner. There was in the west side a small, three-paned slide window, covered with white oiled paper. The wide wall bunk took up the greater portion of the part east of the south door, leaving scant room to set our carbines [rifles]

³⁷ *New York Times*, 26 November 1875 “The Cattle King of the West” and Haley, *Charles Goodnight*, 241.

³⁸ *BFB*, 6 May 1932; *BFB*, 13 April 1934; *BFB*, 9 November 1934; and *BFB*, 1 March 1935.

³⁹ While staying at the Chalk Bluffs, Ed may have instructed Minnie Pinneo in horseback riding. Pinneo later earned some renown as a world-class horse racer, winning prizes in several large races in the Eastern United States and in Europe. She may have raced some of James’ Church Island horses in these contests. The Pinneo family, who also lived in Cheyenne at this time, was well-acquainted with the Lemmons, so Minnie and Ed probably rode together. See *BFB*, 18 January 1935.

at the head of the bed, so we had placed them at the foot, but had our six-shooters under our heads. It was a moonlight night and we had scarcely gotten in bed when we heard a slight commotion to the west and looked and espied three Indian faces crushed against the window, apparently trying to pierce the interior darkness, for they had likely seen our horse sign around the house and [were] wondering if the owners were in the cabin. I slipped my six-shooter from under my head but the Mormon boy seemed to prefer his carbine and reached for it at the foot of the bed and in so doing evidently made a slight noise from which the Indians sprinted away in a flash. So, I lost my best opportunity to have killed an Indian.⁴⁰

Ed and Rube did not sleep at all during the night and scanned the surrounding country thoroughly before cautiously leaving the cabin the next morning.

In later life Ed would have countless dealings with Indians. While working as a cowboy he trailed cattle to Indian agencies on numerous occasions, including trips to the “Sitting Bull Indians” at the Standing Rock Agency in south-central North Dakota and the “Red Cloud Indians” at the Pine Ridge Agency in southwest South Dakota. Ed regularly ate, talked and traded with them; he would come to know Red Cloud, Young Man Afraid of His Horses and other notable Indians. In the early twentieth century he would acquire a huge lease on the Standing Rock Reservation and hire nearly 300 Indians to help fence the pasture. He looked upon several Indians as friends and tried to maintain an amicable relationship with the local tribes. Ed’s apparent respect for Indians makes his recollection of “My Lost Opportunity to Kill an Indian” seem somewhat out of character.

The story’s title, which Lemmon drafted in 1931, suggests he would have liked to shoot at the silhouette in the window. Ed did not kill anyone during his life—“not even” an Indian—and his apparent regret is probably the result of a desire to impress the public.

⁴⁰ *BFB*, 6 May 1932; *BFB*, 27 May 1932; WSA, WPA Collection, “Pioneer Cabinet,” Articles by G.E. Lemmon, “My Lost Opportunity to Kill an Indian;” and WSA, Vol. 10, p. 9.

When Ed wrote this story he had been preparing articles and reminiscences for publication for several years. He wrote his stories for a white audience and colored them with details and insights he hoped would rival the tales produced by popular western authors like Zane Grey. In his private correspondence with Lewis Crawford, a North Dakota historian he contacted about editing his writings into a single collected volume, Ed apologized for the tameness of his accounts—which, as he regretfully admitted, could not rival the “blood and thunder” exploits the novelists produced. As he noted in a 1926 letter, “I realize you are going to have trouble living my stories up as to tales so, bear in mind I have at least 10 more good Indian stories . . . I can vouch [for them], as they are truth and not fiction. One can’t expect such blood-curdling stories [as found in popular novels].”⁴¹ He sought to produce a factual representation of his life, but he also wrote with entertainment in mind. Much like the stories he told to amuse the cowboys he hired, Ed made a point to highlight the “action” of his encounters, taking great pains to flesh out these events in painstaking detail, not unlike Zane Grey or later, Louis L’Amour. His apparent regret over not killing the Indians outside the cabin may have been designed to attract readers without necessarily reflecting his personal beliefs.

Throughout Ed Lemmon’s early life, his father and brother taught him to treat others with respect, to be honest and to stand up for his convictions. James and Hervey showed him the value of hard work and instilled in Ed character and an entrepreneurial spirit he would carry for his entire life. Thirty-two years after his “lost chance to kill an Indian,” Ed reflected on his experiences during a long buggy ride near Leaf-on-the-Hill Creek in North Dakota to appraise his newly-acquired cattle empire. As he stood to

⁴¹ North Dakota State Historical Society, G.E. Lemmon Papers, “G.E. Lemmon to Lewis F. Crawford,” 7 December 1926.

survey the 800,000-acre lease, shifting his weight to his left to accommodate his badly crippled right leg, he was a confident, content cattleman revelling in the product of a life's work. Ed was at the pinnacle of his career; he was successful, well-to-do and had a satisfying sense of his place in the world. While standing at the peak of the butte, perhaps he reflected on the beginnings of his life, when he revered his brother, respected his father and enjoyed carefree days on the Little Blue. And perhaps he thought back to the origins of his career in the cattle business, when he followed in Hervey's footsteps to become a cowboy.

Chapter III: Cowboy

Ed Lemmon's introduction to the open range cattle industry began in an ordinary fashion, with no fanfare and little indication he would become one of the world's greatest cowboys. When his older brother Hervey began working as a cowhand for J.W. Iliff's Colorado and Wyoming ranches in 1869, Ed managed to secure a part-time job carrying messages for the wealthy cattleman. Although he had worked around livestock as a child, Ed's first significant exposure to cowboys came in 1870, when at age thirteen he began spending a great deal of time with Iliff's outfit. Lemmon was short, wiry and looked even younger than his years, but he was also tough, determined and showed a keen interest in cattle-handling. A short time later he managed to secure a job tending beeves for Iliff on the open range. Ed's early experiences in Wyoming and Colorado marked the beginning of a fifty-year career in the saddle, during which he worked more than one million head of cattle on horseback and earned recognition for his talents as a cowboy and cattleman. His time on the open range also brought him into close contact with Indians and their reservation lands—a connection marked by his illegal, but profitable, use of the Great Sioux Reservation for grazing cattle.

In the fall of 1870, after three years in Cheyenne, the Lemmon family packed their belongings and returned to Liberty Farm, their road ranch on the Little Blue River in eastern Nebraska. Following the completion of the Union Pacific and Ute Metcalf's theft of his hard-earned wages from the Coe and Carter tie-hauling contract, James Lemmon had little reason to remain in Cheyenne. He still owned the 160-acre property in Nebraska and planned to take up farming and freighting once again. James, Lucy and their four children traveled with seven of Iliff's cowhands who helped drive their herd of

fifty-two Church Island horses. Before starting work with Iliff, the cowboys had been members of James' freighting outfit; now they were heading back to their homes and families in Nebraska since Iliff would soon be cutting his winter hired help down to a skeleton crew.¹

When the Lemmons arrived at Liberty Farm they discovered a former soldier named Benjamin Royce living on their property. Royce had been stationed near Liberty Farm during the previous year and had established his homestead there after being discharged. In the Lemmon family's absence Royce had contested their homestead and filed his own claim of ownership, contending they had abandoned the farm. In addition, Ed recalled that "Royce had broken open a large cellar that father, upon leaving, had filled with furniture, fixtures, windows, doors, farm implements, and lumber removed from the houses."² Royce and three other area homesteaders had found the cache and divided it between themselves, leaving the Lemmon family with none of their former possessions.

Despite the cowboys' desire to forcibly remove Royce from the Lemmon property because "it was evident he had jumped father's homestead by moving right into father's house, scarcely making a new improvement," James decided to leave Liberty Farm to Royce. His decision to abandon Liberty Farm was a reasoned one based on several factors. Royce was a former soldier who might garner some sympathy for his case. He had officially filed paperwork on the property and for James, the time and expense of contesting the claim in court was probably not worth the effort, given the area's other

¹ WSA, WPA Collection, "Pioneer Cabinet," Articles by G.E. Lemmon, "After Completion of the Union Pacific Railroad, 1869, and Driving of the Golden Spike at Promontory Point, Utah, in May 1869."

² Ibid.

available tracts of land. The Lemmons took up residence on a section of land about twenty-four miles east of Liberty Farm, near the town of Kiowa in Thayer County, Nebraska.³

James may have been willing to give up Liberty Farm without a fight, but Ed was deeply affected by the loss. He had spent his formative years there and felt a strong attachment to the place. Liberty Farm was the site where his family fought off the Indians, hosted Wild Bill Hickok and took Ed Stokes buffalo hunting. It was a stop on the Pony Express, part of the Ben Holliday Stage Line and the spot where two of Ed's infant brothers were buried beneath a stand of cottonwood trees. To the end of his life, Ed cherished the memories he made there. As he later wrote, "with all my roaming, successes, failures, devotions, and annoyances, the old place will always seem my real home. Even with a good thrifty town named for me in South Dakota, I will never have the attachment for it I have for Old Liberty Farm."⁴

With few job prospects available during the Nebraska winter, Hervey, who was seventeen years old, left for Texas to continue his career as a cowboy.⁵ He would remain there more than five years, depriving Ed of his longtime friend and hero. Hervey's absence, combined with the clean break from his childhood endeavors at Liberty Farm, would prompt thirteen-year-old Ed to begin his cowboy career as well. Before the Lemmons left Cheyenne in 1870 Ed had attended school like most other boys his age. When the family returned to Nebraska he and Alpharetta attended a local school during

³ Kiowa was about seven miles south of Davenport. Grabow Collection, unknown newspaper, James Hervey Lemmon, Sr. obituary, 1903 and Lyn Ryder, *Road Ranches of the Oregon Trail, 1858-1868*. Benjamin Royce received patent to the 160 acres James Lemmon first claimed on February 19, 1873. Yost, *Boss Cowman*, 68 (footnote) and Grabow, "Brief Biography of James Hervey Lemmon."

⁴ WSA, WPA Collection, "Pioneer Cabinet," Articles by G.E. Lemmon, "After Completion of the Union Pacific Railroad, 1869, and Driving of the Golden Spike at Promontory Point, Utah, in May 1869."

⁵ *BFB*, 29 July 1938.

the winter of 1870-1871.⁶ But when spring arrived, Ed stopped going to class and started working full time.

Two Texas cattlemen, whom Lemmon identified as Lawhorn and Hardigan, drove several large herds into southern Nebraska that spring, fattening them on the open range grasses and selling them to area residents for beef. The cattle grazed for several months near the town of Oak, just a few miles from the Lemmon home at Kiowa. At that time homesteaders capitalizing on the 1862 Homestead Act were arriving in southern Nebraska, seeking free title to up to 160 acres of land. The Lawhorn and Hardigan herds, which had a penchant for stampeding at night, began causing significant damage to crops and the cattlemen hired Ed to gather up the strays and compensate homesteaders for any damages. Lew Slover, the brother of Hervey's future wife, also worked with this outfit.⁷

One night, Ed

was with a herd of three year old steers and they met in a head-on collision, in quite a deep gulch, with a herd of all steers, fours [four-years-old] and upwards. As the herds neared one another the bosses hollered for all hands to quit the leads and drop out of their path.⁸ The results were that about one hundred steers were killed and many more crippled; but not a single man or horse killed, owing to the knowledge of the bosses and their hollering for all hands to quit the leads.

This incident was illuminating for Ed; indeed, it was one of his closest calls during a stampede. Even as a teenager, he was acquiring the necessary skills for success as a roundup and trail boss.⁹

⁶ Grabow Collection, City of Cheyenne Census Document, 11 June 1870 and *BFB*, 28 December 1934.

⁷ Lew Slover was Elizabeth Slover's brother. Elizabeth would marry Hervey Lemmon in 1878.

⁸ "Quit the leads" refers to the practice of cowboys riding in front of a stampeding herd (leading it), to drive it in a particular direction and (hopefully) stop or slow the stampede. In this case, the cowboys were unable to stop the herd and the bosses told their men to get out of the way (quit the leads) before the herds collided in the gulch.

⁹ *BFB*, 21 May 1937.

Later in the summer of 1871 Ed contracted to carry mail from Kiowa southwest to the Guide Rock outpost (known as the Lower Stockade) on the Republican River, then west to Red Cloud (known as the Upper Stockade), Riverton and back. Guide Rock and Red Cloud were called the Stockades because area homesteaders had built and occupied wooden stockades to protect themselves from the Indians who still inhabited the area.¹⁰ One morning while making the return run from Riverton, Ed came upon a group of homesteaders gathered on the north bank of the Republican and inadvertently put himself in an awkward situation.

Earlier in the day a small party of Indians had launched a surprise attack on the homesteaders while they were digging a well. The settlers managed to wound one member of the war party, but the Indian escaped across the river and hid in a group of plum bushes. The homesteaders felt certain they had wounded him, but were unsure if he was dead. Now they gathered at the edge of the river, too afraid to cross it to see about the Indian's condition, but too curious to leave without finding out. When Ed challenged them by asking "why they didn't swim over and see if they had a dead or badly wounded Indian," they claimed they did not know if their horses would swim the river. Ed offered the loan of his horse, which he knew would swim, but immediately the entire group began complaining about being troubled with rheumatism or some other affliction. The group suggested to the young mail carrier that since he was well-acquainted with his own horse, he would be the best candidate to do the swimming. Though only fourteen years old, Ed had been bragging for some time about his competency as a frontiersman. Now

¹⁰ A.T. Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska* (Chicago: The Western Historical Company, 1882), "Webster County" and *BFB*, 27 May 1932.

he could hardly “falter and show a yellow streak,” so he asked for a rifle and a pair of field glasses and began to swim his horse across.¹¹

Ed headed downstream for a place with no vegetation that could be used for cover and when he reached the bank, began searching with the field glasses to see if the Indian was dead or alive. He soon saw a horse and “upon more careful scrutiny located the Indian close under the horse’s nose, with flies buzzing over his face. But for fear of a ruse I rode up with cocked rifle, but found the Indian stone dead.” Ed swam back across the river, reported his findings and resumed the trip to Kiowa. He later learned the homesteaders had traveled several miles to get a boat and could not retrieve the Indian’s remains until the following morning. In retrospect, Ed wished he had pumped “a few shots into the carcass” so he could “claim the honor of finishing him off.”¹²

Like the incident in the tie-cutting camp two years earlier, this was another lost chance to kill an Indian. Ed likely felt relief in finding the Indian already dead, but his disappointment in not being able to *claim* he killed the warrior was probably genuine. He never missed an opportunity to take credit for a heroic act or remarkable feat and had Ed been clear-headed enough to think of shooting the carcass a few times before he returned, he probably would have done so. Ed also demonstrated a willingness to face danger, both to quench his own thirst for excitement and to prove his bravery. His actions took considerable daring and he no doubt felt great pride in his feat: a fourteen-year-old boy swimming alone across the river to confront an armed Indian while a group of adults stood idly by. In later years Ed would display a noticeable lack of concern for his personal safety. His enthusiasm for risk-taking earned him great respect among the men

¹¹ *BFB*, 27 May 1932 and WSA, Vol. 5, pp. 3-4.

¹² *Ibid.*

with whom he worked, but also caused him considerable physical hardship and pain.

This characteristic influenced his business dealings as well, because he was not one to back down from a challenge. He did not often behave rashly or “go off half-cocked,” but on occasion he could (and did) succumb to the reckless nature of his heart rather than the logical pleadings of his head.

From 1871 to 1874 Ed worked at various jobs, including carrying mail, herding mules, tending horses and trailing cattle. He even claimed to have met Wyatt Earp in 1872 or 1873 in Dodge City, Kansas, during the days when buffalo hunters sold hundreds of thousands of hides in the frontier town. Thousands of people passed through Dodge City during this period, so it is possible Ed had a run-in with the famous lawman. Still, this meeting probably never happened and is another example of Ed’s use of secondary sources to supplement his own memories. When Ed wrote in a 1935 *Belle Fourche Bee* article titled “How Small This World” of meeting Earp, Stuart Lake’s 1931 biography, *Wyatt Earp: Frontier Marshal*, was the leading historical account of his life and adventures. Lake’s book described Earp’s time as a buffalo hide hunter in Kansas and probably served as the basis for Ed’s claim. Starting in the mid-1920s Ed became a voracious reader, so it seems likely he had read Lake’s book a short time before he typed his “recollection” of the Earp meeting. Unlike the childhood encounter with Wild Bill Hickok, which he wrote about on multiple occasions and in great detail, the account of the Earp meeting contains no information about how it occurred.¹³ A few years later Ed voiced strong criticism of writers who pass judgment without personal knowledge, stating “it is a shame for persons to express their views on hearsay, and not from real experience

¹³ Stuart N. Lake, *Wyatt Earp: Frontier Marshal* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1931) and *BFB*, 11 October 1935.

and use.” Ed obviously overlooked his own hypocrisy, because he did just that on a number of occasions.¹⁴

Though he probably never met Earp in Dodge City, Ed often traveled into Kansas while working on cattle drives. During an 1873 drive he witnessed an incident that demonstrated just how dangerous life on the plains could be. He and several other cowboys were trailing a herd of cattle when they came across a group of Comanche Indians hunting buffalo. Neither party showed any hostile intent and each let the other go about their business unmolested. As the cowboys rode by Ed saw an Indian shoot a buffalo and dismount to skin it. The Indian straddled the animal’s neck to cut its throat when the buffalo, which was still alive, rose to its feet with the man on its shoulders. As the animal began to run one of its horns slipped through the Indian’s wide leather belt, dragging him along as they pounded across the prairie. The disoriented Indian still held his skinning knife and attempted to cut the belt, but as he did so the knife slipped and he stabbed himself. As Ed later recalled, the Indian “cut his own bowels out and the buffalo literally tramped them off before anyone could shoot the buffalo and rescue him.” One of the cowboys galloped over and killed the buffalo, but the Indian had already died. Even though Ed and the others were “not much in love with the Comanches,” the sight unnerved them to a man. For several days they talked about the horror of the scene, which was among the most memorable experiences of Ed’s early life.¹⁵

Ed had reason to contemplate life and death again in 1873 when his mother Lucy passed away on December 26 at age forty-two. The cause of death is unclear, but she had several difficult pregnancies—including three children who died in infancy—which may

¹⁴ *BFB*, 7 January 1938.

¹⁵ *BFB*, 27 May 1938.

have been a factor. Lucy's family buried her next to the Little Blue River, though subsequent flooding caused them to move her remains to a hilltop cemetery above the site of the old Oak Grove Pony Express Station.¹⁶

It is difficult to determine the effect Lucy's passing had on her youngest son. In his writings Ed rarely mentioned his mother and said next to nothing about her death. Her role in his stories was very limited and Ed did not brag about his mother in the same way he did the rest of his family. Perhaps her death was too painful to write about, but more likely, Ed and his mother simply were not very close. He was a man who appreciated the exploits and the world of other men. Women were pleasant to look at and a necessity for raising children, but their lives and labors held no interest for him, except when they reflected the qualities of men, as in the adventures of Calamity Jane, whom he mentions in several of his reminiscences. He was not prone to displays of emotion ("for it seems I am not built that way") and he probably did not dwell too long on her death.¹⁷ This apparent lack of feeling would emerge in his future relationships with women, including both of his wives, and have significant consequences for his life and livelihood.

* * * * *

A few months after Lucy's death the McCumpsey family, which consisted of a widow and her four sons, moved into the Lemmon home near Kiowa. The widow's former husband, Richard, had mysteriously disappeared some time before and with Lucy's passing it seems James needed a woman to care for the home. The nature of their relationship is unclear, but the McCumpsey family would live with the Lemmons for the

¹⁶ Grabow, "Brief Biography of James Hervey Lemmon," 75.

¹⁷ *Lemmon Tribune*, 17 February 1927 "Blizzard of 1873."

next three years.¹⁸ Ed quickly became friends with Tom McCumpsey, who was the same age, and they spent a great deal of time working with the Church Island horses.

According to Ed, “these horses were hot-blooded stock bred for cavalry horses on which to mount troopers.” Since the Mormons had isolated them on Church Island, they became wild and somewhat inbred, which reduced their size to that of a medium-sized horse. The animals were very fast and when Hervey and Ed worked for Iliff in 1870, the brothers had attempted to make them into roping and cutting horses.¹⁹

Although roping and cutting were both done on horseback, they were very different activities that required two different types of horses. When roping during a roundup a cowboy would throw the noose of his lariat around a calf’s neck then quickly wrap the slack end around the saddle horn, a maneuver called “dallying.” With the rope secured, the cowboy would turn his horse and drag the calf to the branding fire. Cowboys often roped large calves and unbranded mavericks out on the range as well. Since four-year-old beeves could weigh more than 1,000 pounds, a heavy roping horse with a broad chest and wide hips could absorb the jolt when a running half-ton steer reached the end of the cowboy’s thirty-foot line.

In contrast, cutting horses were generally smaller, narrower-fronted animals built for speed and agility rather than strength and stability. A cutting horse’s job was to remove, or cut out, an animal from a larger group of cattle without using a rope. The rider and his horse used proper positioning to drive the animal to a particular location, rather than roping and pulling it. Cutting was utilized when cowboys needed to move a number of animals rapidly, without having to “work” each individual animal. This was

¹⁸ *BFB*, 25 January 1935.

¹⁹ *BFB*, 7 January 1938.

especially true when large herds needed to be sorted by brand. This meant cutting horses could be lighter—which made them quicker and more nimble—than roping horses.

Cowboys riding cutting horses would sort and drive branded cattle to pre-determined locations where the animals could be gathered for return to their home ranges. When Ed selected his cutting mounts he knew exactly the type of animal he wanted. The “most durable cutting horses were narrow breasted and flat limbed, especially the hind limbs,” because “a good cutting horse stops on [its] hind legs, which takes off the jar on both horse and rider.” He liked horses with front ends so narrow it seemed that “both legs [were] coming out of one hole.”²⁰

Ed also preferred narrow-fronted horses because he thought they aged well and held their flesh during long winters on the range better than their broad-chested counterparts. Cutting horses had a propensity to “stiffen up” in the shoulders when they reached fifteen to twenty years old and during the winter Ed employed a technique called “roweling” to keep them limber for the spring roundups. To “rowel” a horse Ed used a sharp knife to make two parallel incisions in the horse’s shoulder. He would then carefully insert the knife blade just beneath the hide between the two incisions, to separate it from the muscle underneath. Within the two slits he would tie a braid of rope or horsehair so the cuts would remain open throughout the winter, allowing the impurities to leach out.²¹

When training cutting horses, some cowboys preferred to give them a loose rein, thereby allowing the horse the ability to select how it would move and react to an animal during pursuit. Ed emphatically dismissed this approach, arguing that “I think I can

²⁰ WSA, Vol. 10, p. 1; *BFB*, 21 February 1936; and WSA, Vol. 13, p. 10.

²¹ WSA, Vol. 10, pp. 1-2 and WSA, Vol. 13, p. 10.

anticipate the next move of a cow better than any horse.” He further contended that “a horse working on a loose rein . . . covers a wider swath than a stiff reined horse” and tends to “stir up” cattle in a roundup, making them nervous and more difficult to handle. His “stiff reined” method was less stressful to the cattle and thus he was able to cut more animals than other cowboys. A few years later he would cut 900 head in a single day, a statistic that suggests his progressive, efficient methods were successful. Given his skill in handling cattle, Ed’s stiff-reined approach served him well, but for the average cowboy, whose ability to anticipate the movements of cattle was not as acute, giving a horse its head (using a loose rein) was probably more effective.²²

Unfortunately for the Lemmons, the Church Island horses were not well-suited to either cutting or roping and they “never had a one of the breed that made what we termed a cutting or cow pony.” They made fine courier horses, however, and Ed rode these small horses while traveling his mail routes. They were “the cream of the region for go-getters” and their speed was such that Ed could even run down antelope on them.²³ James knew an opportunity when he saw one and since the Church Island horses were not suitable for cow ponies he used them as racers. Throughout the mid-1870s James traveled around the region with these horses, competing in match races and at local fairs. Tom McCumpsey often accompanied James and served as jockey. James’ horses were moderately successful and may have been the mounts renowned female racer Minnie Pinneo used during her races in the eastern United States and Europe.²⁴

²² WSA, Vol. 13, p. 10.

²³ *BFB*, 7 January 1938.

²⁴ *BFB*, 18 January 1935 and Grabow, “Brief Biography of James Hervey Lemmon,” 65.

In the summer of 1874 Ed had the first of two accidents that would change his life forever. While trailing a wild Lawhorn and Hardigan cow in south-central Nebraska, Ed's horse fell, pinning him underneath. The horse's weight crushed his right leg "from knee to thigh, the break cropping out [of the skin] in two places." As a result of this severe compound fracture, Ed was bedfast for four months and on crutches for a year and a half.²⁵ He was only seventeen years old and might have made a complete recovery if not for a similar accident the following year, when he broke the same leg a second time. On this occasion Ed and Tom were racing their horses behind a herd of cattle moving toward a night corral when their youthful exuberance got the better of them. Sixty years later in an article titled "More Bitter With The Sweet" Ed described how it happened:

Tom was riding a young mare half broken, and with my bridle, while I rode with [just a] rope around my 1,200-pound mount's nose, and after running about 200 yards, both flew the track, which was a wagon road, each bolting outward . . . [and] as we pulled them inward, they clashed together with terrific force, piling Tom's mount up to a heap and killing my mount on the spot . . . [the horse] crushing my partially healed leg in similar manner as the year before and rendering me unconscious for an hour, [after] which I was rendered a cripple for life, for besides the breaks, rheumatism set in, drawing my defective leg all out of shape.²⁶

Healing the injuries sustained in this second accident took several months and gave Ed ample time to reflect on his life and his new situation. He must have known the injury would be permanent, and coming to terms with this realization probably took some time. The Lemmon family had a history of taking adversity in stride—Ute Metcalf's theft of James' money cost him much of the freighting enterprise he had worked for years to build, as well as the use of his left index finger, but he rebuilt his business; after the

²⁵ *BFB*, 16 February 1934; WSA, Vol. 13, p. 5; and "Fifty-Three Years of Open Range Cattle Handling," Ed Texley Collection, George E. Lemmon Papers.

²⁶ *BFB*, 16 February 1934.

loss of Liberty Farm to Benjamin Royce, the Lemmons started again on a new homestead—and likewise Ed did not wallow in misfortune. The incident changed the course of his entire life, but the impact was not all negative; although he likely would not have agreed, his crippled leg probably made him a better cowboy.

Ed's inattention and recklessness had cost him the use of one leg and necessitated a change in how he sat in the saddle, but the accident also made him more mature. He knew the challenges life could present and made a concerted effort to overcome them. Ed did not seek pity and would not accept charity. He understood that he had to work harder to match the physical capabilities of other cowboys and demonstrate competency in specialized areas—like castrating calves—in order to earn his place; and he embraced the challenge. Standing less than five and a half feet, weighing under 150 pounds and lacking full use of his right leg, Ed's physical limitations also pushed him to seek more efficient methods for completing assigned tasks. He was intelligent and in future years would excel at finding new and better ways for guiding trail drives, branding cattle, staving off stampedes, leading men and holding roundups. This knack for finding efficiency in every aspect of cattle handling would earn him widespread admiration among cattlemen. As Ed gained experience he became even more adept in these areas; so adept that he was recognized by his peers as among the best in the world.

* * * * *

By 1876—the year Charles Goodnight settled in the Texas Panhandle, the centennial of the Declaration of Independence and the year historian Dee Brown called “The Year of the Century”—the Lemmon brothers had begun to establish themselves in various

trades.²⁷ Hervey had been trailing cattle in Texas since 1870; Ed worked as a courier and cowboy in Nebraska; and Moroni sought freighting opportunities in the Black Hills of Dakota Territory. By the time Jack McCall shot Wild Bill Hickok in Deadwood on August 2, Moroni had already made a significant profit freighting goods and supplies for the miners in the area's various gold camps, not unlike his father had done during the 1849 California gold rush.²⁸

The early development of the Black Hills began with an 1874 military expedition led by George Armstrong Custer. In July, General Phillip H. Sheridan ordered Lieutenant Colonel Custer to travel from Fort Abraham Lincoln (near present-day Bismarck, North Dakota) south to the Black Hills to look for a suitable route through the region, scout potential locations for a military outpost and investigate the opportunities for gold mining. Custer was to travel to Bear Butte near the Belle Fourche River, collect as much information as possible and return to Fort Lincoln by August 30.

For centuries the Black Hills had been a sacred place for many plains Indians, who used the land the Lakotas called *Paha Sapa* to conduct religious ceremonies, gather medicines, cut lodge poles and shelter themselves from the harsh plains winters. Lakotas thought they had secured permanent title to their sacred lands in the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie, which included the Black Hills as part of the Great Sioux Reservation. This tract of land covered the entire western half of modern-day South Dakota and was set aside for the exclusive use of the Sioux. The treaty had ended Red Cloud's War, a two-year conflict between whites and Cheyennes and Lakotas for control of the Powder River

²⁷ Haley, *Charles Goodnight*, 188, 280 and Dee Brown, *The Year of the Century: 1876* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966).

²⁸ Yost, *Boss Cowman*, 80; Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 127-128; and Watson Parker, *Deadwood: The Golden Years* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981).

country in central Wyoming. In signing the treaty the Indians made their feelings clear—any reservation must include the Black Hills. Rumors of rich gold deposits threatened to render the treaty's terms irrelevant, however, as did the U.S. army's desire to establish an outpost to protect white settlers and control the Indians. The 1874 expedition made an unambiguous statement: the United States planned to change the terms of the deal it had made six years earlier.²⁹

Custer's expedition was large and well equipped. In addition to more than 1,000 soldiers, Indian scouts, scientists, photographers, miners and newspaper correspondents, Custer's assembly included a brass band, artillery pieces, 110 wagons and 300 head of cattle. George Bird Grinnell, who would later earn fame as an author, historian and wildlife conservationist, served as naturalist for the expedition. In late July two civilian prospectors, Horatio N. Ross and W. T. McKay, discovered traces of gold in a southern Black Hills stream. As the expedition began its return journey on August 15, word began to spread about the existence of gold in the Black Hills. Within weeks news of the discovery had reached the pages of eastern newspapers. By the end of 1874 hundreds of white prospectors had found their way into the sacred hills of the Great Sioux Reservation.³⁰

At first the army made a show of preventing white encroachment into the area by removing dozens of miners from the region. The Sioux also tried to protect their land by sending Chiefs Red Cloud, Spotted Tail and Lone Horn to meet with President Ulysses S.

²⁹ Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: The Illustrated Edition: An Indian History of the American West* (New York: Sterling Publishing Company, 2009), 143-168; 307-364 and Jill St. Germain, *Indian Treaty-Making Policy in the United States and Canada, 1867-1877* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001).

³⁰ Herbert S. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, Fourth Edition, Revised John E. Miller (Pierre, SD: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2004), 126-130.

Grant in Washington, D.C. But their efforts were unsuccessful and the federal government showed little desire to try to stem the tide of white fortune-seekers entering the area. President Grant had determined that the military should not continue to resist further occupation of the Black Hills by the miners, as such attempts only exacerbated the situation. In 1875 the U.S. government offered to purchase the Black Hills for \$6 million. The Sioux refused. When whites continued to arrive, Lakotas, Cheyennes and others met this encroachment with force. The conflict that followed, known as the Great Sioux War, featured the June 1876 Battle of the Little Bighorn, in which Custer and most of the 7th Cavalry were killed; the death of famous Sioux warrior Crazy Horse at Camp Robinson, Nebraska, on September 5, 1877; and the U.S. government carving out a large piece of land, including the Black Hills, from the Great Sioux Reservation.³¹

While Moroni sought his fortune in the Black Hills, Ed remained in Thayer County, Nebraska, for the rest of 1876. But when spring came, he and Tom McCumpsey—who had become too heavy to serve as James’ racehorse jockey—left for the town of Ogallala to find work as full-time cowboys.³² Ogallala was a major cattle shipping point in the Great Plains, sending more than 175,000 cattle to market in both 1875 and 1876.³³ With dozens of cattle operations in the area the young men soon earned positions with a large outfit, the Sheidley Cattle Company, managed by Dave Clark. The Sheidley brothers—Ben, George and William—had been involved in the livestock business since the end of the Civil War and owned large herds of cattle, sheep and horses.

³¹ Ibid., 130-139; Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 307-364; Paul L. Hedren, Editor, *The Great Sioux War, 1876-1877* (Helena, MT: Montana Historical Society Press, 1991), 8-21; Jill St. Germain, *Broken Treaties: United States and Canadian Relations with the Lakota and the Plains Cree, 1868-1885* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 257-286; and *United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians*, 448 U.S. 371 (1980).

³² *BFB*, 25 January 1935.

³³ Yost, *Call of the Range*, 54-56.

They owned or controlled land in Texas and Nebraska, had built a large mansion in downtown Kansas City where they based their operation and were involved in a number of other business and real estate ventures. Clark, just nineteen years old in 1877, was “a handsome man and good mixer, with a finished education and weighing about 240.”³⁴ He hailed from the Sheidley’s hometown of Tiffin, Ohio, and showed tremendous skill as a cattleman and leader of men. During the 1870s the Sheidley Company drove more than 32,000 cattle north from Texas and operated a large ranch near the forks of the Platte River in western Nebraska.³⁵

Tom soon soured over “punching cows” and returned home, but Ed thrived as a cowboy. He participated in his first large-scale roundup during the spring of 1877 and soon earned the respect of his superiors. In June he bossed his first cattle drive. The Sheidley brothers loaned Ed’s services to a friend and fellow cattleman, “Major” Seth Mabry, who had contracted to provide beef to soldiers stationed in the Black Hills.³⁶ At just a month over twenty years old—one of the youngest cowboys in the outfit—Lemmon was selected to lead a three-man crew on a 160-mile drive from the North Platte River in western Nebraska to a soldier’s camp in the Black Hills. Though all he had to go by was a crude map sent by the troop commander, which showed the location to be somewhere in the southwestern Black Hills, Lemmon managed to find the camp “without encountering a single Indian or other obstruction.” After the Lieutenant in charge finished counting the cattle, he asked who was responsible for the herd. When the other

³⁴ *BFB*, 6 October 1933.

³⁵ Yost, *Call of the Range*, 67; Howard Smith and Ann Harry, *The Trail of the Sheidley Cattle Company: An account of cattle ranching on the Western Plains in the era of the open range—and wealth therefrom* (Tiffin, OH: Herald Printing Company, Inc., 2002); and *BFB*, 5 May 1934.

³⁶ Smith and Harry, *Trail of the Sheidley Cattle Company*, 24 and Yost, *Call of the Range*, 94-95.

cowboys pointed out the small, boyish, crippled Lemmon, the officer looked him up and down and remarked that “it was a damn shame to place a stripling of a boy in charge of such a precarious undertaking.” Lemmon’s men seemed proud of their young leader’s abilities and came to his defense, saying “if you would just follow him on a long difficult ride and try to lose him on a dark night, or fool him about the habits of these northern Indians, you would soon change your mind.”³⁷

Ed’s successful trail drive established him as a competent and trustworthy employee, but he remained on the lower rungs of the Sheidley Company hierarchy. In western Nebraska during the 1870s, the range was not owned by any single individual or company, but each cattle outfit had clear boundaries that neighboring ranches respected. Like many cowboys, Ed worked as a line-rider, following the edges of the Sheidley Company range to keep their cattle from straying onto land controlled by adjacent ranches and to keep other cattle off the Sheidley range. He also watched for rustlers, shot or ran off wolves and coyotes that would prey on weak cattle or calves, rounded-up stray cattle and trailed them to locations with ample grass for grazing. Line-riding was essential to maintaining order on the open range where the cattlemen, not law enforcement, set the rules.

According to Ed, the “code of the open range usually was very strictly observed” and cattle outfits rarely placed livestock on land not under their control (i.e. drove them onto another outfit’s range to “steal” their grass).³⁸ On the established ranges of public land the terms of this gentlemen’s agreement only extended to white, large-scale cattle ranchers in good standing with other cattlemen. Ranchers with less than a few hundred

³⁷ *BFB*, 19 February 1937; *WSA*, Vol. 10, pp. 5-6; and Yost, *Boss Cowman*, 86-88.

³⁸ *WSA*, Vol. 2, p. 1.

head, Indians, newcomers and sheepmen—who were almost universally detested by cattlemen and regarded as inferior—were not covered by the terms of this unwritten code. Cattle ranchers tended to dislike shepherds out of, as historian Richard Slatta phrased it, “equal parts prejudice and belief in the destructiveness of grazing sheep.” Cattlemen believed that sheep grazed prairie grasses too close to the ground, reducing the range’s ability to re-grow the following year. Racial prejudice may also have been a factor, since many of the sheepmen were Hispanic or Basque. In addition, since some shepherds did not tend their flocks on horseback, cowboys—who rode so often they practically slept in the saddle—continued the longstanding superiority a mounted man felt over a man afoot.³⁹ Ed may have felt superior to the sheepmen, but as a young, low-ranking cowboy he followed orders and honed his skills. He worked hard and earned about a dollar per day for his labors. Although the pay was low, each day on the range brought a new adventure and he thoroughly enjoyed the excitement and uncertainty of being a cowboy.

A number of writers have described the boredom and loneliness cowboys experienced while tending the same cattle over the same country on the same horse day after day.⁴⁰ This sentiment extended to cattlemen as well; even renowned trailblazer Charles Goodnight commented on the “monotony of the range.”⁴¹ While some cowboys may have thought their tasks tedious, Ed thrived in such conditions. His clear preference for life in cow camp rather than in town—or even in his own home—had a negative effect on his future relationships with his wives, but was a key factor in his successful

³⁹ Richard Slatta, *Cowboys of the Americas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 186.

⁴⁰ For a few examples see Sara R. Massey, Editor, *Black Cowboys of Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2005), 183-184; 200-202; Philip Durham and Everett L. Jones, *The Negro Cowboys* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 43; C. L. Sonnichsen, *Cowboys and Cattle Kings: Life on the Range Today* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), 88; and James K. Folsom, Editor, *The Western: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1979), 19.

⁴¹ Haley, *Charles Goodnight*, 249.

career. A cowboy's work might change little from day to day, but the natural environment—weather, season of the year, terrain and wild animals—made each day different from the previous one. Ed wrote dozens of stories about incidents on the range, including his occupation's hazards and opportunities. In one colorful story, Ed recalled a run-in with a badger:

When I hired out to the Sheidley Brothers, near Ogallala, Nebr., on the Platte River in 1877, with Dave Clark, manager, they were furnishing saddles if desired. In addition to the saddles there were many harnesses to oil. Badger oil was excellent for the purpose, so Dave gave it out that he would pay us boys one dollar for each badger we would kill and render the oil from. Since we were then only getting thirty dollars per month, every added dollar was a temptation, especially as it was gotten on company time, so we were all on the look-out for badgers.

My duties at the time of this happening was as line rider between the Sheidley cattle and the neighboring outfit, west, known as the 100 outfit as that was their brand. One day, as I was out on my line, I espied a very large badger some distance away and rode for him, but, before I could reach him, he was partially down a hole which he evidently had hurriedly sought. It was a tight squeeze for him and he was just about one-half down when I jumped from my horse and grabbed him by both legs and gave a great heave. Out he popped, and I whirled him in the air, turning him over completely once. As he left my hands, I pulled my six-shooter, and as he came up facing me, I let drive, hitting him as square in the brain as one could have stuck one's finger. He fell stone dead on my toes, but he had made his grab and his dying teeth stripped the whole front top of patent leather from my boot and he still retained it in his teeth. The act from the time he plopped from the hole couldn't have been more than three seconds. This is what in 'western gun vernacular' would be called in the 'split second.'⁴²

Ed was proud of his accurate shot and no doubt appreciated the additional dollar for his pay, especially since the badger had ruined a boot in the process. In later years he recalled such incidents with fondness, but at the time of his encounter with the badger his low wages rendered him among the lowest-paid of the Sheidley employees. He soon sought greater opportunities elsewhere.

⁴² WSA, Vol. 3, p. 3.

When the Sheidley Company cut its payrolls for the winter months of 1877 Ed was among those left without a job. Using a skeleton crew during the winter was standard procedure for most open range cattle outfits. A company's range grasses could not be injured by another outfit's cattle because the cold weather made the plants dormant; new grass would grow when the weather warmed in the spring. This meant cattle companies were unconcerned where their cattle roamed, so employing line riders was an unnecessary expense. Likewise, most of a cowboy's other responsibilities—branding, castrating, driving cattle to railroad heads, etc.—only occurred during the warmer months. Most cattlemen avoided shipping their animals to slaughter in Chicago and elsewhere during the wintertime in part because the cattle were much lighter due to “shrinkage” (the additional energy they expended to keep warm and the increased difficulty in finding adequate forage). This meant cattlemen had fewer pounds of flesh to sell and thus, lower profits.

After collecting his wages Ed returned to his father's home in Thayer County to spend the holidays. In the spring of 1878 Ed hired out to the 100 Cattle Company, whose range ran adjacent to the Sheidley Company holdings. The manager of the 100 outfit, George Green, was also from the Sheidley brothers' hometown of Tiffin, Ohio, and based his operations about thirty-five miles northeast of Sidney along Rush Creek, near the present-day town of Lisco, Nebraska. The 100 consisted of about 4,000 head and was the first cattle ranch on Rush Creek.⁴³ Ed worked for Green throughout 1878 and impressed him enough that when the 100 cut employees for the winter Ed managed to keep his job. During those months his duties ranged from tending horses to cooking meals. Despite

⁴³ *BFB* 6 April 1934; Yost, *Call of the Range*, 86, 136; and Smith and Harry, *Trail of the Sheidley Cattle Company*, 6, 30, 32, 34.

the dangers of the open range in wintertime, the domestic duties could prove more hazardous; Ed narrowly escaped a gunfight—over a dirty dish towel.

One day a heavily scarred middle-aged man with “a keen piercing eye and a nerve as steady as clockwork” called Red River Red

came to our ranch . . . on foot hunting a job. At the time the cattle were turned to the four winds to flutter until the coming spring roundups, and the ranch force was cut to the ranch owner (one Geo. Green) and myself, for he only had about 3,800 cattle, and as there was splendid sand stone building material in a bluff near our pole stable, over which a strong spring gushed forth, and building logs were scarce, George was desirous of building a stone stable, at which Red said he was an expert. So George took him on for the special job. As I positively refused to milk, George always did the milking, while I [made] breakfast and supper, and dinner was gotten by whoever was on the ground first. As at that time cowmen lived almost exclusively on beef, it was usual to use bacon only for bean seasoning, but Red expressed his preference for bacon for breakfast, and as he had arrived at rather the peevish age we somewhat catered to his wants. I prided myself on keeping the kitchen and cooking paraphernalia in neatness, especially the drying cloths.

But one morning I forgot to fry his bacon and he rather peevishly jumped up, grabbing the slab of bacon and knife and slicing half a dozen slices of bacon, he had previously slammed the skillet on the stove rather far back and when he had the bacon ready he grabbed the drying cloth instead of the dish rag with which to handle to hot receptacle. When I drew his attention to the fact . . . he flared up, saying he would not be dictated to by me.

The discussion between Ed and Red continued to escalate over breakfast and “finally our epithets grew so heated we both started to draw our six-shooters, but soon we observed the muzzle of [a] Winchester [rifle] weaving back and forth between us, in the hands of Green, who said very convincingly that if there was any shooting to be done on the ranch he would do it.”⁴⁴ The confrontation ended without incident.

Ed may have exasperated his boss with an armed defense of his organizational methods, but this systematic attention to detail was an inherent part of his personality and

⁴⁴ *BFB* 21 September 1934.

played an important role in his development as a cowboy and cattleman. Ed was neat, organized and very particular about certain things, including the type and style of horses he preferred for roping and cutting.⁴⁵ He adamantly refused to perform some chores, such as milking the cow, yet this stubborn streak did not overtake his ability to reason in difficult situations. Although Ed often proved unwilling to back down from a confrontation, he would choose peace over violence when given the chance. He and Red parted on good terms, just as he would with most men with whom he had disagreements. This ability to move beyond quarrels and petty arguments without holding a grudge had important ramifications for his success as a cattleman because the men he employed always received a fresh slate after making mistakes. Ed did not forget their transgressions, but he did not overreact to them either. His innate ability to get along with a broad spectrum of personalities made a lasting impression on his employers and proved popular with his employees when Ed became a boss himself.

A few weeks later Red left the 100 Cattle Company, Green headed east with a shipment of cattle for market, leaving Ed in charge of the ranch. Green planned to spend the rest of the winter in his hometown in Ohio, which he had not visited in over thirty years. This gave Ed his first opportunity to manage a cattle outfit. His “management” responsibilities were limited since the cattle were out on the range and his main occupation consisted of tending to the horses. But life on the open range was unpredictable and his tenure was not without incident. While trailing horses one day he got caught in a blizzard almost ten miles from the ranch house. Before the blowing snow and strong winds cut all visibility, he managed to find shelter in a deep canyon filled with

⁴⁵ For examples, see WSA, Vol. 7, p. 3; WSA, Vol. 11, pp. 12 & 17; and WSA, Vol. 13, p. 10.

small trees suitable for firewood. Ed had plenty of matches, but only his chaps, a light overcoat and a dirty saddle blanket for protection from the elements. For three days he managed to keep a fire going, but could not sleep because “the cold was so intense the outer side of my person from the fire would freeze in short order” and he had to continuously adjust his position. He tried making two fires in order to warm himself enough to sleep, but “the canyon was sharp bottomed [and] the wind current would whip sparks and smoke over me.” When the fierce storm finally broke, he made his way back to the house and treated himself to a well-deserved eighteen-hour nap.⁴⁶

Ed proved a capable manager of the 100 ranch. On one occasion his caution and foresight saved the ranch’s horses from theft, even though other area outfits lost dozens to Indian raids. A group of Northern Cheyennes, led by Chiefs Dull Knife and Little Wolf, had fled Indian Territory for their ancestral homes in Wyoming and Montana because they were homesick, starving and dying of disease under the care of the federal government. By the time the group reached Nebraska—a trek of 500 miles—they were cold, hungry and ill-clothed for the cold winter weather on the northern Great Plains. While Dull Knife took most of the women and children to surrender, Little Wolf pressed on with thirty to forty men. Throughout western Nebraska in late 1878 he and his warriors raided white ranchers for fresh mounts to resume their flight. Ed knew they were in the area, for “it was an advertised fact that Little Wolf was almost nightly raiding the country for horses,” and wisely staked the 100 outfit’s horses in deep draws close to the ranch where they were less likely to be seen or heard. One night a group of Indians stole twenty-three horses from several neighboring cowboys who had stopped at the 100

⁴⁶ *BFB*, 12 April 1935.

ranch for the night. The horses were picketed only seventy-five yards from the cabin, but Ed's skillful planning ensured that none of the 100's horses were missing.⁴⁷

When Green returned to the ranch in the spring of 1879 he acknowledged Ed's reliability and aptitude by assigning him a task only given to the most trusted men in any cattle outfit—the roundup representative. This job, known as “repping,” meant “to be sent to a neighboring cow outfit or roundup to gather the stray cattle of his respective outfit.”⁴⁸ A rep made sure cattle carrying certain brands were returned to their home ranges, so they were not blended into herds owned by other cattlemen. The rep had a great deal of responsibility because the annual spring roundups determined the number of cattle each outfit owned. Since the business of cattle ranching depended on an accurate count of beeves to ship to eastern markets, aside from the managers and bosses, reps were among a cattle outfit's best-paid men.

Spring cattle roundups were large, colorful affairs that included scores of cowboys and could last two months or more. During a typical roundup on the northern Great Plains, cowboys gathered at a designated location and spread out in all directions, collecting every animal they came across—regardless of brand—and driving them to a central collection point. As the cattle were brought in cowboys rode around the herd constantly, singing to keep them calm. When night came each man took a two-to-four hour shift as a night guard, while a skilled cowboy called a nighthawk cared for the horses. According to Ed, when daybreak came the first act was to cut the branded cows with their new calves from the main herd and into separate collection points for each

⁴⁷ Joe Starita, *The Dull Knives of Pine Ridge: A Lakota Odyssey* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 40-55; *BFB*, 19 August 1932; *BFB*, 23 September 1932; and *BFB*, 2 December 1938.

⁴⁸ *BFB*, 28 October 1938.

cattle outfit. This ensured that when further cutting of other branded animals commenced the pairs would not be split apart. Keeping pairs together was important because the calves should receive the same hot-iron brand as their mothers. After separating the cows and calves, cowboys began to cut out the remaining animals by their brands, taking cattle from smaller outfits and leaving animals from the brand with the greatest number, which was usually the owner of the range where the roundup was held. By cutting branded cattle from the smaller outfits out of the larger group, the cowboys saved a great deal of work. That way they handled fewer animals and the remaining cattle would likely stay on the roundup range throughout the summer. Following each roundup the crews would move on to the next one until the entire region's cattle had been gathered, sorted, cleaned of strays and the calves castrated and branded.⁴⁹

During his first experience as a rep in 1879, Ed was responsible for cattle from a number of other outfits in addition to the 100 Cattle Company. His obligations included gathering cattle for the 100, the Sheidley Cattle Company, Walworth Brothers, Paxton and Ware, the Bosler Brothers and Keith & Barton. To make his job even more complicated, several of these outfits had more than one brand. As Ed later recalled, since it was his first time repping and he had so many brands to keep track of, he “deemed it necessary to have all brands I was gathering stamped on a wide leather hat band, that encircled my ten dollar Stetson, and if the brands had been in variegated colors, as I broke a rise I would have presented the appearance of a rainbow breaking over the horizon.” As he prepared to leave Ed chose a string of four horses and prepared the rest of his equipment, which included “two soldier blankets and a strip of wagon sheet to

⁴⁹ BBB, 23 July 1937; *BFB*, 28 October 1938; and Slatta, *Cowboys of the Americas*, 68-74.

wrap the blankets in, a war-bag [made] of a seamless sack in which was enclosed one clean shirt, one pair of socks, one change of underwear and four pair of rawhide hobbles, to be placed on my four horses when not picketed to insure [*sic*] them staying put nights.” As Ed continued his career this equipment would be his standard outfitting for spring and summer work. When he moved to ranges farther north, he supplemented his war-bag with a thick blanket, extra socks, a heavy overcoat and warmer underwear.⁵⁰

Ed excelled at repping, as he did almost every other task involving cattle. Despite his inexperience and the large number of brands he had to recognize and cut accordingly, his “untiring mien,” “ability of defining directions either day or night” and obvious cattle-handling skills drew the attention of several company managers. A few offered him work with their outfits, but he turned them all down. After finishing his repping responsibilities, Ed stayed on with the 100 ranch for the rest of 1879, but continued to entertain job offers. When winter arrived the twenty-two-year-old quit the 100 and once again left for his father’s home in Thayer County, where he mulled over employment opportunities with three different cattle companies. It took Ed two months to decide, but when he came back to work in early 1880 he took a position with a familiar outfit—the Sheidley Cattle Company. Ed’s return marked the beginning of a twenty-seven-year association with the Sheidleys. This relationship proved lucrative for both parties, with their early success largely a result of trespassing on Indian lands.⁵¹

⁵⁰ *BFB*, 28 October 1938.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Chapter IV: Trespasser

Over the course of his career with the Sheidley Cattle Company Ed Lemmon benefitted from good wages and eventually an ownership stake, while the Sheidley brothers received the services of an outstanding cattleman and natural leader. In addition to sound ownership and good on-the-ground management, the Sheidley Company's considerable success (and Ed's as well) depended on another ingredient—Indian lands. During the 1880s the company grazed thousands of cattle in western Dakota Territory, many of them on Sioux land. In fact, the operation owed a great deal of its success to illegal grazing on the Great Sioux Reservation.¹

The Sheidley Company's illegal use of the reservation as grazing lands was not unheard of, as several companies ran cattle on land that belonged to the Lakota people. The interaction between large-scale ranchers like Ed Lemmon and the Indians of the Great Sioux Reservation played an integral part of the development of the range cattle industry in the northern Great Plains. The opportunities afforded by illegal grazing also led many ranchers to support, rather than oppose, the reservation system.

It is often taken as fact that ranchers sought to expel Indians from their lands as a matter of principle and profit. Hollywood has long depicted Indians as a hindrance to progress, a challenge white men embraced as a ticket to manhood. Yet while many whites saw Indians as just another obstacle—not unlike the northern Great Plains' frigid winters or lack of rainfall—some large-scale ranchers, such as Ed Lemmon and others at the Sheidley Company, looked on Indians (and their land) as an opportunity. These

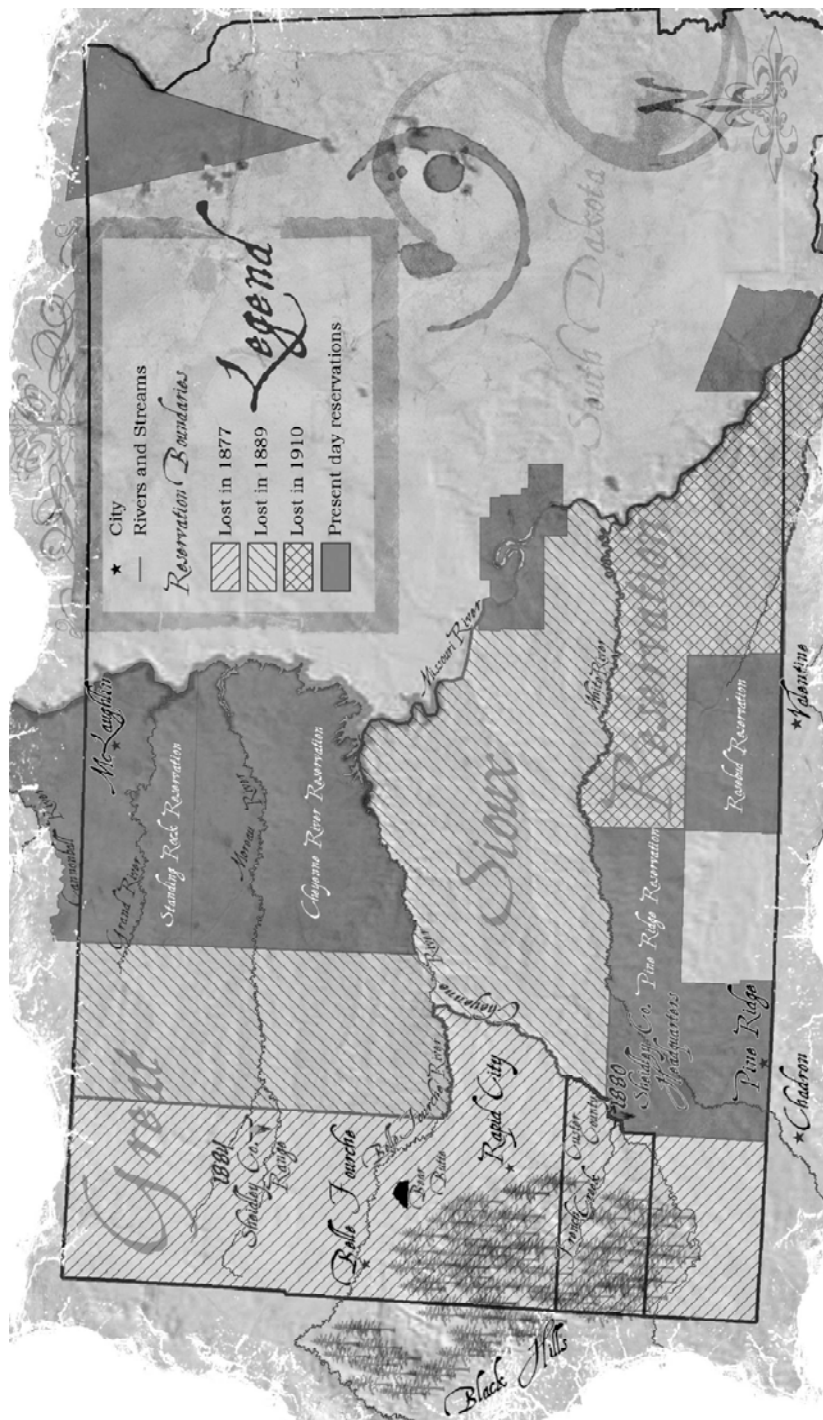
¹ Portions of this chapter appeared in Nathan Sanderson, "We Were All Trespassers: George Edward Lemmon, Anglo-American Cattle Ranching, and the Great Sioux Reservation," *Agricultural History* Vo. 85, No. 1 (Winter 2011), 50-71.

opportunists supported Indian reservations in furtherance of the prospect that they could use those lands to make a profit. Indeed, the interest white cattlemen took in the Great Sioux Reservation was based on financial concerns, not goodwill, and most ranchers had little desire to see Indians prosper as a people. The cattlemen who practiced illegal grazing simply had a vested interest in ensuring their own ability to use reservation lands.²

On February 28, 1877, in the midst of the Great Sioux War, the U.S. government signed an agreement with the Sioux, Northern Arapaho and Cheyenne which deeded the

² A number of historians have noted the connection between cattle ranchers and Indian reservations in the northern Great Plains, but few have examined the role of illegal grazing before the General Allotment Act of 1887. In *When Indians Became Cowboys*, Peter Iverson argues that “Obviously, other forces helped fuel the effort to defeat the Indians and confine them to reservations. However, especially in the northern plains, cattlemen played a major role in this process.” Iverson focuses on Indian efforts to start cattle herds of their own and centers his examination in the twentieth century, after the Dawes Act and other legislation had taken a heavy toll on Indian lands. Jeffrey Ostler in *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* touches on the impact of illegal grazing, noting that in 1887 Indians on the Rosebud Reservation in Dakota Territory tried to prevent white trespassing because the Indians needed the range to graze their own horses and cattle. But, Ostler’s excellent work says little about grazing in the early 1880s. Stuart Banner’s recent book, *How the Indians Lost Their Land*, has a chapter on the 1887 General Allotment Act which describes how whites used the guise of protecting Indians from trespassers as a reason for Allotment. Banner notes that one of the criticisms of Reservations lodged by white reformers was that they “left the Indians too vulnerable to having their land expropriated” by whites, which provided an excuse to “divide the reservations into individually owned parcels.” By giving each Indian title to a designated piece of land, reformers felt that they could better protect Indian land rights. Of course, the “excess” land would then be available for settlement by whites. These and other histories have laid the groundwork for a study of illegal grazing on the Great Sioux Reservation in the pre-allotment era and add insight into this complex relationship. See Peter Iverson, *When Indians Became Cowboys: Native Peoples and Cattle Ranching in the American West* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 31; Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 140-141; and Stuart Banner, *How the Indians Lost their Land: Law and Power on the Frontier* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 267. For cattle grazing in western Dakota, see Bob Lee and Dick Williams, *Last Grass Frontier: The South Dakota Stock Grower Heritage* (Sturgis, SD: Black Hills Publishers, 1964). There are a number of monographs concerning the 1887 Dawes Act, including D. S. Otis, *The Dawes Act and the Allotment of Indians Lands* (Norman, OK: Oklahoma University Press, 1973); Sister Mary Antonio Johnson, *Federal Relations with the Great Sioux Indians of South Dakota, 1887-1933, with particular reference to land policy under the Dawes Act* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1948); and Wilcomb E. Washburn, *The Assault on Indian Tribalism: The General Allotment Law (Dawes Act) of 1887* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1975). For an excellent look into white efforts at assimilation, see Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2001). For detailed study of Indian land policy, see Janet A. McDowell, *The Dispossession of the American Indian, 1887-1934* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1991).

Figure 4.1. The Reorganization of the Great Sioux Reservation, 1868-Present.



Source: Christopher Marsh, South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks.

Black Hills to the United States and reorganized the boundaries of the Great Sioux Reservation. The “new” reservation extended from the Missouri River on the east to the 103rd meridian on the west (except for the Black Hills region, which included the land west of the Belle Fourche and Cheyenne rivers) and from the Nebraska border on the south to the Cannonball River on the north.³

The opening of the Black Hills to white settlement brought hordes of gold miners, freighters, settlers and soldiers into the area, but these were not the only new arrivals. The growing population needed a ready supply of beef and cattle ranchers quickly stepped in to provide it. Cattlemen capitalized on the Black Hills’ excellent grass valleys and established large-scale cattle operations in western Dakota Territory. Antoine and Nicholas Janis, brothers who had worked as traders in Wyoming Territory and served as interpreters during the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie negotiations, were among the first to bring cattle into the Black Hills. Dozens of other outfits followed, including the Matador, Diamond A, Turkey Track, BXB, VVV, Diamond M and the Sheidley Cattle Company.⁴

Although they had enjoyed considerable financial success in Nebraska, in 1880 the Sheidley brothers sought even greater opportunities in Dakota Territory, which encompassed the present-day states of North and South Dakota. Early that year they created a new entity, D. H. Clark & Company, a cattle outfit not directly associated with the Sheidley Company’s other interests. Managed by Clark, this business would be the “silent” Dakota branch of the Sheidley empire. Clark & Company records would not be part of the Sheidley Company’s official business and all transactions would be handled

³ *Act of February 28, 1877*, as printed in Edward Lazarus, *Black Hills, White Justice: The Sioux Nation Versus the United States, 1775 to the Present* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), Appendix B, 451.

⁴ Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 23 and *BFB*, 3 March 1933.

by an outside party. This new entity would provide the means for the Sheidley brothers to protect themselves while illegally grazing cattle on the Great Sioux Reservation. Some cattle remained in Nebraska and were identified with the Sheidley Company's traditional OSO brand, while most were sent north to graze the Dakota range under a new brand, the Flying V. Clark hired Ed as his range manager and made preparations to move a portion of the Sheidley Company's cattle into Dakota Territory.⁵

In July 1880 Clark and Lemmon cut out 2,800 head of two and three-year-old cattle from the Sheidley's large Platte River herd and headed north to a new range in the southern Black Hills. Clark selected the trail route while Ed, as his right-hand man, supervised the cowboys. Their responsibilities were not fixed and the two enjoyed a close working relationship. Clark and Lemmon were both in their early twenties, had years of experience working cattle and respected and trusted each other. In the coming years Clark would often leave for weeks at a time while conducting business in Rapid City, Belle Fourche and other towns. He served as president of the Black Hills Stock Growers Association, was a roundup foreman and member of the Wyoming Stock Growers Association, managed a wholesale and retail meat market in Rapid City and in 1888 was elected that city's mayor.⁶ In Clark's absence Ed was in charge. He saw the Flying V as "his" outfit and managed it accordingly; even though he did not become a full-fledged partner until 1891, Ed took ownership in the operation. On the initial drive into Dakota Territory in 1880 Clark and Lemmon steered their herd to the Cheyenne

⁵ Smith and Harry, *Trail of the Sheidley Cattle Company*, 1-36; Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 106-108; and *BFB*, 5 May 1934.

⁶ Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 76-98 and Smith and Harry, *Trail of the Sheidley Cattle Company*, 147.

River without incident and set up company headquarters north of the river near the mouth of French Creek.⁷

They turned the cattle loose on the open range north of the Cheyenne, which marked the boundary between U.S. government land and the Great Sioux Reservation. Within days some of the cattle had re-crossed the river (it was only a few feet deep) and began grazing on Sioux land. This development did not bother either man in the least. In fact, it was probably part of Clark's strategy from the start. While other cattle companies competed for grazing land on the Black Hills range, Flying V cattle roamed the "untouched" reservation. Because the reservation was supposed to be off limits to white ranchers, this land received very little grazing pressure since most cattlemen chose to avoid the potential legal problems of unauthorized reservation access by running their cattle on non-reservation government land west of the 103rd meridian. Cattlemen were unclear exactly what the ramifications of getting caught grazing illegally could be, but large-scale operators were the primary trespassers because they controlled large expanses of territory and thousands of cattle, so they could readily claim their animals grazed on the reservation by happenstance. Small operators did not have this luxury, nor the political connections to avoid prosecution for their crimes should they get caught. In addition, the reservation had almost no natural competition for the grass—outside of a few pronghorn antelope and the occasional mountain sheep—since most of the bison that had once grazed the area had moved to less occupied areas or been slaughtered.⁸

⁷ Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 93-170.

⁸ Andrew Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 140-143; White, "It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own," 216-220; and Pekka Hämäläinen, "The Rise and Fall of Plains Indian Horse Cultures," *The Journal of American History* Vol. 90, No. 3 (Dec., 2003), 844-845.

The reservation land was far better than the Sheidley Company's Nebraska range and Ed considered it "the first prime beef range I had ever seen." The needlegrass plains of southern Dakota Territory featured a different grassland ecology than the shortgrass prairies of western Nebraska. The Dakota prairies contained a broader range of grasses that provided much better forage for livestock. The presence of taller, more voluminous grasses such as little bluestem allowed cattlemen to stock the ranges with more animals per acre than farther south, while succulent plants like threadleaf sedge and needleleaf sedge proved more palatable to the cattle.⁹ In addition, the terrain south of the Cheyenne River featured a number of wide, deep draws that offered excellent protection during the bitter winter months. With the reservation's "virgin" grass, ample winter forage and natural shelter in mind, Clark located their headquarters on the free government land available across the river from the western border of the Great Sioux Reservation. Ed later referred to Clark as "the very best picker of ranges of any man that I ever knew," a statement that suggests his selection of reservation lands for grazing was hardly an accident.¹⁰

This strategy may also explain why the Sheidley brothers created D. H. Clark & Company in the first place. By creating a "silent" entity in Clark's name, with substitute management and different cattle brands, the Sheidleys insulated themselves from legal issues that might arise from trespassing on the reservation. As respected members of the Kansas City business community they had a vested interest in avoiding legal troubles. In his numerous articles and reminiscences Ed often stated that he was always a Sheidley

⁹ James R. Johnson and Gary E. Larson, *Grassland Plants of South Dakota and the Northern Great Plains* (Brookings, SD: South Dakota State University Agricultural Experiment Station, 2007), 10-13.

¹⁰ *BFB*, 26 May 1933.

employee, even when working for Clark & Company. Clark must have understood the arrangement, because he participated in every aspect of the venture. He probably accepted this personal risk as payment to the Sheidley brothers (along with part of the profits) for bankrolling the operation. At only twenty-five, Clark had no capital to begin a herd of his own and no collateral for the Sheidleys to loan him the money to support such a venture. Clark made a simple decision: he traded the threat of potential legal problems for the opportunity to start his own cattle business.¹¹

Years later Ed described the operation in detail and explained how the parties justified their actions. The Sioux, being legally bound to stay within the confines of the reservation, kept the land “pretty well skinned of game, all excepting the wily mountain sheep that abounds in the badlands.” Since they regularly camped near the Cheyenne River “it was very tempting to cross over to the north where both deer and antelope were in vast numbers. Upon such occasions as the Indians slipped off the reservation, say a mile or two, they did not care to be seen and reported to the [Indian agent] for disobedience of rules,” so they tried to avoid contact with the cowboys. While Clark handled his management responsibilities from the operation’s main headquarters, Ed oversaw the range. His job that year

did not necessitate my coming in close proximity to their filched hunting grounds, for my job was line riding on a body of cattle that had been left on French Creek while two other riders, Sam Bell and John McNabb, rode line on the balance of the cattle along the river, presumably to keep them from ranging on the reservation only a short distance. So, one can readily see the Indians were not the only ones that were trespassing for our boys had no right on the reservation and neither did our cattle. So naturally, when the boys espied Indians, when throwing the cattle near the line or off

¹¹ Smith and Harry, *Trail of the Sheidley Cattle Company*, 36-38.

the reservation, they shied clear of them as much as possible, often hiding until the Indians passed from view . . . and vice-versa.¹²

According to Ed, since the Indians were trespassing on the U.S. government's land there was no reason why the cattlemen should not trespass on the reservation. He believed that if the cowboys kept quiet to the agent about Indians hunting north of the Cheyenne, the Sioux would not complain about cattle south of the river. In 1875 the Commissioner of Indian Affairs had announced that any Indians hunting on lands outside of the reservation would be considered "hostiles" and subject to military action.¹³ This served as strong motivation for Lakotas to avoid being reported to the agent. In the coming years Ed's relationship with Oglala Sioux chiefs Red Cloud and Young Man Afraid of His Horses would further ensure that this understanding remained in place.

Lemmon's use of the term "filched" suggests that he and Clark understood they were breaking the law, but in their view, since each party looked the other way when they saw trespassers there was no reason to stop. Within a short time Clark & Company started trailing more cattle from Nebraska into Dakota. In August 1880 they brought up 1,800 yearling steers and later that fall trailed in more than 1,000 cows with calves. Although the subsequent winter caused substantial losses—Ed held that "the winter of 1880-81 was the hardest we, the Sheidley Cattle Company . . . ever encountered," with an estimated fifty percent loss on yearlings and twenty percent on two-year-olds—still their venture began to take off.¹⁴ By placing cattle on the protected range of the Great Sioux Reservation, Clark managed to save most of his herd from the devastating winter

¹² "My First Arrival on the Cheyenne River With Range Cattle, 1880," Ed Texley Collection, George E. Lemmon Papers and *BFB*, 18 November 1932.

¹³ *United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians*, 448 U.S. 371 (1980).

¹⁴ *BFB*, 26 May 1933. Lemmon considered this winter even worse than 1886-1887.

weather. He also found excellent grazing lands that offered huge potential for stocking cattle. Flying V cattle remained on reservation lands for most of the decade.

From Ed's perspective, the Oglala Sioux and the Indian agent at the Pine Ridge Agency, Dr. Valentine T. McGillicuddy, were willing to overlook this encroachment.

He claimed that

the doctor and I soon became fast friends, so much so that he, together with Chief Red Cloud, advised me to come and go on their reservation very much as I pleased, with the proviso from Old Red, as we called him, that I treat him and his sub-chiefs hospitably while rounding up on their domain, which I of course did by saving all lump-jaws [cattle unsuitable for market] for them, besides feeding them sumptuously when they came to our camp and mess wagon, sometimes half a dozen composed of Old Red and . . . [his] leading sub-chiefs, even accompanying [us] through the whole round-up of a week or ten days . . . [But] we were at all times grazing on their reservation and grasses nearly if not quite ten thousand cattle. I believe I was absolutely the only cow-man allowed to come and go over the reservation as I pleased.¹⁵

Ed estimated that throughout the 1880s “nearly, if not quite, two-thirds of our cattle were at all times trespassing on the Pine Ridge Reservation,” yet “during this period I never had any reason to believe [the Sioux] butchered a single beef animal . . . or in any manner pilfered even the smallest article.” He attributed this situation to his practice of treating the Indians with “liberality.” In addition to Red Cloud and his “sub-chiefs,” Young Man Afraid of His Horses, also a respected chief of the Oglalas, and his band would often set up camp near the Flying V headquarters. On such occasions *Huste*—as many of the Oglala Sioux, including Red Cloud, called Lemmon—would “put on a big pot of beans and another of beef” and invite them to supper. He and his cowboys would eat, talk and trade with the Sioux, which helped ease relations between them. This amicable interaction convinced Ed that the Indians did not have strong objections to whites grazing

¹⁵ *BFB*, 22 June 1939.

the reservation. In his estimation they “never really figured I was sponging that grass” because he was getting it in exchange for “good treatment of the border settler Indians.”¹⁶

His policy of liberality apparently worked because Lemmon noted that after a single run-in with an Indian hunter in 1880, “this was the last Indian scare we had until the Great Sioux Uprising the fall and winter of 1890-91.”¹⁷ In 1879 McGillicuddy had instructed the Pine Ridge Indians to put the agency’s FOF brand—which he registered with the Wyoming Stock Growers Association that year—on any stray cattle found on the reservation, but he did little about animals already wearing a brand.¹⁸ In his 1881 report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, McGillicuddy made light of illegal grazing, noting only that “many stray animals belonging to the stockmen have been picked up on the Indians’ land and returned to the rightful owners by the Indian police and individual Indians.”¹⁹

His report for 1882 demonstrated more concern for protecting white stockmen from Indians killing their animals than preventing illegal cattle from grazing on the reservation. McGillicuddy wrote, “No crimes have been committed on the reserve and no depredations of any kind have been committed on neighboring settlers or stockmen off the reserve.”²⁰ A year later he said nothing about illegal grazing at all, but pointed out the Indians’ ambivalence to stock-raising. “Under the nonsensical treaties at present in

¹⁶ *BFB*, 26 August 1932 and *BFB*, 13 January 1933.

¹⁷ “My First Arrival on the Cheyenne River With Range Cattle, 1880,” Ed Texley Collection, George E. Lemmon Papers and *BFB*, 18 November 1932.

¹⁸ Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 75.

¹⁹ United States. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Year 1881* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1881), 45.

²⁰ United States. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Year 1882* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1882), 35.

force,” he wrote, “these people are guaranteed plenty of beef to eat, whether they work or not, so what earthly object has an Indian in going to the trouble and labor of raising beef? The consequence is that he either permits his cows and bulls to stray off or eats them.”²¹ McGillicuddy’s apparent lack of concern over illegal grazing probably contributed to Ed’s characterization of him as “the best Indian agent ever, excepting Colonel J. H. McLaughlin, of the Standing Rock.”²² McGillicuddy may have been a better agent than McLaughlin, but in 1902 the latter would support Lemmon’s bid for a lease of more than 800,000 acres on the Standing Rock Reservation, so Lemmon’s views probably held more than a little bias.

The Indians’ lack of opposition to Clark & Company’s illegal grazing was not solely due to handouts of food. The same practices agents touted as detrimental to the Indians’ advancement toward civilization—a belief in community, shared property and common-use practices—also extended to the open range.²³ As Janet McDowell noted in *The Dispossession of the American Indian*, Indians “did not regard land as real estate to be bought, sold, and developed. Rather they valued it for the things it produced that sustained life.”²⁴ The Sioux were not using the grass for their own livestock; consequently, so they saw little reason to prevent others from doing so. Some of the Oglala Sioux may have objected to white trespassers, but the cattlemen continued the practice anyway. Since they faced no legal repercussions and the Indians did not attempt

²¹ United States. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Year 1883* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1883), 35.

²² *BFB*, 22 June 1939.

²³ The strong sense of community among Indians has been demonstrated in numerous works. For Indian agents’ views on the “problems” associated with Indian society, see United States. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior*, 1881-1889.

²⁴ McDowell, *The Dispossession of the American Indian*, 1.

to quell their actions with violence, in the pre-allotment era white ranchers operated as if this was something Indians and the Indian agent would allow. The Sioux were not treating their own land like private property, so white ranchers did not treat it like private property either.

Historian Peter Iverson has argued that white encroachment forced Indians to forge a new identity through the creation of a new society based on cattle ranching.²⁵ This “new society” may have emerged in the twentieth century, but it had not yet developed by the early 1880s. As Red Cloud told McGillicuddy, the “white man can work if he wants to, but the Great Spirit did not make us to work. The white man owes us a living for the lands he has taken from us.”²⁶ Thus, white cattlemen operated on the range with little fear of reproach. They may have been “buoyed by their own needs and their own cultural assumptions” as Iverson contends, but his statement that “these intruders hardly ever seemed to recognize that they were, in fact, intruding” is inaccurate.²⁷ Cattlemen like Ed Lemmon may not have appreciated the full social and cultural implications of their actions, but they knew perfectly well that they were trespassing on Indian lands—they simply did not care.

After Clark & Company used the Great Sioux Reservation’s grass to feed its cattle the animals were sold to reservation agencies, which distributed the beef in fulfillment of the “nonsensical treaties” McGillicuddy opposed. In August 1881 Ed bossed one of many trail drives to Indian agencies when he guided a herd of 738 cattle to

²⁵ Iverson, *When Indians Became Cowboys*, 52.

²⁶ Julia B. McGillicuddy, *McGillicuddy Agent: A Biography of Dr. Valentine T. McGillicuddy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1941), 103.

²⁷ Iverson, *When Indians Became Cowboys*, 28. Indians near the Rosebud Agency started to oppose illegal grazing as early as 1887. See Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism*, 140.

a location on Oak Creek, near the present site of McLaughlin, South Dakota. This 180-mile cattle drive was a “hurry-up call for beef to supply the Sitting Bull Indians,” who had recently surrendered after a five-year exile in Canada.²⁸ The herd was comprised of cattle from three outfits, the Sheidley Cattle Company (acting as Clark & Company), the W. B. Grimes Company and Stearns & Patterson. Ed’s use of three sources in gathering a herd of 700-plus head for the “hurry-up call” suggests that they were not alone in tapping the reservation’s readily-available resources.²⁹

In 1882 after just two years of grazing the reservation, Clark shifted course and sought to end his company’s illegal activities by acquiring a lease on the Great Sioux Reservation. He and other Black Hills cattlemen proposed legally opening the reservation for cattle grazing because they believed it would encourage railroads to construct new lines into the region, bringing further economic prosperity. It seems the cattlemen also thought they could acquire long-term leases—perhaps up to a decade or more—which would secure their ability to continue utilizing the land for years to come. In addition, Ben, George and William Sheidley dissolved D. H. Clark & Company that year and reorganized all of their livestock holdings as the Sheidley Cattle Company. It is unclear exactly why the Sheidley brothers restructured their operation, but it appears that after Clark’s initial success (and a lack of government intervention in their illegal operation) the push for legal grazing leases would be better served with the backing of an influential, large-scale operator like the Sheidley Company.³⁰

²⁸ David G. McCrady, *Living With Strangers: The Nineteenth-Century Sioux and the Canadian-American Borderlands* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

²⁹ *BFB*, 11 November 1932.

³⁰ Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 128-129.

With the entire business again under the family name, the brothers looked to find a legal way to access the reservation and attract railroad companies, a development that could dramatically increase the marketing opportunities for their livestock.³¹ Clark, then president of the Black Hills Stock Growers Association, joined a number of other large operators in proposing to open the Great Sioux Reservation for grazing. Their plan called for grazing leases only, with no possibility that the land would be opened for settlement. Agent McGillicuddy and agent Leonard Love of the Cheyenne River Agency favored the plan, which the Stock Growers presented to Richard F. Pettigrew, Dakota Territory's delegate to the U.S. House of Representatives. Although he pledged support for the measure at first, opposition by businessmen, settlers and small cattle ranchers forced him to reconsider.³²

Most residents of the Black Hills opposed grazing leases because they wanted the Great Sioux Reservation opened for settlement. Many whites believed that "growth was being restricted by the existence of the big reservation" and leases would prolong its presence. Although opinions on the issue varied greatly, small cattle producers tended to oppose leases as well because their chance of actually acquiring them was slim when bidding against operations with thousands of cattle. This strong opposition killed the proposal and Clark and Ed continued to illegally graze the reservation as before.

The cattlemen's attempts to acquire legal grazing probably did them more harm than good in the long run. They sought to prevent the opening of the Great Sioux Reservation to white settlement, but as Bob Lee and Dick Williams noted in *The Last*

³¹ Smith and Harry, *Trail of the Sheidley Cattle Company*, 69 and Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 108.

³² Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 133-141.

Grass Frontier, their efforts “hastened the eventual opening of the coveted country. It had alerted the people of the [Black] Hills to the possibilities of the surplus reservation lands and it had incited them to vigorous action that brought on extinguishment of the Indian title that the cattlemen wanted too.”³³ Their quest to attract a railroad and utilize the land through legal—rather than illegal—means hastened the end of unlawful grazing on the reservation.

Although a number of livestock companies took advantage of the opportunity to graze the Great Sioux Reservation and competition over choice ranges or mavericks (unbranded cattle) often created disputes between outfits, violent confrontations among white ranchers were minimal. Even sheep ranchers, whom many cattlemen looked upon with scorn, were not molested while grazing on the reservation. Ed explained the reason for this lack of conflict: “The Sheidley Cattle Co., or Lake, Tomb & Lemmon, of which I was manager for many years never openly placed a straw in the path of sheep,” he stated, “for as we looked at it we were all trespassers, and one had as good a right as the other.”³⁴ A bloody disturbance on the reservation would have drawn attention to their illegal activities and the cattlemen and sheepmen understood this well enough to leave petty disputes to ranges on non-reservation land.

Grazing thousands of cattle on reservation land may have been illegal, but efforts by white cattlemen and agency officials to cheat the Sioux out of their beef ration were far more detrimental to the tribe. Several decades later Lemmon described how the system was designed to work in the cattleman’s favor and illustrated the ways unscrupulous men manipulated it. The Pine Ridge Agency—named after the long string

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ *BFB*, 17 April 1936.

of evergreen trees growing atop a nearby escarpment—in the southwest portion of the Great Sioux Reservation generally purchased about 5,000 head of 900-pound steers each fall to distribute among the Indians. The cattle were issued throughout the year based on each animal's weight at the time of receiving. When the agents distributed the animals during the winter, however, they did not account for the “shrink” (loss of weight during the cold months), which reduced each Indian's ration considerably. By the time the final steers were issued in the spring, most weighed 150 pounds less than when purchased.³⁵

The flawed system denied the Indians their full ration during the time of year when they needed it most, but the cattlemen tried to gain an even greater advantage by working together to cheat the Indians. As one of the conspirators later confessed, “everyone made what he could and kept quiet about the other fellow.”³⁶ Ed noted that there was usually some method used at the weighing pens to “bolster up the weights considerable. On one particular occasion it was found there had been, by night presumably, a trench dug under the plank runway by the side of the chute and scales, into which a man crawled before the weighing began.” Using an improvised lever, the man increased each animal's weight as it stood on the scale. He released the pressure as soon as the scale was empty, leaving it in balance. Thus, the animal's actual weight was less than the scale's reading, which cut into each Indian's ration even more.³⁷

Other methods were employed to cheat the system. In 1877 while Ed was working for Seth Mabry's outfit, the stock scales at the Red Cloud Agency “mysteriously” burned down. This situation forced the agency's receiver to accept the

³⁵ *BFB*, 26 August 1932.

³⁶ Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 26.

³⁷ *BFB*, 26 August 1932. On other occasions, nuts were loosened so that the scales would read heavier weights. See Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 25.

herd based on its average weight per animal, which was usually between 850 and 1,000 pounds. To determine this average the contract boss, Bill Campbell, selected the largest steer from his herd while the receiver chose the smallest. These two animals were weighed and the average was used as the weight for every animal in the herd. On the surface this method seemed fair, but Mabry's outfit held a decided advantage. They had a large 1,200-pound steer that somehow managed to be included in all of the company's deliveries that summer. Ed noted that "it is plain to see how he brings the average up." He also pointed out that attempts were made to disguise the animal and thus the fraud. "First he was issued with a full set of horns, next he had quite a tip off his horn, which would change his appearance quite considerable, next he had a portion of both horns off, and next one horn entirely missing, and lastly a perfect muley. I, as merely a cowboy, was not let into the secret of how this stag came to be gotten back and issued five times, but I had my suspicions . . ." ³⁸

Lemmon, writing years after these events, demonstrated genuine sympathy for the Indians. He may have felt guilt at the time as well, but business trumped all other considerations and one man could not stand up against a system designed for the Indians' exploitation. The cattlemen who sold beef to the agencies stood together, even in their dishonesty, and did whatever was necessary to earn what they could. Ed saw a clear distinction between outright corruption—manipulating the livestock scales, re-selling the same steer multiple times, issuing cattle without factoring in shrinkage—and trespassing on the reservation. From his perspective trespassing did not defraud the Indians of

³⁸ *BFB*, 26 August 1932 and Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 377-378. In Burdick's account, Lemmon suggests that the large steer was returned to the company by an Indian accomplice, who brought him back before every issue.

anything because the Indians themselves did not value the land in the same way they did their beef rations. Grazing on the Great Sioux Reservation was technically illegal, but he viewed it as preventing waste, not stealing. For Lemmon the difference was stark: depriving the Indians of their beef ration was morally wrong because they wanted and needed it; depriving the Indians of their grass was not immoral because they did not seem to want or need it. As such, even though he may have had qualms about some of the practices at the weighing pens, Ed had no problem using the reservation to graze his cattle. In 1884 Dave Clark's decision to operate on the Great Sioux Reservation proved a worthwhile venture yet again, when county taxes came due.

The Sheidley Cattle Company had expanded considerably since first arriving in Dakota Territory in 1880. It had sold most of its Nebraska ranges to Alex Swan in 1883 and moved the rest of its cattle into Dakota Territory. Also that year Clark purchased 5,350 head from Texas ranchers for \$147,000 and 9,000 more from the Grimes and Thornton Company for \$160,000.³⁹ With several thousand cattle already grazing on the Great Sioux Reservation, Clark needed additional acres for his growing herd. In 1884 they moved 10,000 head north to a new range on non-reservation government land along the Moreau River near the boundary between present-day Harding and Butte counties in northwest South Dakota, leaving the balance on their traditional ranges in the southern Black Hills. The cattle grazed on a vast swath of the range, including parts of present-day North Dakota.⁴⁰

³⁹ Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 108 and Sheidley Family Papers, Betsey Sheidley Fletcher Collection, Mission Hills, Kansas, "Swan Brothers & Frank to William Sheidly [sic]," 14 December 1883.

⁴⁰ Yost, *Boss Cowman*, 213 and Faith Historical Committee, *Faith Country Heritage*, 278, 715.

After just four years in Dakota the Sheidley Cattle Company—with Dave Clark as general manager and Ed Lemmon as range manager—had one of the territory’s largest herds. It also had a steep tax bill. In 1883, the year the railroads implemented standardized time zones across the United States and Canada, Custer County placed an assessed value of \$100,000 on Sheidley Company holdings. The company had headquartered there since it arrived in 1880 and the bulk of its assessment was livestock. The following year the county estimated its value at \$124,000. Apparently the county assessor noticed the increase in Clark’s cattle numbers and raised his taxes accordingly. Yet even though their overall herd had grown considerably in 1884, most of the new cattle were 140 miles north on the Moreau River range, far beyond the boundaries of Custer County and not subject to its taxes. The number of animals in the county had remained about the same and Clark considered the tax assessment too high. He filed an injunction against the collection of the company’s 1884 taxes until he could meet with the county commissioners. Clark argued that Custer County had no standing to assess his holdings at that level because most of the assessed cattle were not in the county—they were across the river on the Great Sioux Reservation. The county could not charge them for property outside its boundaries, he argued, so his liability should be reduced. The county commissioners agreed and Clark’s 1884 tax assessment dropped to \$25,275.⁴¹

* * * * *

During the 1880s grazing on the reservation was a near-ideal situation for white cattlemen. By running their herds on Sioux land, Clark and Ed had an excellent cattle range, a ready market for their beef and could avoid paying taxes at the same time. But

⁴¹ Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 108.

while Agent McGillicuddy remained unconcerned about illegal grazing, some of the Indians at Pine Ridge began to show their displeasure. His 1884 report stated (apparently without irony) that “there have been a few instances where evil-disposed Indians have, out of spite or revenge, maimed or killed their neighbors' cattle, but a prompt incarceration in the agency guard-house at hard labor is rapidly teaching them a respect for other people's property.” Despite these few unpleasant instances, McGillicuddy contended that during the annual roundup “the Pine Ridge Indian now works in company with the stockmen of Nebraska and the Black Hills, assisting each other in gathering and returning their strays, so that where a few years ago each party preyed on the others' horses and cattle, now the most amicable feeling prevails.” According to McGillicuddy “the Indian is welcome in the settler's house, while the settler is welcomed when visiting the reservation on business or pleasure. As the future of the Indian will be his gradual adoption of the white man's ways and absorption into the general mixed population of the country, their friendly and neighborly intercourse should be encouraged.”⁴²

The relationship between white “neighbors” and the Oglala Sioux who lived near the Pine Ridge Agency was probably not as rosy as McGillicuddy described and the assertion that “the most amicable feeling prevails” was a stretch. For white cattlemen with large herds, however, the overall lack of action by the Indian agent and the absence of any substantial opposition by the Indians themselves served as silent endorsement of illegal grazing. The Indians' perspective on illegal grazing was irrelevant, so far as the cattlemen were concerned, as long as they did not start killing cattle or cowboys. A lost

⁴² United States. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Year 1884* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1884), 37-38.

steer or two would do little to deter ambitious men like Dave Clark and Ed Lemmon and without any strong opposition white ranchers would continue trespassing as long as they could.

While Lemmon spent his twenties expanding his knowledge of the business side of open range cattle ranching, he also began to hone his skill in managing cowboys. In the mid-1880s after the Sheidley Company took control of several smaller outfits, the Flying V inherited a number of cowboys, four of whom were top cowhands, but very “independent men.” The man Clark initially selected to lead this group, Hugh Adair, could not control them so Clark asked Ed to take the men into his crew, one by one, until he had them all. Ed had acquired a reputation as a popular manager; his obvious cattle-handling skill, love of story-telling, competence in difficult situations and ability to overcome his physical infirmities earned him widespread respect. His four new cowboys were wild and unruly when they reached town, drinking, shooting and riding their horses on sidewalks and into saloons, but “oh, my, what cow punchers they were!” Ed let local law enforcement handle them when they reached city limits, but kept the four raucous cowboys under control while in camp. This cracker-jack gang may have caused trouble for sheriffs in Valentine, Chadron, Ogallala and other railroad towns where the Flying V shipped cattle, but “they didn’t know what the word ‘quit’ meant” and after Ed got them trained properly, “they needed practically no bossing.” Eventually these new cowboys joined four of Ed’s established crew in a top-notch unit he called my “eight killers.” They received their strange moniker at a roundup on Hat Creek in present-day Fall River County, South Dakota, where they showcased their incredible skills. When the main roundup boss came out to check brands on the Flying V cattle, Ed told his crew to cut the

herd of 2,500 head “into five equal bunches and in so doing, slip through them carefully so as not to cut the cows away from the calves, and place them on that level spot in a circular position.” The men completed the order to the letter in less than twenty-five minutes, causing the boss to remark, “Ed, how in hell do you get such results out of that bunch of killers?” He responded that it required “no effort at all, for they knew my methods.”⁴³

Such was Ed Lemmon’s style of management. He had a systematic approach to cattle handling, taught it to his men, then stood back and let them work. Although he probably would not have appreciated the analogy, Lemmon orchestrated men like a symphony conductor, pushing each individual to use his own talents for the good of the whole. The ability to sort 100 head per minute with an eight-man crew took equal measures of individual skill and group cohesiveness; Ed’s cowboys demonstrated this high level of proficiency on several occasions. He may have urged people “not to judge me by [the behavior of] my cowboy crews” while in town, but knew how to motivate and inspire his employees.⁴⁴ In this, Ed’s inherent understanding of cattle and horse behavior also seemed to extend to people. Rather than trying to change his crews, he sought to mold them into the best they could be by harnessing their natural abilities. Lemmon did not rein them in to the point of rebellion, nor did he allow them to operate independently. He taught his men to work together and follow orders while bringing out the qualities that made them excel at working cattle. Much like the spirited horses in his remuda, the men of Ed’s “killer” crew were headstrong and determined. His ability to tame them made Lemmon an unusually effective boss.

⁴³ *BFB*, 5 April 1935.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Strong cowboy crews were essential for the Sheidley Cattle Company in the mid-1880s because the Flying V outfit continued to expand. By 1885 the company had at least 30,000 head on ranges spread over hundreds of square miles.⁴⁵ Ed was a key contributor to their success, but he also spent time attending to other issues. From 1884-1885 he served as a commissioner of Fall River County, his election likely supported by “many of the pioneer cattlemen” who afterward “considered Mr. Lemmon to be the best and most capable cattleman who ever lived in southwestern Dakota.” In 1886 his oldest brother Hervey died of injuries sustained in a riding accident. And later that year Ed married sixteen-year-old Bertha Reno in a small ceremony in Buffalo Gap, Dakota Territory.⁴⁶

The exact cause of Hervey’s death is unclear. In late 1885 or early 1886 he was thrown from a horse and likely sustained internal injuries in the process. He sought a cure at the Hot Springs in Arkansas and spent two months there in mid-1886, but saw little improvement. After lingering for several months, Hervey eventually passed away on August 20, 1886. Following his death the Lemmon family buried Hervey next to his mother Lucy in the Oak Grove Cemetery in Nuckolls County, Nebraska, which overlooked the Little Blue River.⁴⁷

Since Ed’s earliest years Hervey had been his best friend and hero. Ed idolized his brother and tried to emulate him in almost every respect. Hervey helped Ed get his first job working cattle on J.W. Iliff’s ranch and his cowboy career in Texas served as

⁴⁵ *BFB*, 23 June 1933 and Annie D. Tallent, *The Black Hills, or The Last Hunting Ground of the Dakotahs* (St. Louis: Nixon-Jones Printing Co., 1899), 685-686.

⁴⁶ August Schatz, *Longhorns Bring Culture* (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1961), 39; Grabow, “Brief Biography of James Hervey Lemmon,” 64-65; and Mrs. J. O. Bamble, “Tentative Biography of the Lemmon Family,” Lemmon Public Library, George E. Lemmon File.

⁴⁷ Hervey was survived by his wife, Elizabeth, whom he had married in 1878 and his only child, a seven-year-old daughter named Edna.

strong motivation for Ed to pursue similar work on the northern plains. Hervey participated in nearly every major event of Ed's young life and was doubtless his strongest role model. Both men had sustained severe injuries in accidents on horseback and it seems likely that Ed dwelled on the fact that he survived both of his close calls and Hervey did not. Although Ed had lost his mother several years earlier, Hervey's death was likely the first (and perhaps the only) loss that caused him deep emotional pain. He never wrote about it, instead choosing to honor Hervey's life and memory in dozens of stories dramatizing his bravery, cunning and unmatched frontier skills.

Hervey's passing may have been the impetus for Ed to marry as well. He and Bertha Reno wed on November 25, just three months after Hervey's death. Then twenty-nine, Ed was almost twice as old as his new bride and it appears their courtship was not lengthy. Indeed, Bertha was the same age Rosie Kelley had been when Ed saw her "perfectly tapered legs" in Cheyenne almost two decades before. Women seemed to find his humor and easy demeanor charming—at least, he made ready friends with a large number of women and mentioned them often in his reminiscences—so a teenager like Bertha could easily have been attracted to him, despite his short stature, baldness and crippled leg. Ed was not overly compassionate and was probably not a particularly loving or attentive husband. He once noted that love "is almost wholly out of my line" and given the thirteen-year age difference between them, Ed's marriage to Bertha was probably the result of physical attraction and convenience rather than mutual respect and love.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ *BFB*, 15 February 1935. The date of this article's publication—the day after St. Valentine's Day—may or may not be coincidence.

He very likely approached his relationship with Bertha in the same fashion as his relationship with his cowboys—as the boss he administered specific orders and expected their execution—a situation that, combined with the age difference and his indifferent attitude toward romance, almost surely led to their divorce twelve years later. Ed’s marriage did not alter his work habits much; he lived for working cattle and spent most of his time engaged in activities on the range. In future years he would display very little devotion to his wife, cavorting with “painted ladies” and pretty girls in cow towns throughout the region on numerous occasions.⁴⁹ The couple even took up residence at the headquarters of the Flying V outfit near the mouth of French Creek so Ed could remain close to his men. Hervey’s severe horseback riding accident may have caused Ed to think about his life and legacy. This fleeting sense of mortality probably played a role in his hasty decision to marry, because working cattle for the Flying V outfit continued to hold the greater portion of his attention.

His focus on business concerns became especially strong in 1887, when the Sheidley Company’s lucrative practice of grazing the Great Sioux Reservation was threatened by the passage of the General Allotment Act. This legislation, known as the Dawes Act after its key sponsor, Republican Senator Henry L. Dawes of Massachusetts, was an attempt to solve the “Indian problem”—defined as poor, savage, dependents living apart from “civilized” society—by replacing “tribal consciousness with an understanding of the value of private property.” Reservations would no longer be “owned” by the entire tribe; each individual or family would receive its own parcel of land—between forty and 160 acres—for farming or raising livestock. This “problem”

⁴⁹ For examples, see Burdick, *Range Cattle*, Chapter XII.

had festered in the minds of policymakers for years and the Dawes Act was touted as a forward step toward assimilating Indians into American society. The legislators who passed the Dawes Act also sought to save a great deal of money for the federal government and protect the Indians from whites, such as Clark and Lemmon, who took unfair advantage of their lands. In practice this law substantially reduced the size of the Great Sioux Reservation by opening “surplus” land for white settlement.⁵⁰

A major selling point for the Dawes Act was the perception that Indians were not properly utilizing their lands. Far too many acres sat idle in Indian hands while tens of thousands of whites were willing to “improve” the land and use it “properly.” As historian Frederick Hoxie argues in *A Final Promise*, one of Senator Dawes’ chief aims was “gaining entry to and reducing the size of tribal holdings.” Many whites who lived near the reservations saw them as a barrier to prosperity that hindered local economic development.⁵¹ Settlers, railroad executives, businessmen and politicians all clamored for Indian land and pushed to open the reservations up for settlement.

Not all whites supported opening the reservations, however, as the large-scale Black Hills cattlemen had demonstrated five years earlier. Hoxie points out that throughout the 1880s, “railroads with special privileges in the [Dakota] territory and cattlemen holding profitable leases joined the tribes in opposing the settler’s demands.”⁵² The Sheidleys did not have a lease for grazing on the Great Sioux Reservation, but their opposition to its opening was strong nevertheless. Unlike businessmen and potential homesteaders who saw Indians as a hindrance to progress, Clark and Lemmon saw

⁵⁰ McDowell, *The Dispossession of the American Indian*, 1 and Banner, *How the Indians Lost Their Land*, 257-258.

⁵¹ Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, 46-47.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 47.

Indians—or rather Indian lands—as the *key* to progress. Throwing open the reservation for settlement would be a disaster for their operation. The reservation contained thousands of acres they could access at virtually no expense, beyond wages and supplies for their cowboys. The permeable boundaries between the public domain and the reservation—often just a small stream or dry creekbed—offered a ready excuse when counties tried to assess “unfair” taxes on their herds.

White cattlemen had other reasons to preserve the Great Sioux Reservation. The close proximity to Indian agencies gave them access to a market without having to ship livestock to Chicago by rail. The Sheidley Company utilized the Chicago markets, but they had to trail thousands of cattle to shipping points on the Union Pacific Railroad at Ogallala, Nebraska, or on the Fremont, Elkhorn & Missouri Valley Railroad at Valentine or Chadron.⁵³ Selling cattle to Indian agents saved a great deal of time and effort and prevented shrinkage—weight lost during transport—which could cost the company a considerable amount.⁵⁴ Another advantage of selling to the agencies was the ease in which Indians could be cheated. Above all, the Great Sioux Reservation kept thousands of acres of open range free from white settlement. Without the “protection” of the reservation, cattlemen would be forced to compete with homesteaders for the opportunity

⁵³ Lemmon shipped from various points, including Ogallala, Valentine, and Chadron in Nebraska and Smithwick and Belle Fourche, Dakota Territory. See Smith and Harry, *Trail of the Sheidley Cattle Company*, 36-137 and Nebraska State Historical Society, Union Pacific Railroad Collection, MS 3761, SG2, series 1, box 28, “Union Pacific Railroad Freight Department Folder.”

⁵⁴ Shrinkage could have a tremendous affect on the weight and quality of the cattle, once they arrived in Chicago. In 1895, Lemmon chose to ship from Forest City, South Dakota rather than from Belle Fourche because the train ride for the cattle was 31 hours instead of 61. Cattle would gain weight, rather than lose it, when trailed properly, so it was better to trail them a longer distance to Forest City, which was on the east side of the Missouri River, rather than trail them the far shorter distance to Belle Fourche and keep them on the train for 30 additional hours. The cattle shipped from Forest City weighed, on average, 40 pounds more and earned \$0.20 more per hundredweight than earlier cattle shipped from Belle Fourche. See *BFB*, 1 April 1938.

to use the land. And given their failed attempt to acquire leases on the Great Sioux Reservation, the ranchers knew they could not win that battle long-term. The reservation provided a settlement-free haven they could use relatively undisturbed. Cattlemen in Dakota Territory were businessmen, first and foremost, and opening the reservation would reduce their profits.

When Congress finally passed the Dawes Act on February 8, 1887, it posed a threat to white ranchers illegally grazing the Great Sioux Reservation, but not the most significant one. The winter of 1886-1887 arrived in October and did not abate until late February. For most it was the worst winter they had ever seen. Fierce winds, bitter cold and heavy snows ravaged cattle throughout the ranges of the northern Great Plains, including those in Dakota Territory. For fifty-six days the temperature never rose above zero. “Thousands of cattle had already drifted in on the river,” cowman W. H. Hamilton wrote, “and they had nothing to eat except willows and young cottonwood. Before spring there was not a twig left within reach . . . range cattle began dying by the hundreds.”⁵⁵

The problem was exacerbated by the arrival of tens of thousands of cattle just before winter. In August 1886 President Grover Cleveland ordered more than 200,000 illegal cattle removed from Indian Territory in the southern plains; many of those animals appeared on the northern ranges that fall. These were joined by thousands more cattle driven up from Texas and other southern ranges, which had been ravaged by drought. The recent arrivals, underweight due to rapid travel and unused to the low temperatures of northern winters, fared poorly. Some cattlemen lost eighty to ninety percent of their herds. Others, including Theodore Roosevelt, lost more than their cattle—they lost their

⁵⁵ W. H. Hamilton, *Dakota: An Autobiography of a Cowboy* (Pierre, SD: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 1998), 35.

ranches as well. The hard winter on overstocked ranges claimed so many animals that it became known as the “Great Die-Up.”⁵⁶

While hundreds of thousands of beeves perished in Dakota Territory, the Sheidley Cattle Company managed to survive with fewer losses than the 1880-1881 winter. They had sold most of their young stock the previous fall, retaining only animals that had spent at least one winter in Dakota. In addition, Clark selected a protected winter range that had not been grazed during the summer. As a result of his planning and skill in choosing an adequate pasture, Clark and Lemmon had an above-average roundup, while many of their neighbors left the territory, never to return.⁵⁷

The passage of the Dawes Act and the severe winter of 1886-1887 forced Clark and Ed to reexamine their operation. A number of large cattle companies left Dakota for good that spring, freeing up thousands of acres of prime range in the northern Black Hills. The area north of Belle Fourche experienced a massive exodus as most outfits saw winter losses between eighty-five and ninety percent. Many cattlemen simply could not remain in business with such high losses. In addition, the government began taking an interest in illegal grazing on the reservations. The agent at the Cheyenne River Agency, Charles McChesney, threatened to forcibly remove all white cattlemen and their stock if they were still on the reservation after May 31. Other agents quickly followed suit. With huge expanses of grassland available farther north and the weight of the U.S. government

⁵⁶ Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 154-157; Edmund Morris, *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York: Modern Library Paperback Edition, 2001), 375-378; and Clyde A. Milner II and Carroll A O’Connor, *As Big As The West: The Pioneer Life of Granville Stuart* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 258-265.

⁵⁷ Smith and Harry, *Trail of the Sheidley Cattle Company*, 140-141 and *BFB*, 13 May 1938.

against them, Clark and Lemmon decided to move the bulk of the Flying V operation north to the Moreau River range they had begun to occupy three years earlier.⁵⁸

The success of the Sheidley Cattle Company's endeavors in Dakota Territory was largely the result of utilizing the Great Sioux Reservation to graze their cattle. Although Indians and whites had very different attitudes toward land use, in Ed's view the Indians did not mind having cattle on their land so there was no reason not to take advantage of the situation. Despite this, Lemmon conceded that "we, the cattle owners, [were] really contributing very little to the support of the country."⁵⁹ He and the other white cattlemen who trespassed on the Great Sioux Reservation did not advocate opening the territory for settlement, nor did they contribute to the Sioux Indians' welfare. They avoided paying taxes when they could, grazed the prairies to their breaking point and did their best to make a profit. These cattlemen were nineteenth-century businessmen who, much like the railroad robber-barons, extracted as much as they could for as long as they could and then moved on to—literally—greener pastures. Although the cattlemen did not actively facilitate the utilization of the country for others, they were the primary drivers in the development of the western portion of the northern Great Plains. Ed's participation in the region's progression would continue on an even larger scale in the coming years, when he would take a step not made by many men—leave the ranks of the cowboys and become a full-fledged business owner and cattleman.

⁵⁸ Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 154-161.

⁵⁹ *BFB*, 5 August 1938.

Chapter V: Roundup Boss

After joining the Sheidley Cattle Company for good in 1880, Ed Lemmon had risen through the ranks to become one of the outfit's most important cowboys. By the spring of 1888, a few months after the disastrous "children's blizzard" that killed more than one hundred schoolchildren in Dakota Territory and Nebraska, Ed was serving as the roundup boss, organizing the gathering of the company's Flying V cattle from their old grazing lands on the Cheyenne River and driving them to a new range based 140 miles north on the Moreau River.¹ Following the passage of the Dawes Act the previous year, the Flying V outfit had been moving its cattle off the Great Sioux Reservation—where they had been grazing illegally for seven years—and onto the federal government's open ranges in the Black Hills. The reservation had once provided cattlemen with thousands of acres of free grass, but when the Dawes Act opened it for settlement, the days of open range cattle grazing were numbered.

The dismantling of the Great Sioux Reservation did not bring about an immediate end to open range cattle ranching, nor did the arrival of Joseph F. Glidden's barbed wire in the 1880s.² In fact, despite historian Walter Prescott Webb's contention that the entire Great Plains region—from Texas to the Dakotas—shared a unique system of development due to its "geographic unity" (treelessness, levelness and semi-arid climate) combined with the arrival of the six-shooter, the windmill and barbed wire, in many

¹ David Laskin, *The Children's Blizzard* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004).

² Glidden, a native of DeKalb, Illinois, received a patent for barbed wire in 1874. David J. Wishart, Editor, *The Encyclopedia of the Great Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 35.

respects the development of the northern plains was different than on the southern plains.³

Following the Civil War cattlemen on the southern plains gathered herds of wild longhorns and drove them north to railheads in Kansas and elsewhere. The relatively mild winters made for moderate cattle losses, but encouraged the spread of diseases such as “Texas Fever,” a highly transmissible parasitic infection in cattle. This disease was carried by ticks and caused high fever, trembling and convulsions, lesions, paralysis, abortion in pregnant cows and often death. Missouri, Kansas, Arkansas and other states banned Texas cattle from entering their borders, due to the prevalence of Texas Fever. The problem would persist into the mid-twentieth century, when a federal eradication program finally managed to control the disease.⁴ The arrival of barbed wire on the southern plains caused the cattlemen to split into two rival factions—the “free grass” men versus the “big-pasture” or “fenced range” men. Barbed wire led to violent fence cutting wars in Texas and was the vanguard of what Webb called “the evolution of the range.” In his influential book *The Great Plains*, he outlined four stages involved in this transformation: 1) open range; 2) fenced range without windmills; 3) fenced range with windmills; and 4) farms. In addition to this new configuration Webb argued that the arrival of barbed wire forced cattle ranchers to operate under a system of fenced pastures, either leased or purchased; to improve their longhorn cattle with superior European breeds; to take a greater interest in the care of free range animals, particularly in winter;

³ Webb, *The Great Plains*.

⁴ Cynthia M. Kahn, Editor, *Merck Veterinary Manual, Ninth Edition*, (Whitehouse Station, NJ: Merck & Co., Inc., 2005), 749-764 and the Center for Food Safety and Public Security, “Rhipicephalus (Boophilus) Annulatus: Cattle Tick, Cattle Fever Tick, American Cattle Tick,” Iowa State University College of Veterinary Medicine, 2007).

and to accept the expansion of the railroads as the end of the trail drives. In short, he claimed that after 1885 ranching had been converted from “an adventure into a business.”⁵

Aside from the obvious differences affecting the development of the northern part of the Great Plains as opposed to the southern portion—the lack of a native cattle herd, which required all animals to be brought into the area; the delayed start of the cattle industry, which reduced the need for long trail drives because railroad shipping points were closer to the ranges; and especially the longer, colder winters which caused greater hardship for the cattle, but reduced disease—as the Sheidley Cattle Company demonstrated, many of the changes attributed to the expansion of barbed wire on the southern plains were already in place on the northern Great Plains prior to its widespread use.⁶ The Sheidley brothers’ decision to move their cattle operation from Nebraska to Dakota Territory in 1880 was, if nothing else, a business decision, not a fanciful adventure. Their selection of the fine grasses in Dakota and use of the Great Sioux Reservation for grazing was not arbitrary—it offered the best possibilities for making money. It also afforded a better opportunity to care for their cattle. Dave Clark’s selection of the deep, protected draws in and around the Cheyenne River proved valuable on several occasions, not the least of which was during the Great Die-Up of 1886-1887.

Moreover, as early as the 1870s the Sheidleys recognized the importance of cross breeding Texas longhorns with heavier-muscled (but more expensive and less hardy)

⁵ Webb, *The Great Plains*, 238-240 and Andrew R. Graybill, *Policing the Great Plains: Rangers, Mounties and the North American Frontier, 1875-1910* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 110-157.

⁶ For a detailed study of the development of western South Dakota after 1900, see Paula M. Nelson, *After the West was Won: Homesteaders and Town-Builders in Western South Dakota, 1900-1917* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1986).

English breeds, such as shorthorns or herefords, in order to produce a superior beef animal. While longhorns were cheap, they took a long time to fully develop (four years or more) and had very little muscling—some said they were all hide, horns and hooves. Historian J. Frank Dobie summed up the “heroic” longhorn in this way: “the Texas steer stood with his body tucked up to his flanks, his high shoulder-top sometimes thin enough to split a hailstone, his ribs flat, his length so frequently extended that his back swayed. Viewed from the side, his big frame would fool a novice into a ridiculous overestimate of his weight, but a rear view was likely to show cat hams, narrow hips, and a ridgepole kind of backbone. His bones appeared to be heavier than they actually were.”⁷ In an attempt to correct these deficiencies, in 1876 the Sheidleys purchased 900 shorthorn cattle, which they trailed to their Nebraska ranges and started to breed with longhorns brought up from Texas. By 1884 the Sheidley Cattle Company had shorthorn-longhorn cross steers that weighed between 1,000 and 1,300 pounds after just three years on the range—a significant improvement over the longhorn steers that took four years or more to weigh between 800 and 1,000 pounds.⁸

The Sheidleys had also recognized the value of leased land several years before the arrival of barbed wire. In 1882 they petitioned Territorial Delegate Richard Pettigrew to allow grazing leases on the Great Sioux Reservation. They deemed it far better to have control of the land being grazed than to rely on the whims of the federal government or an ambiguous relationship with the Sioux Indians. Likewise, the violent fence-cutting disputes in Texas were largely avoided on the northern plains, though incidents such as

⁷ J. Frank Dobie, *The Longhorns* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1941), 35.

⁸ Smith and Harry, *Trail of the Sheidley Cattle Company*, 15-20; 122-124. Charles Goodnight, who ranched on the southern plains, also recognized the value of cross-breeding with Hereford cattle. Haley, *Charles Goodnight*, 318-320.

the 1892 Johnson County War in Wyoming demonstrated that the region was not without conflict.⁹

Another important difference between the development of the northern and southern Great Plains was the timing of settlement. Homesteaders, along with the windmills and barbed wire fences they erected, may have forced a change in the cattle industry in Texas around 1885, but at that time much of western Dakota Territory was still a part of the Great Sioux Reservation and not open for settlement. Homesteading in the ‘West River’ portion of what would become South Dakota (excluding the Black Hills) did not occur in any significant numbers until after 1900 and even then much of the range remained.¹⁰ And while the presence of settlers played a major role in the end of the open range cattle industry, many changes, including a preference for leased or purchased land rather than unsecured range, had already taken place prior to their arrival. Even Lemmon, who despised wire and in later years lamented the loss of the range to farmers, succumbed to the relentless engine of progress. In 1902 he would, for the first and only time in his life, enclose a cattle pasture with a barbed wire fence. That the pasture covered more than 1,350 square miles and fencing was required in the terms of his lease on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation did not mean he did so willingly. In this, the northern plains was both like and unlike the southern plains—many of the post-1885 changes experienced in the south had been implemented years before in the north, yet the northern ranges maintained large areas without fences even into the twentieth century.

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⁹ Bill O’Neal, *The Johnson County War* (Austin: Eakin Press, 2004).

¹⁰ Nelson, *After the West was Won*, 151-153.

Heedless of barbed wire's expansion on the southern plains, in the 1880s the Sheidleys continued to modernize and become more efficient without using wire. Dave Clark, the Company's general manager and Lemmon's boss, spent a great deal of time in town conducting business, so the outfit's day-to-day operations fell to Ed. His responsibilities had been increasing for several years and in 1888 they expanded even further when Clark was elected mayor of Rapid City. Serving as mayor of one of the Black Hills region's largest and fastest-growing communities was not unusual for a cattleman, as several had taken leadership positions in cities throughout western Dakota Territory, including Spearfish mayor Milton C. Connors, who six years earlier had supported Clark's efforts to acquire grazing leases on the Great Sioux Reservation. While Clark continued to get involved in politics, Ed's leadership became more and more important to the Sheidley Company's success.¹¹

Lemmon led from the front, never asking his men to perform a job he would not do. He repeatedly put himself in physical danger, but viewed personal risk as a necessary part of completing the task he set out to finish. Whether crossing deep rivers, exposing himself to the elements, gathering cattle at night, confronting wild animals or any of a dozen other natural dangers on the open range, Ed seemed to relish the opportunity to overcome a challenge. He demonstrated this willingness later that spring, while gathering cattle for a second drive to the Moreau River range.

Ed had already finished one 280-mile round trip cattle drive and had given orders to collect several thousand more head for another. He situated his mess wagon south of the Cheyenne River, where most of the company's cattle had spent the 1887-1888 winter

¹¹ Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 160 and Smith and Harry, *Trail of the Sheidley Cattle Company*, 147.

in the region's deep, protective draws. One morning he directed his cowboys to fan out north of the river in a wide circle to gather strays. They were to return to the river that afternoon and join any cattle they found with the larger herd south of the Cheyenne. Ed and his men left early in the morning; since the search took them several miles from their remuda of extra horses, by the time the cowboys circled back late in the afternoon their mounts were quite tired. Heavy rains in the west had caused the river to rise considerably during the day until the north and south banks were separated by nearly 300 feet of deep water.

His cowboys—most of whom probably could not swim—were hesitant to cross the fast-flowing river on tired mounts, but Ed needed to return to camp so he could continue directing the roundup. While the cowboys pushed the cattle into the river to join the southern herd, Ed removed his clothes and saddle blanket for the swim across. He would drive the cattle they had gathered back to the main herd while the rest of the cowboys stayed on the north side to continue looking for strays. Because of the deep, swift-running water, Ed left his clothes, boots and hat with the men on the north side. Then he grabbed the saddle horn and swam across the Cheyenne with his favorite horse, named S.I. Bay, who “swam like a duck.”¹²

They made it across the river without incident, but Ed now had no clothes. He kept his war-bag of extra supplies with him on the swim, but it contained only underwear—no pants or shirts. So when the roundup boss returned to his mess wagon with the cattle that evening, it took a few moments for Ed's cowboys to recognize their hatless, bootless, half-naked leader. The river stayed high for three days, during which

¹² WSA, Vol. 8, p. 6 and *BFB* 13 December 1935.

time Ed went without his regular clothes. He managed to borrow a pair of low-cut shoes and a pair of overalls; the camp cook provided Ed with an old straw hat with no crown that he had picked up on the prairie somewhere days before and which had recently adorned the wagon's brake lever as a souvenir. Ed's hobo's getup concealed his identity pretty well and several cowboys from other outfits got a good chuckle when they came looking for Roundup Boss Lemmon. Ed eventually got his clothes back, but not before getting the mess wagon to the north side of a river that days earlier had been difficult to cross on horseback. The water had receded some, but to get the wagon across the cowboys had to stabilize it with saddle ropes. They tied several together, attached them to the upper sides of the wagon and then dallied them to their saddle horns to keep it from capsizing. Several men flanked the wagon at pre-tested places that were shallow enough to accommodate a horse and they managed to get it across in one piece.¹³

Ed's decision to cross the river seems like an unnecessary risk in hindsight, but his main consideration was getting the roundup completed in a timely, efficient manner, not seeing to his personal safety. As he later stated about the incident, "I had never yet fell [*sic*] down on a job, and I didn't propose to begin at that date [on account of] a little water."¹⁴ Likewise, he probably never gave a second thought to crossing the Cheyenne without boots, a hat or clothes. He knew that somehow he would get by. Like the horses he rode—which were not prize-winning animals, but perfectly suited his needs—everything about Ed Lemmon was designed for functionality rather than appearance. This uncommon confidence proved an effective leadership quality for a man whose youthful looks, short stature and crippled right leg did not inspire immediate respect. His

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

ability to dismiss personal danger prompted others to follow his example and view risks as something one undertook in order to complete a task.¹⁵

On occasion Ed demonstrated more than a bit of recklessness, but he also developed various techniques that reduced risk and helped accomplish tasks more efficiently. For instance, stray steers carrying another ranch's brand frequently got picked up with trail herds heading to market or to different ranges. Cattle outfits did not want to be accused of stealing another man's beeves, so they took great pains to make sure that steers carrying other brands were removed from their herds. Once strays started traveling with the herd they became comfortable with the group and could be very difficult to cut out. Often after they were cut from a herd they would rejoin it within hours. Lemmon employed a couple of techniques to prevent this from happening. After an alien steer had rejoined his herd two or three times, Ed would rope him around the horns and drop him to the ground by tossing the slack over the animal's right hip and quickly turning his horse to the left. This action was very effective in pulling a steer down and not unlike the technique later used in steer-roping contests at rodeos.¹⁶ Once on the ground Ed would rub sand into the steer's eyes. This would temporarily blind the animal and often prevent it from rejoining the herd. If this method failed, Lemmon would rope and throw the steer again and once he was down, Ed would tie a knot in the extreme end of the steer's tail. He would wrap the knotted tail around the animal's right hind leg above the hock (knee), then lift the left leg and place the split hoof into the tail just above the knot. When the steer's left leg was suspended in this manner he could

¹⁵ Ed had several difficult experiences crossing streams and recounts three challenging river crossings in *BFB*, 20 January 1933.

¹⁶ John O. Baxter, *Cowboy Park: Steer-Roping Contests on the Border* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2008), 4.

hobble along and graze, but not move fast enough to keep up with the herd. Eventually the knot would fail or the steer would kick loose, but by that time the herd had usually moved on.¹⁷

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After the Great Die-Up during the winter of 1886-1887, cattlemen in the northern Great Plains worked to rebuild their cattle herds. By 1888 cattle numbers in Dakota Territory had rebounded and then some, reaching more than 950,000 head—the highest level of the decade. The railroad played a significant role in the quick turnaround by providing ready means to ship cattle from the southern plains to the northern grasslands.¹⁸ In 1885 the Chicago & North Western Railroad had purchased the Fremont, Elkhorn & Missouri Valley Railroad and extended the line from Valentine, Nebraska, west to Chadron and then north to Buffalo Gap in Dakota Territory. This line reached Rapid City the following year.¹⁹ The Sheidley Cattle Company headquarters was about ten miles from the Buffalo Gap railhead, providing a prime receiving location for new southern stock and an excellent shipping point for cattle they did not sell to the Indian agents on the Great Sioux Reservation.

The destination for Sheidley Company cattle, like virtually every other beef animal shipped by rail from the northern Great Plains in the 1880s, was the Union Stockyards in Chicago. Built in 1864 by a consortium of nine railroad companies, Union Stockyards covered several hundred acres southwest of Chicago and quickly became the

¹⁷ Yost, *Boss Cowman*, 138.

¹⁸ Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 161.

¹⁹ J. Sterling Morton and Albert Watkins, *History of Nebraska: From the Earliest Explorations of the Trans-Mississippi Region* (Lincoln: Western Publishing and Engraving Company, 1918), 682 and William G. Thomas, “Nebraska Railroads Expansion, 1865-86,” *Railroads and the Making of Modern America*, www.railroads.unl.edu, accessed 22 August 2010.

country's largest livestock receiving point. Its more than 2,300 pens could hold 50,000 cattle at one time, in addition to 200,000 hogs, 30,000 sheep and 5,000 horses. Between 1865 and 1895, nearly fifty million cattle arrived at Union Stockyards, most of which were immediately transferred to the adjacent packing plants, known as Packingtown, for slaughter.²⁰

When Sheidley Company cattle began arriving in Chicago during the mid-1880s, the livestock transportation and slaughter processes were in the midst of a significant shift. Since the early 1870s, packing houses had integrated “natural” refrigeration into their operations. Natural refrigeration used ice—usually large blocks cut from lakes and ponds in the winter—to keep meat cool during warm months. This resulted in an important change in the periods when packing plants could slaughter. Prior to refrigeration, most slaughter took place from November to March, when the naturally cold temperatures would aid meat preservation; after refrigeration, livestock could be slaughtered at any time and stored until the carcasses could be further processed or distributed. Also in the 1870s Gustavus Swift had been among the first to use refrigerated railroad cars to transport chilled beef to cities on the east coast. Starting in the 1880s “artificial” refrigeration by compressing machines using ammonia as a coolant began replacing natural refrigeration as the preferred preservation method. Artificial refrigeration dramatically dropped cooling times—swine carcasses could be chilled in nineteen hours rather than sixty—which increased the number of animals packers could

²⁰ Louise Carroll Wade, *Chicago's Pride: The Stockyards, Packingtown, and Environs in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 48 and W. Jos. Grand, *Illustrated History of the Union Stockyards: Sketch-book of Familiar Faces and Places at the Yards* (Chicago: Thomas Knapp Printing & Building Company, 1896), 15.

send through their slaughterhouses and led to the Union Stockyards processing even more western cattle.²¹

Another technological advancement reduced livestock shrinkage (weight lost through feces, urine and lack of feed and water consumption) during shipment by rail and likely led to increased profits for the Sheidley Cattle Company. In 1888 an improved livestock car made its debut in Dakota Territory. The new car, built by the Western Stable Car Company, held twenty-one head and provided feed and water during the trip—a feature not available on earlier models. In addition, the new livestock car allowed for faster speeds. Trains pulling the updated cars could now make the run from Buffalo Gap to Chicago in forty-eight hours, a full day less than before. On one mixed-car shipment that year, cattle traveling in old-style cars averaged shrinkage of ninety-one pounds per head, while cattle on the same train shipped in the new cars lost just thirty-one pounds, a total savings of 1,260 pounds per car—the equivalent of one large mature steer. This dramatic reduction in shrinkage was especially significant in 1888 because cattle prices in Chicago were excellent. One of the Sheidley Company's neighbors shipped a carload of large, heavy steers to Chicago that earned \$57.40 each—a premium price when local steers sold for about \$26 per head.²²

Upon arriving at the Stockyards via rail the cattle were transferred to pens assigned to individual owners. After being fed and watered the animals were weighed—a crucial step to determine the sales price—inspected by a government official, then transferred to another series of holding pens in preparation for slaughter. W. Joseph Grand described the slaughter process in 1896:

²¹ Wade, *Chicago's Pride*, 104-107; 199-201.

²² Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 161-162.

A man stands on a board walk above, and with a well directed blow with a heavy sledge, stuns [a steer]. A door is raised and the steer falls, causing him to slide out upon the floor of the slaughterhouse. A chain is now fastened to his hind legs and he is hoisted from the floor, his forelegs spread wide apart, and a sharp knife thrust into his throat by a man who does no other part of the work than this. As the knife strikes the throat the blood wells out in a torrent. This ocean of blood is washed down into a gutter leading to a tank, from which it is pumped into covered carts and conveyed to the fertilizer factory.

The head of the steer is now removed. He is then lowered to the floor and laid upon his back, sticks set in the floor propping him up. The legs are now broken, the stomach opened and the hide skinned from the edges of the opening. A hook is then stuck behind each of the joints of the hind legs, and the steer is hoisted up to a position convenient for the butchers, whose subject he now is. The tail is cut off, the intestines removed and the hide pulled a little farther off. This done, the animal is hoisted from the floor. Above are two tracks on which are wheels with hooks hanging from them. These hooks are substituted for those previously put behind the joints of the hind legs, leaving the steer conveniently hanging from the wheels. The hide is now completely removed by two men pulling it and a third beating it and separating it from the flesh with a cleaver. When removed the hide is inspected and, if found intact, is sent to a cellar to be salted and folded and made ready for sale.

At once [*sic*] the hide is removed from the steer the carcass is halved lengthwise by means of a huge cleaver, the ragged edges being trimmed by several men, who also wash and dry the meat very carefully. Numbering, tagging, weighing and hanging in the cooler now follow rapidly, the carcass being rolled rapidly along the tracks from man to man until the task is done. From five to eight minutes have elapsed from the time the steer was knocked on the head until placed in the cooler, during which time he has passed through the hands of forty-two men.²³

In 1906 Upton Sinclair's novel, *The Jungle*, would expose widespread health and food safety issues in Packingtown and lead to significant reforms.²⁴ But in the 1880s and 1890s the Sheidley Cattle Company gave little thought to such concerns. Like many others they were solely interested in their livestock enterprise—a business designed to turn cheap cattle and free grass into profitable beef.²⁵

²³ Grand, *Illustrated History of the Union Stockyards*, 49-51.

²⁴ Edmund Morris, *Theodore Rex* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2001), 435-439, 447-448.

²⁵ Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*.

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Without question, Ed Lemmon's principle passion was working cattle on horseback. By his early thirties he had probably handled more than 500,000 head, worked for several different outfits and taken charge of other cowboys, including his top-notch "killer" crew. Ed took great pride in his horsemanship, claiming: "I was almost continuously in the saddle and few indeed could out-distance me in long or continuous riding."²⁶ He thrived on the action and thoroughly enjoyed life on the open range. When he married Bertha Reno in 1887, Ed moved his bride to the company's range headquarters on French Creek so he could be close to his cowboys—no doubt an awkward situation for Bertha, a young, attractive woman in a camp filled with more than a dozen single young men. Ed continued to live the cowboy life—riding for long hours, sleeping near the mess wagon, taking a turn on night guard—even after the birth of his sons, the eldest named James Hervey after Ed's father and older brother on October 28, 1888; the second, Roy Edward, in 1889; and the youngest, George Reno, in September 1894.

Yet Ed had a secondary passion, even if he recounted his exploits in this arena with less enthusiasm and detail than his cattle-handling endeavors: women other than his wife. From the 1920s to the 1940s, after he had retired from the cattle business and began recounting his life for publication, Ed wrote about all manner of cowboy experiences—good horses, bad weather, exciting accidents, run-ins with Indians, ornery steers—including his knowledge of "painted ladies," the prostitutes he encountered during his regular visits to town. While Ed refrained from publishing such stories in the *Belle Fourche Bee*, which printed hundreds of his reminiscences over more than ten

²⁶ *BFB*, 29 April 1938.

years, he wrote a number of articles about women for inclusion in a volume prepared by North Dakota historian Usher L. Burdick, titled *History of the Range Cattle Trade of the Dakotas*. Ed's family and friends all read the *Bee*, so he probably sought to maintain appearances by avoiding potentially embarrassing stories there. But in the Burdick volume, which Ed hoped would become a book, he described an incredible number of his various female acquaintances, both before and after his first marriage.

In fact his chapter on the "Good and Bad Women of the West" read like a who's who of the region's madams and prostitutes: Calamity Jane, Poker Alice, Frisky Phyllis, Stepladder Jane, Kate the Bitch, Grace of Pimp Tom, the Sage Hen, Queen of French Creek, Mae of Hurdy Gurdy, Slippery Ann, Brockel-Faced Mary, Will O' the Wisp and Monte Verde were all covered in detail. In this volume and other writings he mentioned several other "soiled doves" he knew, including Madame "Mustache" Maude, Connie Hoffman, Brocky Moll, Nellie Bly, Billy the Kid (obviously not the famous gunfighter), Maude S., Addie Devier and Dollie Varden.²⁷ Even though Ed did not drink, he was clearly well-acquainted with the saloons and gaming establishments in the cow towns where he shipped cattle to market.

Lemmon exhibited a remarkable sense of humor regarding the "scarlet poppies." He once described an incident involving a respectable ranch wife and a male guest at her home. For several consecutive nights the McMahon cattle ranch had hosted a "fine gentleman" who stopped by frequently on his way to and from a nearby town. While Mrs. McMahon served dinner, the gentleman told her about his cattle operation and the "hog ranch" he owned outside of town. Apparently she was unaware that "hog ranch"

²⁷ Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 193-235.

was a euphemism for the whore house which sat outside of city limits, beyond the reaches of local law enforcement. A few days later Ed stopped by the McMahon ranch for supper after selling some horses nearby. The conversation drifted to the fine gentleman the McMahons had hosted earlier, a man Ed knew quite well. Mrs. McMahon remarked that he must be quite well off, for he owned a large hog ranch on White River. Straight-faced, Ed replied, “Yes, Mrs. McMahon, if you will ask your husband I think he will tell you that [the fine gentleman’s] swine are of inferior breed and of little market value, especially in Chicago or Omaha markets, where there are so many of better value.”²⁸

Ed’s interest in women was not limited to prostitutes. He wrote regularly of the beautiful young ladies he met, describing particularly lithe women as “supple as a panther.”²⁹ Among those who caught his attention (in addition to Rosie Kelly, the Belle of Cheyenne) were Mandy the Sheep Girl; the Belle of the Little Blue River; a woman named Nell Miller; and Alta Steele, the Belle of Buffalo Gap. Ms. Steele proved nearly irresistible for Ed, who described her as “hardly what would be classed a full-fledged flirt . . . and of the hands-off type that made the boys all the more anxious to possess her.” No doubt Lemmon was one of those boys: “She got to making her home very much with our family, this was after I was married and living on the Flying V ranch on French Creek, she and my wife being very chummy, and possibly the same with myself, *but just as a fatherly adviser* [emphasis mine].”³⁰ One can almost picture Ed—who was nearing eighty when he wrote the line—pausing and rereading the first portion of this sentence

²⁸ Ibid., 218-219.

²⁹ Ibid., 199.

³⁰ *BFB*, 25 October 1935; *BFB*, 16 November 1939; and Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 193-235.

before hurriedly including the last phrase to cover his true feelings. Alta Steele had clearly caught his eye, but we have no way of knowing if Ed acted on his impulses or simply remained “chummy” with her.

Lemmon never described his sexual involvement with any of these women, instead focusing on their interactions with his cowboys. It is very likely that he did not have a physical relationship with all of the women he named, including Calamity Jane, Poker Alice, and Stepladder Jane, whom he described as “too homely to hold a lover.”³¹ However, his stories are laced with innuendo (“her talents were much sought after”) and he provided detailed physical descriptions of many women he admired (“she was a queenly style of a girl, slender, graceful, with a large rope of dark hair”).³² He demonstrated a strong preference for young, beautiful girls and on at least one occasion, with Mandy the Sheep Girl, had one of his cowboys reassigned to a different part of the range so he could pursue a courtship uncontested. Ed’s passion for women lasted his entire life and influenced his interactions. As he noted, “I never was much for company when trying to enjoy the company of a swell dame.” Yet women were far less important

³¹ Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 218 and *BFB*, 1 March 1933. Whether or not Ed personally knew Calamity Jane is unclear. In the March 1, 1933 edition of the *Bee*, he mentions a conversation he had on a train with Calamity Jane and Dr. Valentine McGillycuddy while traveling as “invited guests” to Deadwood’s annual Days of ’76 celebration, but Calamity Jane died in 1903 and the Days of ’76 celebration did not begin until 1923. By the latter date, Ed was well known and respected throughout the Black Hills, so it is possible he and McGillycuddy (who died in 1939) were traveling to Deadwood for the celebration on the same train, but it seems unlikely Calamity Jane was with them. Here Ed may be fabricating the story or combining two incidents into the same event. Either way, his relationship with her is ambiguous. Calamity Jane was away from the Black Hills from 1878 to 1895, so even if he did know her, a “professional” relationship between them is highly unlikely. See James D. McLaird, *Calamity Jane: The Woman and the Legend* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004). Poker Alice, while a famous madam of Sturgis, South Dakota, was not herself a working girl. See Michael Rutter, *Upstairs Girls: Prostitution in the American West* (Helena, MT: Farcountry Press, 2005), 169-174.

³² Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 193-235.

to Ed than cattle ranching and life on the open range. As both of Lemmon's wives would discover, cattle, horses and cowboys meant more to him than any woman ever could.³³

* * * * *

As the Sheidley Company made preparations to begin the 1889 spring roundup in Fall River County, perhaps half of its nearly 30,000 cattle had been moved to what Lemmon called the Moreau River range, an area covering the southern part of present-day North Dakota down past the forks of the Moreau in what is now northwest South Dakota. The balance of the Flying V cattle ranged in Custer and Fall River counties in the southern Black Hills.³⁴ During the winter months cattle tended to drift with the wind at their backs. In the northern Great Plains the prevailing winter winds blew from the northwest to the southeast, so when spring came cattle that originated in Montana or Wyoming could end up as far south as Nebraska. These animals needed to be gathered and returned to their home ranges for summer grazing. Roundups also provided an opportunity to brand the young calves born in late winter or early spring. Open range cattle usually calved in March or April, after a gestation period similar to humans, about nine and a half months. Cows nursed their calves throughout the summer and early fall, usually weaning them prior to the onset of winter. Because cattle bred in June or July, cows needed all their available energy to care for themselves and their unborn calves during the cold winters. The yearling calves born the previous spring learned to care for themselves or, as happened in many cases, they perished.³⁵

³³ *BFB*, 6 October 1933; *BFB*, 24 April 1936; *BFB*, 2 December 1938; and *BFB*, 30 November 1939.

³⁴ *BFB*, 23 June 1933.

³⁵ *BFB*, 7 August 1936.

As soon as the grass began to green up, the meadowlarks started to appear and the weather turned warmer, roundup bosses like Ed Lemmon would begin preparing for the spring cattle roundups by sending their cowboys to gather all the horses left to roam over the winter. When an outfit cut cowboys for the winter months it needed far fewer horses than during the busy summer and fall, so some were left to graze the open range unattended. After they were caught, many times the horses had to be re-broken to carry a saddle and rider. Because the cowboys were busy with a number of tasks—inspecting, fixing, greasing and preparing the roundup wagons for duty; trimming hooves, manes and tails; repairing and oiling harnesses, saddles, cinches, bridles, belts and other ‘tack’—sometimes the re-breaking was not as thorough as it ought to have been. The battles between a half-broken horse and a cowboy with months of winter-rust made for an amusing spectacle and sometimes led to “a man or two carted to town for repairs.”³⁶

Meanwhile, Dave Clark and the other general managers of the region’s cattle enterprises met to determine where roundups would be held and who would boss them. They published notices of their upcoming roundups in all of the stock newspapers, so other outfits knew when and where to send reps to collect the cattle with their brands. Under Clark’s management Sheidley Company roundups generally began on May 25 to allow for warmer weather. After Lemmon took over he moved the start date back to May 15 because he believed a later roundup caused greater harm to the cattle. Ed handled cattle much like his father had once trained teams of oxen: deliberately, quickly and with total control. But his penchant for working cattle rapidly could cause them injury if they had regained enough strength after the winter months to move quickly—the cowboys

³⁶ *BFB*, 6 April 1939.

could easily push them to the point of overexertion. If handled ten days earlier, while still recovering from their winter atrophy, the weakened cattle simply could not move fast enough to injure themselves.³⁷ Roundups were located on a large, flat place near a river or stream so water would be available for the dozens of cowboys involved.³⁸

Each of the area ranches that participated sent a roundup outfit, which consisted of a chuck wagon, one or more “bed wagons” and a group of cowboys. In addition to four extra horses per wagon, every cowboy sent to the roundup brought a string of eight to ten mounts. For a large ranch with four wagons and a dozen cowboys, this meant traveling with a herd of more than 120 horses. The bed wagon(s) hauled bedrolls and extra supplies and featured a rack for carrying ropes used to picket horses and build makeshift corrals. Because nights on the northern ranges could be quite cold, even in the summer (the average low temperature for Custer County, South Dakota, in mid-July drops to about 50 degrees Fahrenheit) Lemmon’s cowboys could pack their bedrolls as heavy as they preferred or could afford.³⁹ The chuck or “mess” wagon contained a dust-proof wooden “mess box” about 3 ½ feet high with drawers for plates, cups, utensils, seasonings and leftover food. The hinged lid featured a one-leg support and doubled as a table.⁴⁰ Meals consisted of fresh beef, baked or boiled beans, potatoes, biscuits, bread, canned tomatoes, corn, dried fruits, suet pudding and occasionally, a pie. Beneath one or both of the wagons was the “cooney,” a cowhide secured to the underside of the box and

³⁷ Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 115-116.

³⁸ *BFB*, 6 April 1939; *BFB*, 10 March 1933; and *BFB*, 7 August 1936.

³⁹ “Season Weather Averages, Custer County, South Dakota,” Weather Underground, <http://www.wunderground.com/NORMS/DisplayNORMS.asp?AirportCode=KCUT&StateCode=SD&SafeCityName=Custer&Units=none&IATA=RAP&normals=on>, Accessed 12 October 2010.

⁴⁰ Charles Goodnight constructed the first “chuck-box” in 1866 and the design remained virtually unaltered until the end of open range cattle ranching in the early twentieth century. Haley, *Charles Goodnight*, 122.

used to carry wood or cow chips to fuel the cook fire. The cooney was just large enough to accommodate a small man and made a snug sleeping spot away from the elements; Ed took refuge in a cooney on more than one occasion. Both the bed and mess wagons carried boxes with horse shoeing tools, patching and mending equipment and a crude type of “first aid kit” with crutches, cloth bandages and a bottle of horse liniment—used for “man or beast practically in the same proportions.” Lemmon’s wagons also always carried enough water for at least three meals, so they could make a dry camp, if necessary. The roundup wagons served as a cowboy’s home base throughout the summer and provided for all his needs.⁴¹

Roundup outfits had a distinct hierarchy, with different responsibilities and pay scales. In Lemmon’s crews the wagon boss was the outfit’s leader and earned about \$80 per month. He directed the men and saw to their needs. Second in command was the cook, who had complete control of the chuck wagon and earned between \$50 and \$60 per month. The nighthawk cared for the horses after dark and drove one of the bed wagons during the day when the main camp moved. Because this job was lonely and dangerous, the nighthawk was among the most undesirable positions. In 1888 Lemmon had hired Frank “Pickles” Koshirak to be his nighthawk, a job he kept for more than twenty years.⁴² The wrangler cared for the horses during the day and occasionally relieved another cowboy from his two-hour guard responsibilities at night. Cowboys familiar with the country around the roundup area were selected to drive the other bed wagons. When the

⁴¹ *BFB*, 7 August 1936; *BFB*, 6 April 1939; WSA, Vol. 6, p. 2-3; and Schatz, *Longhorns Bring Culture*, 87-95.

⁴² Pickles Koshirak was a rough character who rarely bathed. His odor and sour personality earned him his uncommon nickname. Pickles Creek in present-day Perkins County, South Dakota is named for him because one day when Lemmon’s cattle herd was grazing nearby, Pickles used the creek for his annual bath. *BFB*, 11 March 1938 and *BFB*, 24 August 1934.

outfit reached camp these men assisted the cook and wrangler(s) in setting up the stove, pitching the tent, stringing the horse corral, gathering wood, peeling potatoes, carrying water and other tasks involved in preparing the campsite. The remaining cowboys worked under the direction of their wagon boss and the overall roundup boss. During the day they gathered, sorted, moved and tended the cattle; in the evening, every cowboy worked a two-hour night guard shift between 8:00 pm to 4:00 am. An average day lasted more than eighteen hours, beginning when the cook rang the “come-and-get-‘er” call at 2:45 in the morning and ending at 8:45 at night.⁴³

Roundups Lemmon bossed always began with “circling,” in which all the cowboys would ride in a wide arc from the central gathering point, collecting any cattle they found and driving them to the roundup grounds. Even though “Ed Lemmon slapped a roundup together fast,” as cowboy Ike Blasingame recalled, depending on the terrain and the number of cattle in the area, circling often took several days. Once the cattle were rounded-up, they were segregated into groups based on their brand. All the calves were branded and the bull calves castrated into steers. The cattle were then driven onto their home ranges, with line riders keeping the stock on each outfit’s individual range as much as possible. Additional “beef roundups” were held in the fall to gather cattle for shipment to market. After these year-end roundups the cattle were again turned loose on the range for the winter and then re-gathered the following spring.⁴⁴

Every year, Lemmon looked forward to the “action, swapping experiences, [and] fun” of the spring roundups.⁴⁵ Given his lifelong fondness for story-telling and constant

⁴³ *BFB*, 7 August 1936 and *BFB*, 6 April 1939.

⁴⁴ *BFB*, 7 August 1936 and Blasingame, *Dakota Cowboy*, 222.

⁴⁵ *BFB*, 7 August 1936.

desire for action, the annual roundups perfectly suited his personality. Unfortunately for Ed, he would miss all but one day of the 1890 roundup due to a severe injury. Since his last major accident fifteen years earlier—the 1875 horse-fall that crushed his right leg, rendering him a permanent cripple—Ed had managed to avoid serious injury save two broken collarbones, the left in 1884 and the right in 1886. Neither of these accidents caused him any great inconvenience, though when he fractured his right clavicle it forced the right-handed Lemmon to start roping his mounts left-handed. But his lucky streak ended on May 11, 1890, just a day after the start of the spring roundup.⁴⁶

For most of the day Lemmon had been leading a circling party of eighteen men not far from Smithwick Station in Fall River County in the southwest corner of Dakota Territory, gathering bunches of cattle and sending them back to the main roundup grounds with pairs of cowboys. He had just directed his last two cowboys to return to the roundup site with 300 head when he noticed a group of fifty to sixty cattle apparently owned by a nearby homesteader. As his men left for the roundup, Lemmon rode alone about three-quarters of a mile to check the brands on the small herd. If he found any “rangers” not belonging to the settler he planned to return to the main roundup with them. He spotted six rangers among the group and cut them from the main body, but could not prevent one of the settler’s steers from joining his cut. Ed kicked his mount—S.I. Bay, the same horse he used to swim the Cheyenne River in 1888—to a gallop to remove the steer from his half-dozen, but as he did so the bay broke through a gopher tunnel on the edge of a hill, causing horse and rider to tumble forty feet to the bottom.⁴⁷ S.I. Bay survived the fall uninjured, but as they rolled, the horse had flailed “all four of his ragged

⁴⁶ *BFB*, 16 February 1934.

⁴⁷ *WSA*, Vol. 8, p. 5.

hooved limbs right in my face, digging it all to pieces, but nothing serious—only as to looks.” In addition to the cuts and bruises on his face, Ed had once again broken his right leg severely (“with the limb bent backwards”) and fractured his left shoulder as well.⁴⁸

After the fall he tried to get the attention of his two cowboys, who were still within view, but they did not witness the accident. A stiff wind blew in Ed’s face so his voice did not carry and they quickly passed out of sight. He then began the agonizing process of attempting to set the broken bones in his leg and shoulder. His efforts proved futile. Since Ed could not mount the horse, he decided to make himself as comfortable as possible and wait for help. Lemmon assumed that since he was the roundup boss, he would be missed in a short amount of time and riders would come out looking for him. Getting comfortable was a difficult proposition, however, because in addition to the excruciating pain in his leg and shoulder, a light dusting of snow had fallen the previous night and the air temperature was cold enough that it had not yet melted. Ed was wearing only a thin shirt; his heavy flannel jacket and waterproof “slicker” (overcoat) were tied to the saddle and out of reach. He “soon became so chilled [that] I could only utter a guttural sound.”⁴⁹

Unbeknownst to Ed, the cowboys at the roundup thought nothing of his absence. They assumed that since Lemmon was near Smithwick Station he had gone to post the letters he had written the previous evening. For more than four hours Ed shivered in the snow and wind, waiting for his men. Help finally arrived when the settler came to check on his cattle. The man retrieved Ed’s slicker from the horse, wrapped it around him, then mounted the bay and rode for Smithwick. Within thirty-five minutes the homesteader

⁴⁸ *BFB*, 16 February 1934.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

had returned with a wagon and three men. They placed Ed on a cot in the wagon (“without hurting me in the slightest”) and headed for town. At Smithwick someone went to the telegraph office and sent a wire to Buffalo Gap, sixteen miles north, requesting a doctor, who arrived via train just a half hour later. Despite the discomfort of his lengthy exposure, the resilient cattleman suffered few significant long-term effects. Although his injuries were severe, within a month he was moving around on crutches. While Ed claimed to be “not the least bit worse crippled than before,” his cowboys noted that this third break “handicapped to quite an extent his riding and horse breaking activities.”⁵⁰

Lemmon’s accident prevented him from rejoining the 1890 roundup, but instead of staying with his wife and sons at the Flying V headquarters on French Creek, he spent the next several months at his father’s farm in Thayer County, Nebraska. There were several reasons for this decision. Ed’s older brother Moroni had died on February 27, 1888, and Ed had not returned to Nebraska for the funeral. It seems probable he wanted to pay respects to his brother, who died of unknown causes at only thirty-two.⁵¹ His sister Alpharetta and her husband also lived nearby and Ed had not seen them for several years. In addition, for some time James had been “clamoring for [Ed] to quit the range and come back to our old Nebraska homestead and settle down before I got killed chasing the longhorns.” After he broke his right leg for a third time, Ed paid heed to his father’s suggestions and returned home for the remainder of the 1890 cattle-handling season.⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid. and Hall, *Roundup Years*, 336.

⁵¹ Moroni’s family placed his body in the Lemmon plot at the Oak Grove cemetery overlooking the Little Blue River, between his brother Hervey and mother Lucy. His epitaph reads, “A good son, a brother dear; a faithful friend lies buried here.”

⁵² *BFB*, 16 February 1934.

It appears Lemmon made a genuine effort to give up his cowboy life and settle into a career as a businessman. He loved everything about the open range cattle business, but he was only thirty-three years old and had already suffered several severe accidents. Perhaps he began to question how long his body could hold out, given the physical demands and inherent dangers of his chosen profession, and the fact that both of his older brothers had died in their thirties. What seems clear is that his immediate family (wife and sons) had very little to do with his decision. Ed did not spend his time away from the Flying V playing with his children, showering affection on his teenage wife or sitting at the ranch headquarters trying to figure out what to do with himself; he spent it building an independent cattle business.

As soon as Lemmon could ride again he began buying steers in Dakota Territory, driving them to his father's land in Nebraska and selling them to local settlers as feeder cattle. He marketed more than 1,000 head that year, netting an average of \$5 apiece.⁵³ This was not Ed's first foray into business; he had been buying and selling cattle to supplement his regular wages since 1878. That fall he had purchased his first sixteen Texas yearlings (one-year-old calves) for \$180, then added fifteen head to his herd ("by purchase or otherwise") and sold the lot to George Green for \$400. Although his early experience as a cattleman may indeed have been an "adventure," as Webb termed it, Ed's private cattle enterprise was, without question, a business. Throughout the 1880s Ed's cattle purchases escalated as he became more successful. In 1885 he bought more than 200 quality shorthorn cattle, later selling them for \$6,750. Between 1886 and 1889 Ed demonstrated the business acumen James had exhibited years earlier; he purchased no

⁵³ Ibid.

livestock, instead loaning out his money at a rate of two percent per month. Twenty years later Ed made another foray into personal finance when he established a bank in the town that would bear his name.⁵⁴

While Lemmon tended cattle in Nebraska in 1890, two incidents made him rethink his decision to leave the open range cattle business. He owned a string of purebred shorthorn cattle which he grazed on a ten-acre portion of corn stubble (corn that had been cut) that was part of a larger cornfield. The cut section was “fenced” on its boundaries by the tall, uncut corn stalks. Ed cared for the animals himself and on one occasion, as the cattle attempted to cross into the standing corn, he spurred his horse into a gallop to head them off. As he raced across the field his horse stumbled and fell, throwing Ed from the saddle. He landed face-first into the cut stalks, with one of the sharp edges causing a deep cut near his left eye. He immediately placed a hand over his right eye, brushed the blood out of his left and squinted “to see if daylight would appear, showing my eye to not be gouged out . . . [and] to my delight, daylight appeared.”⁵⁵

Later that winter Lemmon had the steers in a “river feed lot,” with the steep banks of the frozen Little Blue River forming the south barrier of his makeshift corral. To make the most of his investment Ed also owned a hog for each one of his steers. Because corn kernels would often pass through a steer’s body undigested, he ran hogs in the same pasture to clean up the waste grain, maximizing the cornfield’s profitability. The river ice was relatively thin and could hold the weight of a hog, but not a steer, so while the cattle remained north of the river some of the hogs crossed to feed on the south side. The nearest bridge was a mile and a half away, so it took Ed quite some time to ride to his

⁵⁴ Yost, *Boss Cowman*, 238-239.

⁵⁵ *BFB*, 16 February 1934.

wayward animals, gather them and return (a six-mile round trip). Once after he had collected the hogs and driven them back across the river, he decided to try to take his horse across the ice a few hundred yards rather than make the three-mile return trip. He rode to a shallow wagon ford 200 yards upstream from his feedlot, dismounted and limped out onto the ice to test its strength. The ice was solid except for a ten-foot-wide section in the middle, which the current kept open. Using a stick to test the depth of the open section, he found the river only four feet deep. Ed developed a plan. He would lead the horse out onto the ice, mount the animal, spur him into the current and force him to climb the ice on the far side, thus saving a half hour of riding time. His plan did not go off as expected. All went well until Lemmon's mount made an awkward plunge into the frigid river, dragging Ed in head-first. He had not removed any clothing, not even his heavy overcoat, and this poor decision combined with his crippled leg and the very cold water rendered him nearly helpless in the swift current, which carried him downstream. Luckily one of his father's hired men was working near the Little Blue and heard his call for help. The man threw him a rope as he passed by the house and dragged Ed, soaked, freezing and probably embarrassed, from the water.⁵⁶

Lemmon survived this latest near-death experience with no long-term effects—he even managed to retrieve his expensive Stetson hat—save one. As soon as he reached the house and met his father, Ed “did not hesitate to make it plain to him that no matter where a person was, they encountered about equal dangers, and in the Spring I certainly would go back to the open range, and longhorns, which I did.”⁵⁷ This single incident, which lasted perhaps a few minutes, clarified Ed's thinking about his future more

⁵⁶ *BFB*, 16 February 1934.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

completely than the months he had spent in Nebraska. After Moroni's death Ed probably felt his mortality and began to think that if he wanted more time on earth, he ought to start taking better care of himself. If he indeed thought along these lines, any semblance of a new approach vanished after his river rescue. Once again Ed felt free to pursue his life's work, as he saw the open range cattle business, without guilt. He decided that if he was going to die, he may as well die doing what he loved. Ed loved working cattle. Never again would he question his gut instincts.

* * * * *

Lemmon did not wait until spring to return to open range cattle ranching; he departed in late winter 1890, more than a year after President Benjamin Harrison signed the Act of Admission papers dividing Dakota Territory into the states of North and South Dakota and just as tensions between Lakotas and the U.S. government reached their boiling point. Ever since Custer's 1874 Black Hills expedition discovered gold the Sioux had seen more and more of their territory fall victim to white expansion. They had signed the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie expecting to retain the entire western half of present-day South Dakota in perpetuity; but the Sioux lost the Black Hills to gold-seekers in 1876 and survived the 1887 Dawes General Allotment Act only to see their territory halved again on February 10, 1890, when President Harrison signed a bill partitioning the Great Sioux Reservation into five smaller reservations.⁵⁸ Much of the former reservation was divided into the Standing Rock, Cheyenne River, Pine Ridge, Rosebud and Lower Brule

⁵⁸ "An act to divide a portion of the reservation of the Sioux Nation of Indians in Dakota into separate reservations and to secure the relinquishment of the Indian title to the remainder, and for other purposes," 2 March, 1889, 50th Cong., 2d sess. *United States Statutes at Large* 25, pt. 2, ch. 405, p. 888-899. The act also established the Crow Creek reservation on the east side of the Missouri River across from the Lower Brule Reservation, but Crow Creek was not part of the former Great Sioux Reservation.

reservations, while the remainder (approximately nine million acres) became available for white settlement.⁵⁹

This radical reduction in territory, combined with the near-extinction of the bison by hide and sport hunters, poor food rations at the agencies (exacerbated by the ranchers' unscrupulous practices at the weighing pens), insufficient winter clothing and other supplies, rampant disease and continual mistreatment by the government pushed the Sioux to their breaking point.⁶⁰ Unrest on the former Great Sioux Reservation had grown considerably, so it was not surprising that by December 1890 many of the Sioux on the Standing Rock Reservation—which straddled the North Dakota-South Dakota state line—embraced the teachings of a Paiute medicine man named Wovoka, founder of the “Ghost Dance.” Wovoka taught that by practicing his religion and dancing the Ghost Dance, Indians could bring back the buffalo and restore the previous way of things by removing the whites from the land. Inspired by this message, many of the Indians on Standing Rock abandoned their reservation houses for tipis. The believers formed a circle of branches, erected a “prayer tree,” which mimicked the traditional Sun-Dance circle, and began to dance. Wovoka had also taught the Ghost Dancers a song to sing during the dances, which lasted all day or until the participants fell unconscious from exhaustion. As Luther Standing Bear recalled, the “Indians were really serious about it . . . they felt that this new religion was going to rid them of the hated pale-faces who had antagonized them for so long.”⁶¹ The “Messiah Craze” had gained popularity among several of the plains Indians nations and as it became more prevalent some whites sought

⁵⁹ Robert M. Utley, *The Lance and the Shield: The Life and Times of Sitting Bull* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1993), 268-280.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 280-285.

⁶¹ Luther Standing Bear, *My People the Sioux* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), 219.

to quell the growing movement. The new religion flourished on the Pine Ridge, Cheyenne and Rosebud reservations as well, taking on what historian Robert Utley described as “an increasingly militant and alarming aspect.” Sitting Bull, the famed Hunkpapa Chief and a revered leader among all the Lakota tribes, encouraged the Ghost Dance and worked to prevent Indian agents, missionaries, schoolteachers and others from disrupting the ceremonies.⁶²

Exasperated by Sitting Bull’s actions, Colonel James McLaughlin, long-time Indian agent at Standing Rock, sought to prevent Sitting Bull from interfering with his attempts to restore order. Ever since Sitting Bull’s return to Standing Rock in 1883 (following his exile in Canada and subsequent stint in a military prison) he and McLaughlin had engaged in a long-running feud. Sitting Bull wanted to exert his influence as a tribal leader, while McLaughlin worked to minimize it in order to push the Sioux closer to assimilation with whites. With the Ghost Dance stirring up the Indians at Standing Rock, McLaughlin convinced the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Thomas Jefferson Morgan, that Sitting Bull posed a threat to order and should be arrested and removed from the reservation. At 6:00 a.m. on December 15 a group of nearly forty Indian police arrived at Sitting Bull’s cabin to arrest him. As Sitting Bull’s followers tried to prevent the police from taking their chief, gunfire erupted. In the brief gun battle that followed, Sitting Bull and several followers were killed, as were a handful of Indian police.⁶³

⁶² Utley, *Lance and the Shield*, 281-307 and Robert M. Utley, *Last Days of the Sioux Nation*, Second Edition, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 60-83; 146-166.

⁶³ Ibid. and Edward A. Milligan, *Dakota Twilight: The Standing Rock Sioux, 1874-1890* (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1976), 108-109.

A few days later Lemmon, still in Nebraska, heard rumblings about Indian activity in southwest South Dakota near the Sheidley Company cattle herds wintering in the southern Black Hills. Since Ed had purchased a large group of steers ranging on Lane Johnny Creek in Custer County to sell to homesteaders in Nebraska, he took a train to Buffalo Gap to see about his investment. When he arrived at the station he received news that seven Flying V cowboys had lost their horses to a band of raiding Indians. Lemmon was concerned for their safety, so the next morning he gathered several saddle horses and rode out to meet his dismounted men.⁶⁴

Meanwhile, following Sitting Bull's death a contingent of Hunkpapa Sioux had fled Standing Rock for the Cheyenne River Reservation. After the Hunkpapas joined Miniconjou Chief Big Foot, a portion of the mixed group left for the Pine Ridge Reservation to seek guidance from Chief Red Cloud. On December 28 the Seventh Cavalry—Custer's old regiment—intercepted Black Foot's band near Wounded Knee Creek in modern day Shannon County, South Dakota. At daybreak on December 29 Colonel James W. Forsyth convened a council and ordered the Sioux to surrender their weapons. Given the events of the previous weeks, Lakotas were naturally hesitant to give up their arms. When two soldiers attempted forcibly to relieve an Indian of his rifle, it discharged. Frightened Indians and nervous soldiers immediately began firing on each other. The soldiers, more numerous and better armed, continued the attack for more than three hours, their small arms fire supplemented with volleys from a battery of 42 mm Hotchkiss guns arranged on a hill overlooking the Indian encampment. During the

⁶⁴ *BFB*, 1 September 1933; *BFB*, 18 November 1932; *BFB*, 7 February 1936; Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 389-395; and WSA, Vol. 10, pp. 7-9.

Wounded Knee Massacre more than 250 Indians, including dozens of women and children, were killed.⁶⁵

Lemmon had not yet reached his seven stranded cowboys when he received word of the massacre at Wounded Knee a few days later. Rumors that one of the seven, a cook named Isaac Miller who worked with Ed's "Eight Killers" crew, had been killed prompted Ed to head for the site to see for himself. On January 4, 1891, he gathered two men and rode for General John R. Brooks' camp on White River, near the present-day town of Oglala, South Dakota, about thirty-five miles southeast of Buffalo Gap and twenty miles northwest of Wounded Knee. As they neared Brooks' headquarters they saw several bands of troops and Indians, including a large group camped near a small stream Lemmon knew as Grass Creek. When they arrived at Brooks' camp a man named Bob Pew met Lemmon and asked for his assistance in gathering a herd of 420 cattle and driving them fifteen miles south to Pine Ridge for distribution at the agency. If he agreed, Ed would command a crew of trusted Indian cowboys who would help him with the job.⁶⁶

Well aware of the recent hostilities and seeing firsthand the Indians roaming the countryside, Lemmon was reluctant to make the drive. He said, "Bob, do you know that the body of those government issue cattle are ranging right back against that badland bluff of Grass Creek?" Pew, who knew very little about cattle and was anxious to pass on the task replied, "I don't believe the Indians will hurt you as you have always been

⁶⁵ Utley, *Last Days of the Sioux Nation*, 200-230 and James Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, Fourteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology, Smithsonian Institution (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1896).

⁶⁶ *BFB*, 1 September 1933; *BFB*, 18 November 1932; *BFB*, 23 December 1938; Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 389-395; WSA, Vol. 10, pp. 7-9; and Peggy Samuels and Harold Samuels, *Frederic Remington: A Biography* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1982) 148-153.

their friend and your helpers will all be Indian boys.” Lemmon was skeptical, but agreed to boss the herd, though he wanted a detachment of cavalry to protect it. He spoke with Captain Almond B. Wells and had just secured the cavalry’s protection when a courier arrived with a message from General Brooks, requesting that Lemmon lead a military and civilian delegation through hostile territory to a safe location in the northwest corner of the Pine Ridge Reservation, roughly forty miles from Wounded Knee. The delegation had been documenting the scene of the massacre and included men sent to investigate Colonel Forsyth’s actions to determine if he acted appropriately. Ed, glad to be rid of a dangerous cattle-driving mission that was not his responsibility, made Captain Wells promise to explain the situation to Pew and left to guide the expedition.⁶⁷

The group Lemmon piloted on January 5 consisted of Captain Frank D. Baldwin, Lieutenant Edward W. Casey and several other cavalry officers; a teamster’s wagon hauling the baggage, seven Cheyenne Indian scouts and an interpreter; and “a *Harper’s Bazaar* artist who was appointed to sketch the Wounded Knee battle field.” Ed guided the party to the safe camp without incident, earning praise from Captain Baldwin for his prudent travel route.⁶⁸ He left the group the following day to search for his missing men, all of whom he later recovered except for Isaac Miller, who had indeed been killed by Indians. Although Lemmon did not know it, the “*Harper’s Bazaar* artist” he escorted was almost certainly famed painter and sculptor Frederic Remington, whose illustrations of cowboys, Indians and western landscapes later earned him worldwide fame.

Remington had visited Wounded Knee a few days before and left South Dakota on

⁶⁷ Ibid. and Renee Sansom Flood, *Lost Bird of Wounded Knee: Spirit of the Lakota* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 54-56.

⁶⁸ *BFB*, 1 September 1933; *BFB*, 18 November 1932; *BFB*, 23 December 1938; Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 389-395; and WSA, Vol. 10, pp. 7-9.

January 6 after a staged holdup by six Cheyenne Indians (arranged by Captain Baldwin, who viewed him as an unnecessary burden and a liability). Remington's sketch of "The Opening of the Fighting at Wounded Knee" appeared in the January 24 issue of *Harper's Weekly*, not in *Harper's Bazaar*, and this slight misunderstanding probably accounted for Lemmon's lack of recognition. If Ed had realized the connection he almost certainly would have mentioned it in his reminiscences, for he never let brushes with famous individuals pass without mention. Since Ed's one-day stint as a military man ended when the delegation arrived at camp, he probably never even heard the artist's name. A few days later Lemmon would visit the battle site for himself, but the bodies had long since been buried and there was nothing to see.⁶⁹

For Ed, General Brooks' request to lead a group through dangerous Indian country was an endorsement of his leadership qualities and skills as a navigator. He was proud of this assignment and in later years would use it as an example of his knowledge of Indian tactics and behavior. His reputation for efficiency in managing cowboys, bossing roundups and handling cattle had begun to spread throughout the region and served as the basis for his notoriety. Ed was widely considered a man who could get a job—any job—done well.⁷⁰ Whether crossing a swift river wearing only his underwear, surviving a severely broken leg and hours of exposure in freezing temperatures, volunteering to trail a cattle herd to market through roving bands of hostile Indians in the wintertime or navigating rough terrain and protecting the members of his party, Lemmon

⁶⁹ Ibid.; Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 178; and Peggy Samuels and Harold Samuels, *Frederic Remington*, 148-153. In 1907, one of the Wounded Knee survivors, Zintkala Nuni, the "Lost Bird of Wounded Knee" would begin her career in "Indian Pete" Culbertson's Wild West Show at Lemmon, South Dakota. Flood, *Lost Bird of Wounded Knee*, 247-250. Ironically, Remington's painting, *In from the Night Herd*, adorned the cover of the first published book about G.E. Lemmon, Nellie Snyder Yost's *Boss Cowman*.

⁷⁰ Blasingame, *Dakota Cowboy*, 222.

demonstrated an unsurpassed ability to handle any situation that came his way. This knack for adaptability would serve him well later in 1891, when Dave Clark's sudden death provided Lemmon the opportunity to manage the outfit he had served for more than a decade.

Chapter VI: Cattleman

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries thousands of cowboys worked on the open ranges of the northern Great Plains, tending millions of beeves for dozens of large cattle outfits. The companies, often financed by backers in Europe or the eastern United States, sought to capitalize on the incredible opportunities available on these grasslands, which stretched from the Nebraska sandhills to the Canadian prairie provinces and from the Missouri River to Wyoming and Montana. With millions of acres on federal or Indian land available for livestock grazing at virtually no cost, returns could be enormous. If all went well outfits such as the Matador, Turkey Track, Diamond A and Flying V would raise their cattle using public grass, sell the mature beeves to local Indian agents or ship them by rail to markets in Chicago and reap huge profits. In contrast, the cowboys who spent long, hot days on horseback caring for herds of stubborn steers rarely became rich from their efforts. Some spent a lifetime riding the range and ended up worse off than they began—penniless, with broken-down bodies and few prospects for the future. Others trailed cattle for a few years during their teens and twenties, trying to earn enough money to purchase a farm or ranch of their own. Among cowboys, perhaps one of the most popular ambitions was to become a wealthy cattleman. Yet few of those who fantasized about running their own spread ever saw their dreams come to fruition.¹ George Edward Lemmon was the exception.

From the time Lemmon began working for the Sheidley Cattle Company in 1880, Dave Clark had been the outfit's general manager. Clark led with authority, skillfully choosing cattle ranges and earning the respect of Lemmon and his other cowboys. As

¹ Slatta, *Cowboys of the Americas*, 97-99 and David E. Lopez, "Cowboy Strikes and Unions," *Labor History* 18:3 (Summer 1977), 325-340.

general manager he had a one-fifth stake in the company and was its overall superintendent, but relied heavily on Ed and others to manage the day-to-day operations during his absences, which were frequent. In addition to serving as mayor of Rapid City and president of various cattlemen's organizations, in 1890 Clark was elected to the South Dakota state senate. For some time Clark had been plagued by a respiratory ailment and following the November election, he traveled to Florida in the hopes that the warm sunshine would prove easier on his lungs than the frigid northern plains winter. When the legislative session opened in January 1891 he spent much of his time in the Missouri River city of Pierre, South Dakota's capital. During the session Clark worked to pass legislation favorable to cattlemen, but on March 8 he succumbed to his disease and died. He was only thirty-three.²

Following Clark's death, George and William Sheidley turned the general manager's duties over to Lemmon, who had served as range manager since 1880.³ Clark had been grooming Ed for the position for years and in his new role Lemmon, also thirty-three, had the opportunity to weave the various systems he had developed for handling men and livestock into the fabric of the entire enterprise. In Lemmon's estimation being the general manager required a different skill set than the range manager, however. A cowboy was an expert in roping, cutting, branding and handling cattle, while a cowman managed cowboys, displayed sound judgment and selected choice ranges.⁴ As he said of W.P. Williams, the general manager of a different outfit: "He was one of the most

² Clark left his estate—worth more than \$200,000—to his wife, Charlotte Gifford Clark. Lee and Williams, *Last Grass*, 178-180; Smith and Harry, *Trail of the Sheidley Cattle Company*, 151-154; *BFB*, 2 September 1932; *BFB*, 26 May 1933; and *BFB*, 5 May 1934.

³ Ben Sheidley had died in 1883. Sheidley Family Papers, Betsey Sheidley Fletcher Collection and Faith Historical Committee, *Faith Country Heritage*, 278-285.

⁴ *BFB*, 26 May 1933.

thorough cow men I ever worked for, but in the true sense of the word he was never a real cowboy. What I mean, he could scarcely rope his own saddle horses or successfully cut a cow, or count a herd, but he was a wonderful manager and trail and range boss.”⁵

Likewise, open range cattle-handling skill did not necessarily equate to success in making a profit for the company, which was the general manager’s primary responsibility. Ed had already earned widespread respect as a cowboy; since being general manger also entitled him to a fifteen percent ownership stake in the Sheidley Cattle Company, he now sought to prove he could excel as a cattleman.

Lemmon’s transition from cowboy to cattleman was not a clean break from one set of responsibilities to another. Whereas Clark usually supervised the outfit from his office in Rapid City, Ed took a hands-on approach and managed from the saddle. While other managers used a buggy and team to cover broad expanses of territory, Lemmon always rode horseback, just like his cowboys.⁶ Working on the range came naturally to him and he felt more comfortable sitting in the saddle than behind a desk. Despite his various injuries and the dangers associated with life on the open range, Lemmon felt at home there, for reasons he could not always articulate. He had intrinsic abilities in many aspects of cowboy life which contributed to his rapid rise in the industry. For instance, in addition to his inherent knowledge of cattle and skill in cutting animals from the herd, Ed was renowned for his remarkable ability to discern directions on the open range at night. Many cowboys, after galloping with a stampeding cattle herd, turning around multiple times and having experienced several changes in direction, could not find their way back to camp. For Lemmon “this seemed to come to me by nature as to the homing pigeon.”

⁵ *BFB*, 6 December 1935.

⁶ Blasingame, *Dakota Cowboy*, 221-222.

After one stampede when he was just nineteen, Lemmon separated from the rest of the cowboys and headed for camp by himself because the other men thought the camp lay in a different direction. Lemmon was sound asleep in his bedroll when the other cowboys arrived, having ridden around in the dark for many miles. In the morning when they asked Lemmon how he knew where to find the camp, he recalled: "I could not tell them. I confessed I kept no track of the different directions the stampeded cattle had taken, but by some instinct knew how to go for camp."⁷

Cowboys soon learned to follow Lemmon's lead at night, especially when clouds covered the stars or there were no other navigational aids. Company managers also gained confidence in his abilities. As Ed later noted, his natural instincts were "a very strong factor in my advancement in the business."⁸ The trust of his cowboys played an important role in Lemmon's leadership abilities, but skill alone did not make him a great leader. Many successful managers are unable to understand why their subordinates cannot function as efficiently or as skillfully as they can. This shortcoming did not affect Lemmon. He never berated a cowboy for lack of ability. He compensated for any weaknesses by implementing methodical systems for virtually every aspect of cattle handling. Ed fused his skills with clear organization to create a system that took much of the uncertainty out of working cattle. Lemmon's crews were more successful than other outfits, in part because everyone worked from the same rubric and knew the overall plan. They capitalized on the tremendous ability of a well-organized, well-managed group to

⁷ *BFB*, 29 November 1935.

⁸ *Ibid.*

get things done. As Lemmon later said about his fabulous killer crew, “it was results that we were after and results was what [we] got.”⁹

Trail drives required as much organization as roundups and Ed employed a specific structure for his drives, which in the 1890s averaged about 2,500 head. In the days following the Civil War, trail bosses tended to use one cowboy for every hundred head of longhorn cattle because the animals were wild and difficult to handle. Charles Goodnight even selected a man to kill any calves born on the trail because they disrupted the progress of the herd and were not worth the trouble.¹⁰ As more docile crossbred cattle increased in numbers in the 1880s and 1890s, bosses increased the ratio to 300 head per cowboy. Lemmon’s crews usually consisted of eleven men: a trail boss, a cook, a horse wrangler and eight cowboys. Two cowboys, known as point men, rode in front of the herd and were usually the most experienced hands deemed best to hold the cattle together when crossing rivers or corralling stock. About one-third of the way back from the pointers rode two swing men, one on each side of the herd. Two flankers rode one-third of the way behind the swing men and were followed by two drag riders bringing up the rear. The cowboys “handling the drags,” or the slowest animals in the herd, were given specific instructions for how to keep the cattle moving: “The drag drivers [were] to weave back and forth, rounding the corners and . . . keeping the hind center full, and in a manner always moving forward and never under any circumstances crowding an animal or your horse up into the herd, which causes the cattle to tromp on one another’s heels,

⁹ *BFB*, 5 April 1935.

¹⁰ Haley, *Charles Goodnight*, 136.

making bruises or cracked and chafed heels.” Riding the drags was dusty and unpleasant, so the most inexperienced cowboys usually drew this assignment.¹¹

Lemmon wanted a trail herd of 2,500 head to spread out for three-quarters of a mile and average between thirteen and fifteen miles per day. Each day the cowboys would push the herd off at about 6:00 a.m., traveling perhaps eight miles before breaking for lunch. In ideal conditions this left a shorter drive for the afternoon, when warmer temperatures caused greater weight loss. The trail boss tried to select a night camp near water, if possible, and bed the cattle on high ground where evening breezes would keep insects off the cattle and cowboys would be less apt to encounter a river or stream if the herd stampeded. Lemmon liked to bed the cattle with plenty of space, so a steer could rise and turn over without disturbing the animal sleeping next to it, in order to prevent stampedes. The eight cowboys divided the night guard into four, two-hour shifts, with the first pair beginning at 8:00 p.m. The night guards rode around the herds in opposite directions, singing or humming a lullaby to calm the herd. Lemmon’s chuck wagon carried a dozen lanterns, one of which was always hung (lighted) inside the wagon cover at night to act as a beacon to guide the cowboys to camp in case of a stampede. The night guards each carried a lantern as they rode around the herd. During a stampede they used them as signals to other cowboys and to slow or stop the rushing cattle, which became used to the lights and looked on them as a familiar sight. Lemmon’s system extended to every aspect of the trail drive, from the design and staking of the rope horse corral (which held the remuda of sixty-three horses) to a detailed list of the utensils and tools carried in the chuck wagon. His methods brought results. As he noted, “If herds are handled as

¹¹ WSA, Vol. 6, p. 1. Charles Goodnight’s system differed from Lemmon’s in several ways, including selecting “three steady men” for the drags. Haley, *Charles Goodnight*, 244-259.

described, either by drifting or slow trailing, over good grass and watered regions . . . they should land at destination with a gain in flesh, and very few sore footed ones.”¹²

Goodnight and Lemmon had differences of opinion on how best to conduct certain aspects of cattle handling, largely due to geography and personal preference. For instance, on his trail drives Goodnight advocated sending stampeding cattle “into the mill” by having a cowboy race to the front of the herd and turn the animals to the right. When the leaders circled in this way they eventually reached the tail end of the herd and formed the mill, which ended the stampede.¹³ Ed viewed turning a stampeding herd into the mill as a last resort because this technique could injure cattle and endanger cowboys. Lemmon’s disciplined cowboy crews avoided the hazards of these nighttime dashes by working together and following his techniques. Ed’s approach proved a success. Although he participated in innumerable stampedes during his half-century on the range, he never had a cowboy or horse seriously injured during one.¹⁴

The seasoned cowboys also differed on the relative quality of their gear. Lemmon believed that “Texas trail equipment was so inferior to our northern equipment,” including their chuck wagons (which Goodnight had invented) and the sourdough keg they usually carried. In the mid-1890s after the Sheidley Cattle Company purchased the NUN ranch in Texas, one of Ed’s hands, Othe Arndt, ridiculed an adjacent outfit’s cowboys about their sourdough keg, “which had a tight hinged cover with felt around the cover edges to make it dust-proof and also air-proof.” The design was faulty “and with

¹² WSA, Vol. 6, p. 1-6.

¹³ Haley, *Charles Goodnight*, 250-251.

¹⁴ Slatta, *The Cowboy Encyclopedia* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1994), 97, 372; Philip Ashton Rollins, *The Cowboy: An Unconventional History of Civilization on the Old-Time Cattle Range* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 36; Hamilton, *Dakota*, 143-144; Webb, *The Great Plains*, 205, 265; *BFB*, 21 May 1937; and WSA, Vol. 11, p. 10.

the shaking and jostling the dough would ferment and gather gas until it was known to blow up and cast off the lid with a loud roar and it always smelled near as strong as a skunk.” One night Arndt and a Texas cowboy were on night guard together when a herd of 3,500 yearling cattle stampeded for no apparent reason. After the cattle had quieted down and been returned to the bed grounds the Texas cowboy asked Arndt, “Now what the hell do you suppose stampeded them yearlings?” “Be damned if I know,” Arndt replied, “unless it was the lid blowed off that sourdough keg!” The actual differences in quality between northern and southern equipment was largely a matter of opinion, but the cowboys enjoyed ribbing each other about the perceived deficiencies of their respective outfits.¹⁵

Lemmon and Goodnight probably never met, but they would have enjoyed arguing over different methods of cattle handling and likely would have shared a feeling of mutual respect. Goodnight’s reputation for producing quality cattle was well-known and Lemmon raved about his skill as a cattleman, calling him the “greatest builder up of stocks of breeding cattle the world ever knew.”¹⁶ During the 1890s Lemmon demonstrated this belief by purchasing thousands of JA-branded cattle with genetics developed by Goodnight. Without question, they would have agreed on one element crucial to successful cattle handling: it was essential to have a plan. Goodnight and Lemmon both used their systems to great effect and owned a portion of their success to teaching cowboys the intricacies of their techniques.¹⁷

¹⁵ *BFB*, 20 May 1932; *BFB*, 15 October 1937; and Haley, *Charles Goodnight*, 122.

¹⁶ *BFB*, 31 August 1934. Lemmon claimed to have spent an evening with Goodnight at his Texas ranch in 1884, but this seems to be another fabricated story. *BFB*, 14 February 1936.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*; Yost, *Boss Cowman*, 246; and Haley, *Charles Goodnight*, 244-259.

In addition to adhering to his system, Lemmon's cowboys were expected to use good judgment and adjust to changing circumstances. Their boss led by example. In May 1891 Ed boarded a train for Amarillo, Texas, to begin his first cattle-buying trip as general manager. Lemmon had overcome the shame of his crippled condition years before, but believed that his unsightly leg, slight build, youthful looks and range attire would detract from his ability to negotiate a good price. So he put on his best clothes and borrowed a fine gold watch and chain in order to "look the part of a full-fledged businessman" rather than a common range cowboy.¹⁸ After purchasing 3,700 cattle for the Flying V ranges in South Dakota, he arranged to ship them to Buffalo Gap by rail. A number of other cattle outfits were attempting to load at the same time and the shipping yards were crowded. Ed volunteered to load in the early morning hours of May 18 and asked permission to sort some of his cattle into the holding pens the night before, a practice frowned on by seasoned Texas cattlemen because in the early cattle shipping days wild longhorns had often damaged the corrals or injured themselves when penned at night. After supervising the penning of several carloads-worth of cattle, Ed went for supper. During the meal he met a sixty-year-old cattleman who openly questioned his decision to pen the cattle overnight, saying, "Whenever a man in my employ pens a bunch of cattle the evening before loading, he ceases to be in my employ." Ed, who took exception to the condescending statement, replied "When a man in my employ won't vary from any set rule to fit circumstances, he ceases to be in my employ." George Sheidley, who had traveled separately to Amarillo to pay for the cattle Ed purchased, was

¹⁸ While in Sidney, Nebraska in 1877, Ed saw a woman he had known years before, but failed to speak to her because he was self-conscious about his leg. As Ed matured, he overcame his shame and developed deep reserves of self-confidence. WSA, Vol. 9, p. 11 and WSA, Vol. 10, p. 3.

also in the room and worked to calm the tempers of both men, who later bonded by swapping stories about working with former Colorado cattleman J. W. Iliff.¹⁹

Ed appreciated adaptability in his cowboys and did not look on them solely as cogs in the wheel of his cattle handling machine—he truly enjoyed spending time with them. He was lenient during their infrequent trips to town, usually giving cowboys “their regular three days to lush up and [get] sober and be ready to move with the outfit.” In this he shared the same perspective as the saloon owners and businessmen of Chadron, Ogallala, Valentine, Belle Fourche, Rapid City, Buffalo Gap, Smithwick, Evarts and the other towns Lemmon’s outfits visited. Since the men “spent their money freely, it was [commonplace] . . . to allow the cowboys the freedom of the town as long as they rode down no ladies or old decrepit men.”²⁰ Lemmon let his cowboys enjoy themselves and they appreciated it. “Everyone liked him,” as cowboy Ike Blasingame noted, because Ed lived in cow camp with his men, told stories, played practical jokes and in general made his camps a congenial place to be.²¹ Unlike some managers, Lemmon understood that a “cowboy’s life was a lot of hard work with little time for recreation or gunplay,” so he and his men made the most of their opportunities to have fun.²²

Sometimes the men in Ed’s outfit got a laugh over the most commonplace of events. Lemmon’s chuck wagons carried extra tobacco, bullets and other conveniences that cowboys could purchase, since several weeks could pass without an opportunity to buy such items in town. One of Ed’s wagon bosses, Ves Merritt, kept a “day book” in which he recorded purchases that the cowboys had charged against their monthly pay.

¹⁹ *BFB*, 22 December 1933.

²⁰ *BFB*, 5 April 1935.

²¹ Blasingame, *Dakota Cowboy*, 222 and *BFB*, 23 July 1937.

²² Grabow Collection, unknown newspaper, 19 July 1939.

Merritt recorded each man's charges with a list of the items, followed by the word "ditto" for repeat purchases. At the end of the month he confirmed the charges with each cowboy before subtracting them from their pay. Bill Boggs, an excellent cowboy but a man with limited education, once racked up a large bill for Durham and Climax tobacco and pistol cartridges, having "smoked up every town or road ranch he struck." Merritt's ledger for Boggs looked something like this:

1 box cartridges	\$1.00
ditto	\$1.00
Climax	.50
ditto	.50
Durham	.60
ditto	.60

When Boggs reviewed the charges, which were lengthy, he exploded in anger. "Yes, I got those cartridges, the Climax and the Durham all right," he thundered, "but I never got a damn 'ditto.' In fact, I never used any in my life and I positively won't pay for them." Lemmon and the other men joked at Boggs' expense, but appreciated his outstanding cattle handling skills. Ed called him "the second best cowboy I ever saw."²³

Although Lemmon enjoyed being around people and got along well with them, he probably did not have many close friends. He almost certainly did not confide in either of his wives and with his brother Hervey's death in 1886, Ed lost the person who knew him best. Ed considered George Sheidley "the best friend I ever had," a telling statement because Sheidley was almost thirty years older, lived in Kansas City and only interacted with Lemmon on an extended basis during the winter months, when they held business meetings in Chicago. Still, Ed got along well with a wide range of personalities and made a point of getting to know his hands. Lemmon's penchant for spending time with

²³ *BFB*, 23 July 1937.

the ‘boys rather than with his wives placed a tremendous strain on his marriages and doubtless was the main reason Bertha divorced him in the late-1890s. But the wishes of his wives had little influence on Ed, who actively sought the company and conversation of cowboys. Even when he became the outfit’s general manager, Ed’s men viewed him as one of them—a cowboy. Dave Clark’s men had held him in high esteem, but they also viewed him as a boss, a cattleman. Lemmon’s men respected *and* liked him, which probably made his crews even more successful.

* * * * *

By 1892 Lemmon had become comfortable with his position as general manager of the Sheidley Cattle Company and was viewed by many as a leader in the industry. Ed’s management paid off handsomely for the Sheidley brothers, who reaped average annual profits of twelve percent under his leadership.²⁴ In April, just as the Johnson County War in Wyoming erupted, Lemmon began working with other large cattle operators to address a problem taking a toll on their profits: cattle rustling. Theft had been a nuisance for cattlemen on the northern Great Plains from the beginning of the industry, becoming problematic in the late 1870s with the arrival of thousands of gold miners and prospectors in the Black Hills. The newcomers needed meat and there were plenty of men willing to steal cattle and sell them in the gold camps. Lemmon differentiated between thieves who stole cattle for profit and homesteaders who pilfered them to feed their children. As he put it, “We never seriously objected to the small cattle men and settlers butchering our cattle for winter beef when the whole carcass could be saved and consumed, but woe be

²⁴ *BFB*, 1 January 1937.

to the man we could catch butchering and peddling it.”²⁵ Although he was a businessman, first and foremost, Lemmon was benevolent by nature and sympathized with needy families. His father James had demonstrated generosity in several instances, such as his profitless sale of wheat to hungry Mormons in the 1850s. Ed’s munificence manifested itself in numerous other ways after he founded the town of Lemmon, including charitable land deals to poor ranchers and gifts of candy to children.²⁶

During the 1870s and 1880s cattle companies in Wyoming, Montana and Dakota began organizing associations for, as one group succinctly put it, “the protection of stock and the detection and punishment of stock thieves.”²⁷ Although some individuals, such as Montana pioneer Granville Stuart, organized vigilante groups and shot or hanged suspected horse and cattle thieves, most ranchers preferred organized deterrence to murder. These groups levied a self-assessment, usually between two and five cents per head of cattle and one or two cents per head of horses, to pay for brand inspectors and livestock detectives. A few such organizations included the Black Hills Live Stock Association, later known as the Black Hills Stock Growers Association, of which Dave Clark served a term as president; the Western Dakota Stock Association; the Fall River County Stock Growers Protective Association; the Montana Stock Growers Association; and the longstanding Wyoming Stock Growers Association (WSGA), which had been founded in 1872. Cattlemen in Dakota, including the Sheidley brothers, had been involved with the WSGA for years and the organization maintained brand inspectors at

²⁵ *BFB*, 26 July 1933 and *WSA*, Vol. 11, pp. 16-17.

²⁶ Rose Tidball, *Taming the Plains* (Huron, SD: Self-Published, 1976), 39.

²⁷ Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 170 and Allen, *A Decent, Ordinary Lynching*.

Pierre, Deadwood, Custer and the Pine Ridge, Cheyenne River and Rosebud agencies.²⁸

The WSGA was very familiar with Black Hills cattle rustling, having sent brand inspectors into the region as early as 1876, when it was still part of the Great Sioux Reservation. As Bob Lee and Dick Williams noted in their history of the South Dakota cattle industry, “the prospectors were there illegally and so were some of the cattle, having been rustled from the nearby Wyoming ranges.”²⁹

The “West River” half of South Dakota had many individual associations designed to protect the cattlemen, but there was no overarching body covering the entire region. Large outfits like the Sheidley Cattle Company sought to organize a single, unified organization because they believed a majority of their losses came from small ranchers rounding up cattle they found on the range and marking them with their own brands. Small operators tended to form their own associations and the big outfits believed these groups existed as a front to conceal theft. Lemmon contended that small operators were more prone to this activity than large outfits because the big ranches “had their hands full caring for legitimately acquired cattle, while the smaller owners had more time to look for mavericks or large unbranded calves old enough to wean.” He claimed to have known of several poor newcomers who arrived in the territory with a handful of cows and within a few years had built up a larger herd than they possibly could have acquired through natural reproduction.³⁰

²⁸ Milner and O’Connor, *As Big As The West*, 217-248 and Sheidley Family Papers, Betsey Sheidley Fletcher Collection.

²⁹ Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 167-170 and *BFB*, 7 April 1933.

³⁰ WSA, WPA Collection, “Pioneer Cabinet,” Articles by G.E. Lemmon, “Visionary Absorption of Small Cattle Holders By So Called Cattle Kings” and *BFB*, 26 July 1935.

The poor relationship between large cattlemen and small-scale ranchers came to a head in Wyoming in April 1892. Many of Wyoming's largest ranchers were members of the WSGA and the wealthiest of these financed the Cheyenne Club, a prestigious social organization in the state's capital city. The WSGA held a great deal of political power and was the prime organizing body for annual roundups; it also established cattle shipping schedules and employed a team of brand inspectors. In some areas WSGA ranchers had banded together and used their combined power to control large swaths of public range land, which prevented smaller cattlemen and homesteaders from using it for grazing. In retaliation, some of the smaller operators branded mavericks they found on the range, an act the large cattlemen considered stealing. The uneasy relationship between the two sides was further exacerbated when the WSGA declared war on the "rustlers" in 1890. Over the next two years several alleged rustlers from small ranches were lynched, continuing the tradition set by Cheyenne's Vigilante Committee twenty-five years earlier. In 1891 the small-scale ranchers in Johnson County attempted to counter the WSGA by forming their own group, the Northern Wyoming Farmers and Stock Growers' Association. The WSGA blacklisted the members of this new group, which planned to hold its own roundup in the spring of 1892. In response the WSGA created a list of alleged rustlers and hired twenty-three gunmen from Texas to track them down. The hired guns received \$5 per day, plus a \$50 bonus for every rustler they killed. On April 12 and 13 the WSGA and their hired men faced off against 200 to 300 small ranchers and their allies, with several men killed in the ensuing gunfight. Though a

number of the WSGA organizers were arrested for conspiring to kill innocent men, none were prosecuted for their part in the Johnson County War.³¹

In South Dakota there were some instances where large cattle operations attempted to remove small ranchers from the range, such as when the Sheidley Cattle Company and others petitioned to open the Great Sioux Reservation for grazing leases in the early 1880s. There were also occasions where large operators pushed off other outfits that violated the “Open Range Rules” by infringing on another’s established range. In one such instance in the 1890s several Flying V cowboys organized a late-night roundup to remove 3,500 “trespassing” cattle from the Sheidley Company’s Moreau River range. A half-dozen other outfits followed suit and pushed the herd from their ranges as well; within a week the cattle ended up more than 100 miles south-west of where they started. As Lemmon remarked, such activities ensured that the “code of the open range was usually very strictly observed.” Ed preferred to handle disagreements with other cattlemen personally, but through subtle hints such as running off one’s cattle rather than directly confronting them, since hot tempers could cause itchy trigger fingers. He also found this course far easier and much more effective than involving the legal system.³²

Dakota cattlemen also managed to avoid the violent confrontations of Wyoming because of the region’s environmental characteristics. In the ponderosa pine woodlands of the Black Hills, many of the smaller operators grazed their cattle in the mountain meadows, which were interspersed with the forest. These meadows were relatively small and thus unfit for grazing thousands of cattle, so larger operators tended to run their herds

³¹ O’Neal, *Johnson County War* and John W. Davis, *Wyoming Range War: The Infamous Invasion of Johnson County* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010). Similar “large versus small” battles were waged in Texas as well. See Graybill, *Policing the Great Plains*, 79-81.

³² WSA, Vol. 2, p. 1 and *BFB*, 30 December 1932.

on the adjacent grasslands and left the wooded areas to the smaller ranchers.³³ Individual homesteaders were far more likely to go to the time and effort of rounding up their cattle in the woods, but larger cattlemen like Lemmon found such activity a waste of time and resources. Any group of cattle less than 100 head was not even a “herd” as Ed termed it, but merely a “bunch” or “lot” and not worth the effort.³⁴ It proved far easier to leave the smaller meadows to ranchers with just a few head and graze the open ranges of the public domain or the Indian reservations. This relative lack of competition, combined with illegal grazing on the Great Sioux Reservation, where all white cattle ranchers—regardless of size—were trespassers, differed from the situation in Wyoming and thus range conflicts such as the Johnson County War were largely avoided in the Dakotas.

Still, problems with rustlers remained. The WSGA provided large Dakota operations some protection, but with its difficulties in 1892 many cattlemen, including Lemmon, began to realize that South Dakota needed its own organization. On April 21, just a week after the showdown between the WSGA hired guns and the small ranchers, Lemmon and Frank Stewart boarded a Rapid City-bound train at Buffalo Gap to attend a meeting to establish the Western South Dakota Stock Growers Association. When they reached the station Lemmon, Stewart and several other men set out for the Harney Hotel in a street car pulled by a plodding white horse. The hotel was not far and the driver, a black man carrying an umbrella, set a steady pace that would not strain the animal. Lemmon could never stand traveling any slower than top speed and as another cowboy who rode on the street car recalled, Ed “grabbed the umbrella and beat the nag until he had him on the run.” They all had a laugh over this vintage Lemmon move and “pulled

³³ Johnson and Larson, *Grassland Plants of South Dakota*, 10-13.

³⁴ WSA, Vol. 11, p. 18.

up in front of the Harney in great style.”³⁵ The meeting’s attendees were among the most influential cattlemen in the region and included Rapid City mayor J.M. Woods and James “Scotty” Philip, the visionary rancher who would earn international recognition as “the man who saved the buffalo.”³⁶

The Western South Dakota Stock Growers Association immediately became the most influential cattlemen’s organization in the state. Building on its original fifteen-plus cattle outfits, in 1893, the year historian Frederick Jackson Turner famously announced the closing of the frontier at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, the Stock Growers added seventeen additional companies to its membership; by 1902 the organization counted 677 members. Eventually all the smaller associations in western South Dakota would disband or merge with the Stock Growers, just as its organizers had intended. The association issued assessments on cattle and horses, employed a seasoned stock detective, Sam Moses, to investigate losses and catch rustlers and became the principle organization for brand registration in South Dakota. Within a dozen years the association’s brand inspectors had recovered nearly 43,000 stolen cattle, valued at \$1.5 million. The Stock Growers printed their first brand book in 1893; within two years it listed brands belonging to 271 different owners. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Stock Growers got involved in the political process as well. They pushed for the establishment of a state brand board, implementation of statewide brand registration and lobbied for laws that continued to enable them to use “the range country

³⁵ Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 188.

³⁶ Philip helped save the American Bison from extinction by gathering and breeding bison on his ranch west of Ft. Pierre, South Dakota. Bison from his ranch were used to populate herds throughout the United States, including those in South Dakota’s Custer State Park. Wayne C. Lee, *Scotty Philip: The Man Who Saved the Buffalo* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1975). While Philip contributed directly to saving the species, he may not have been the most influential. See David Nesheim, “How William F. Cody Helped Save the Buffalo Without Really Trying,” *Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 27, No. 3 (Summer 2007), 163-175.

in the only practical way it can be used to increase the assessed valuation of this country”: cattle ranching. Lemmon would remain actively involved in the organization for the next two decades, serving as an elected member of its Executive Committee from 1892 to 1914. Although fellow members repeatedly asked Lemmon to run for president of the Stock Growers, he turned them down each time. Despite his remarkable ability to connect with people on a personal level, it appears Ed suffered from stage fright. Since he could not confidently address an audience, he never ran.³⁷

* * * * *

As the primary procurement officer for the Sheidley Cattle Company, Lemmon spent a great deal of time traveling around the country searching for low-cost, high-quality cattle to fill the Flying V ranges. After his first visit to Texas in 1891, Ed returned several times over the next four years, purchasing thousands of JA-branded hereford/shorthorn/longhorn-cross cattle from Charles Goodnight’s ranch in the Texas panhandle.³⁸ This approach worked well for the Sheidley outfit—purchasing cattle in Texas and shipping them by rail to the company’s South Dakota range for fattening proved a sound business model that paid off handsomely for its investors. Throughout the decade Ed also bought tens of thousands of cattle in New Mexico, Arizona, Kansas and other states.³⁹ The expansion of the national railroad network facilitated Lemmon’s trips and fundamentally changed the way the Sheidley outfit acquired and marketed cattle. Before the extension of the railroad into Dakota Territory, the Flying V had to

³⁷ Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 188-205, 225; *BFB*, 7 April 1933 and *BFB*, 1 February 1935. In 1937 the Western South Dakota Stock Growers Association became the South Dakota Stockgrowers Association. Even in the Twenty-first Century, the Stockgrowers remain an active voice in the South Dakota cattle industry.

³⁸ Haley, *Charles Goodnight*, 318-320; *BFB*, 1 January 1937; and John Clay, *My Life on the Range* (Chicago: Privately Printed, 1924), 226.

³⁹ *BFB*, 4 June 1937; *BFB*, 15 October 1937; WSA, Vol. 5, p. 10; and Yost, *Boss Cowman*, 239.

trail cattle up from Texas, a process that could take months and required hiring large numbers of cowboys. With the expansion of the railroad system, the same number of cattle could arrive from the southern ranges in less than a week, with minimal additional labor. This was an important development and a major factor in the Sheidley Company's twelve percent annual returns.⁴⁰

While most Flying V beeves traveled by rail to Chicago for marketing, some were trailed the old fashioned way and sold to local Indian agencies. In 1890 the five reservations created out of the former Great Sioux Reservation—Cheyenne River, Lower Brule, Pine Ridge, Rosebud and Standing Rock—purchased almost thirteen million pounds of beef, or roughly 13,000 steers for the 21,000-plus Indians living there.⁴¹ The Indian agents encouraged the tribes to take up stock raising, though they continued to struggle with white trespassers.

In 1892 the Pine Ridge agency impounded 3,000 head of cattle illegally grazing on the reservation. The agent announced a hearing on the issue and although the bulk of the Flying V cattle had been moved farther north and Lemmon had no impounded animals, he attended as an interested observer. During the proceedings a government official asked Chief Red Cloud what he knew about trespassing cattle. As he scanned the crowd, Red Cloud saw Lemmon and pointed him out, saying “My friend, Crooked Rump, over there used to have thousands of them grazing on my reservation, but I did not object for he always, when rounding them up, fed me and mine bountifully, and the cattle really

⁴⁰ *BFB*, 26 October 1939. For examples of the nationwide changes attributed to the railroads, see Thomas, “Railroads and the Making of Modern America,” www.railroads.unl.edu.

⁴¹ United States. Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Sixtieth Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1891), 197-198.

did us no harm for they were not near our settlement farms.” Lemmon, who spoke some Lakota but was far from fluent, credited the old Oglala Sioux Chief with this statement and mangled the translation of *Huste* (which meant “lame”) into “Crooked Rump” or as he described it in another retelling of this event, “Crooked Hip.”⁴²

Ed still believed that since the Indians were not using the reservation grass for their own livestock, white cattlemen should take advantage of it. But he also realized the potential problems in getting caught and continued the company’s recent practice of grazing exclusively on the public domain. In the fall of 1894, with the majority of the Sheidley Company cattle on the Moreau River range, he arranged to ship their beeves to market from Belle Fourche, the town founded by Black Hills lawman Seth Bullock and then the country’s largest cattle shipping point. That year alone, cow punchers loaded and shipped more than 4,700 railroad cars—upwards of 94,000 cattle.⁴³ Belle Fourche served southeast Montana, northeast Wyoming and the western half of North and South Dakota, which had been divided out of Dakota Territory in 1889. Following the closing of the Great Sioux Reservation and the arrival of the Chicago & North Western Railroad in 1890, the city had seen a tremendous increase in stock numbers.⁴⁴

The Belle Fourche stockyards offered a ready location for marketing Flying V cattle, another aspect of the industry at which Lemmon was adept. Each year the Sheidley Cattle Company produced 15,000 mature beeves for the Chicago markets, so Lemmon aimed to ship about 1,300 head per week during the usual August 10 to

⁴² *BFB*, 9 November 1934 and *BFB*, 1 March 1935. This incident may have taken place in 1897 rather than 1892, at another hearing regarding cattle trespassing on the Pine Ridge Reservation. See John Simpson, *West River, 1850-1910: Stories from the Great Sioux Reservation* (Sioux Falls: Pine Hill Press, Inc., 2000), 72-78.

⁴³ Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 250.

⁴⁴ David A. Wolff, *Seth Bullock: Black Hills Lawman* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2009), 120-128.

November 10 beef shipping season. Even after the advent of artificial refrigeration most beef shipments took place in the fall, to coincide with the natural reproduction cycle of the cattle and because severe winter weather could impede later transport. Lemmon employed four active crews during the shipping season, three to trail the cattle to the railhead and load them at the yards, and one to gather beeves from the range and bring them to a central location near Sand Creek in present-day Harding County for “shaping” (sorting the mature animals and preparing them for market). Ed preferred to finish shaping the herds by “slow trailing” the animals, covering the seventy miles to Belle Fourche in a full seven days (several miles per day slower than normal trailing). He wanted to oversee this work personally because proper shaping was necessary to add extra pounds to the beeves, earning the company larger profits. Ed’s determination to shape every herd they sold necessitated long rides back to the range after he finished loading each week’s shipment. He recalled that “sometimes I would be as late as 9 p.m. getting shipped out and supper and a change of horses, when I would pull for the cheese factory 22 miles out, where I would remain for the balance of the night, and make Sand Creek and my herd by the following day . . . a 70 mile ride.”⁴⁵

Shipping from Belle Fourche required meticulous organization, in part because the livestock agent in charge of the shipping schedule had to accommodate dozens of cattle companies. Each outfit had a pre-determined time for loading, based on the quantity and quality of a company’s cattle. Outfits that did not sort their beeves and had poorer quality animals loaded in the pre-dawn or dusk hours, when the lack of light would not hinder sorting. Most cattlemen, including Lemmon, sorted their animals

⁴⁵ *BFB*, 14 April 1933.

according to quality to ensure high prices once their beeves reached Chicago, so they followed a daytime loading schedule that was strictly enforced. If an outfit exceeded its loading time by more than thirty minutes it lost its loading rank for the next day, falling to the end of the line. Almost all of the larger companies, including the Sheidley operation, had agents in Chicago who helped determine the number and grade of beef marketed on a particular day.

During the peak season Lemmon loaded five days per week—Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. The Monday shipments included the highest quality animals because the men buying cattle for the packinghouses in Chicago looked for the best beeves on that date. The quality decreased throughout the week, with the worst animals (“poorly fattened and trashy”) sold on Saturday. Lemmon did not ship on Wednesdays because the New York beef buyers, who offered competition to the usual purchasing agents in Chicago, did not buy cattle that day. When live cattle bought in Chicago on a Wednesday were slaughtered and shipped as beef later that week, the shipments did not arrive in New York until late Saturday or early Sunday. When sold to retail outlets on Monday these animals were termed “stale beef” and brought a lower price.⁴⁶

Shipping five days per week pushed the limits of Lemmon’s stamina, but to the thirty-seven-year-old this hard work was the best part of being a cowboy. In the final weeks of the season he occasionally got “so chilled I had to roll around [on the ground for] several minutes before circulation got enough restored to balance me on my feet, but I was soon in camp shoveling hot beef steak and tea down me, and the affects were

⁴⁶ *BFB*, 3 January 1936.

hardly noticeable when remounted on one of my splendid cutting horses and after a fat beef, for there is something fascinating about cutting and shaping prime beeves, such as our free open range produced.” Ed thrived in this environment. He got excited just thinking about working quality cattle on a top-notch horse over the open prairies of the northern Great Plains. To Lemmon, the open range represented freedom and provided value beyond the free grass necessary to feed beef cattle at a profit. As he reflected years later, “the facts that the ranges were free were not the only redeeming features, for the fact of them being open was a still greater pleasure.”⁴⁷

Lemmon understood the value of the open range for making a profit, but he also prided himself on the Sheidley Company’s marketing system, which in the mid-1890s brought solid returns. He estimated the company’s average costs for buying, raising, transporting and selling their stock at \$32.75 per head, including death loss—younger or weaker animals who fell victim to disease, perished in the cold winters or were killed by wolves, coyotes or other predators—and cattle stolen by rustlers. Average sales prices were \$4 per hundredweight (hundred pounds of live weight) on 1,200-pound steers, which grossed \$48 and generated a return of approximately \$15.75 per head. With the company marketing 15,000 head per year, it could earn returns of almost \$250,000.⁴⁸

Ed’s relentless search for profits led him to experiment with shipping locations outside of Belle Fourche. The following year he split a herd of 2,700 head in two, half of which he trailed 120 miles east across the Missouri River to the railroad terminus at Forest City, the other portion he trailed seventy miles southwest to Belle Fourche. In spite of advancements made in railroad cars, shipping cattle from Belle Fourche to

⁴⁷ *BFB*, 14 April 1933.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Chicago via the Fremont, Elkhorn & Missouri Valley Railroad still took sixty hours, a long trip for cattle unaccustomed to rail transportation. The resulting shrinkage (up to ninety pounds per head) caused unacceptable losses in Lemmon's opinion and he sought a better option. He believed he had found it in 1895 when he heard that Forest City, a small town across the Missouri from the Cheyenne River Indian agency, operated facilities for shipping cattle.

Forest City had constructed a rail line that merged with the Chicago & North Western Railroad line seventeen miles east at Gettysburg and promised reduced transport times to Chicago. Ed gathered 1,350 mature beeves and headed east to try the untested yards, employing his best slow trailing techniques enroute. They arrived on the west bank of the Missouri without difficulty, only to find that the meager holding pens had been hastily built on a sand bar prone to flooding. He also discovered that the only means of getting the cattle across the river was via two small boats that could hold a total of thirty head. For three and a half days Lemmon and his men "worked like slaves" and only had half of their cattle across the river. Frustrated with the prospect of spending a week loading 1,300 head—a process he could normally accomplish in a day—Lemmon, who never commanded deep reserves of patience, decided to swim the balance across the wide Missouri River. He bought an old halter-broke steer from a nearby farmer to lead the herd, tied him to a canoe and pushed the cattle into the water.

Urged on by additional hired help and a fleet of support canoes, the beeves had begun to swim across nicely until someone on the far side used a mirror to shine a light into the faces of the leading animals. The frightened cattle spun around and headed for shore, trampling and killing seventeen head when they reached the bank. Lemmon

suspected one of the boat owners of flashing the light in order to earn greater profits from the numerous trips. In spite of these challenges Lemmon managed to swim the cattle across the Missouri, loaded into railroad cars and shipped to the Union Stockyards. Rather than the sixty hours required to reach Chicago from Belle Fourche, the trip from Forest City took only thirty-one hours. The shorter travel time reduced shrinkage considerably and his cattle averaged forty pounds heavier and sold for twenty cents more per hundredweight than the other 1,350 head shipped from Belle Fourche. Despite the slightly better returns, the hassles involved with shipping from Forest City far outweighed the additional profits and Lemmon never tried to ship from Forest City again.⁴⁹

* * * * *

By 1896 the Sheidley brothers had been operating in Dakota for sixteen years, earning strong returns due to the region's excellent grazing lands and the company's sound managers—both on the range and at company headquarters in Kansas City. Ben, George and William Sheidley had started in business together shortly after the Civil War, with George overseeing the cattle operation following Ben's death in 1883. The Sheidleys had interests in manufacturing, banking and real estate in addition to cattle and George relied heavily on two key advisors, Richard C. Lake and Thomas B. Tomb, to assist in managing the cattle business. While Dave Clark and Ed Lemmon had handled the on-the-ground activities of the Flying V, Lake and Tomb had guided its long-term development. Lake was a thriving entrepreneur who had started to make his fortune in the Black Hills in 1876 as a hardware store owner. After profiting from selling tools and

⁴⁹ *BFB*, 1 April 1938 and *BFB*, 30 March 1939.

equipment to the throngs of gold miners, he invested in cattle and soon diversified into banking. By the early 1890s Lake was the wealthiest man in the Black Hills, having a net worth approaching \$1 million. Part of this wealth resulted from his investments in the Sheidley Cattle Company, of which he had been a founding partner along with Dave Clark, the Sheidley brothers and Thomas Tomb. Like Clark and the Sheidleys, Tomb hailed from Tiffin, Ohio, and brought banking experience to the company when it formed in 1882. He had invested in the northern Great Plains cattle business early, having registered brands with the Wyoming Stock Growers Association in the 1870s. Tomb had also spent time working in Chicago; his personal connections in the Chicago livestock markets and banking industry contributed much to the Sheidley Cattle Company's success.⁵⁰

Since 1895 Lake and Tomb had been urging George Sheidley to expand their cattle operation by purchasing a ranch in Texas. The Sheidleys had sold all of their southern holdings when the cattle business moved from Nebraska to Dakota Territory in 1880, relying on the open ranges of the public domain and the Indian reservations to graze their stock. But after the break-up of the Great Sioux Reservation and its opening for settlement, Lake and Tomb began to realize that the days of open range cattle grazing were numbered. They sought to add a measure of security to their operation by buying a ranch in the Lone Star state. The proprietors of the NUN ranch near Lubbock ran 17,000 head of cattle, owned 54,000 acres and were looking to sell. Lake and Tomb had also identified 306,000 acres adjacent to the NUN that they could lease, which would give them 360,000 acres in Texas from which to initiate a new management system developed

⁵⁰ Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 55, 76-77, 94, 108, 180 and Smith and Harry, *Trail of the Sheidley Cattle Company*, 34, 45-46.

in conjunction with Lemmon. They planned to stock the Texas land almost exclusively with breeding animals, taking advantage of the milder weather to reduce winter death loss and ease spring calving. In the spring the company would ship its weaned calves north to South Dakota, grazing them on the quality grasses of the open range. Early in 1896 George Sheidley assented to the purchase; on March 2 the sixty-three-year-old had a stroke and died.⁵¹

Lake and Tomb continued to implement their plans following George's death, arranging to drill wells, erect windmills and install tanks at forty locations on the newly acquired Texas lands. George's shares in the cattle operation passed to his brother William and sister Sarah, both of whom played no active role in the company's management. For Lemmon, George's death meant the loss of his best friend, but it is unlikely this affected him greatly. Ed had lost his only confidant, his older brother Hervey, ten years earlier and never shared the same closeness with anyone else. A short time after George's death, Lemmon headed south to direct the initial set-up of the NUN operation. Meanwhile, Lake and Tomb continued to broaden the scope of the company's cattle business. To accommodate their growing herd, Lake and Tomb arranged to move some of their stock from the Moreau River range in South Dakota to a new location on the Big Dry range northwest of Miles City, Montana, near the present-day town of Jordan.⁵²

With no Sheidley family members actively participating in the cattle portion of the family's various business ventures, Lake and Tomb encountered no opposition when

⁵¹ Smith and Harry, *Trail of the Sheidley Cattle Company*, 163-168; *BFB*, 14 October 1932; *BFB*, 15 October 1937; and Yost, *Boss Cowman*, 239.

⁵² *Ibid.* and *BFB*, 30 October 1936.

they proposed to develop the Texas and Montana portions of the cattle business as a separate enterprise. They organized their interests as Lake, Tomb & Company, marking their 20,000 cattle with the Reverse L7 brand. The pair continued to remain involved with the Sheidley Cattle Company, however, as did Lemmon, who served as general manager of both operations and retained his ownership stake. The Sheidley Cattle Company continued using the Flying V brand on its 40,000 cattle and printed new letterhead with Lemmon's name displayed prominently in the center. Sheidley Cattle Company wagon boss Bird Rose ("the best technical cow man I ever knew") shifted to Lake, Tomb & Co., becoming range manager of the NUN operation in Texas, while Sam Sheffield, Lemmon's range boss since 1891, remained with the Sheidley Company.⁵³

For Lemmon, Lake and Tomb, the future seemed bright. On November 6, 1896, just days after that fall's presidential election, Lemmon wrote that we "all feel very jubilant over our success." He referred to Republican William McKinley's victory over Democrat William Jennings Bryan, but he could have been describing the trio's attitudes toward the cattle business.⁵⁴ Lake and Tomb had already earned hundreds of thousands of dollars selling beeves, their Texas-Montana venture had begun to take off and with Lemmon handling the day-to-day operations, all three had abundant cause for optimism. The following year Ed had another reason to feel jubilant, when he successfully bossed one of the country's largest cattle roundups.

⁵³ Ibid; Sheidley Family Papers, Betsey Sheidley Fletcher Collection; and *BFB*, 31 January 1936.

⁵⁴ "G.E. Lemmon to W. L. Stocking," 6 November 1896, Sheidley Family Papers, Betsey Sheidley Fletcher Collection. Bryan lost despite traveling more than 18,000 miles and delivering 746 speeches in twenty-seven states during the campaign. See Nathan Sanderson, "William Jennings Bryan and the Railroad," http://segonku.unl.edu/~nsanderson/WJB_Frontpage.html, accessed 20 December 2010.

Because of Lemmon's unquestioned cattle handling skills and renowned organizational talents, other cattle outfits often looked to him to boss their spring roundups.⁵⁵ In late June 1897 on the Peno Flats east of present-day Wall, South Dakota, 500 cowboys gathered 50,000 head during the largest cattle roundup any of the participants had ever seen. This huge undertaking marked the convergence of four separate roundups, consisting of twenty different roundup crews and sixty reps charged with inspecting the brand on every cow, calf and steer on the grounds. The roundup was considered a "general cleanup" for the entire region, stretching from the Cheyenne River on the north and west, east to the Missouri River and south to the Nebraska border. A skilled roundup boss named George Jackson had initially been tasked with managing the roundup, but as cowboy John Anderson recalled, "as Jackson viewed the situation, 50,000 cattle, 20 wagons, 500 men, 4,000 saddle horses—he felt himself pitifully small for the job." Jackson turned the management responsibilities over to Lemmon, saying "You have worked more cattle than I have ever seen. You can handle men better than I. I wish you would take over." Lemmon replied, "If that is the way you feel about it, all right. Let's get to work."⁵⁶ He implemented an innovative system of organization, forming several bunches of 500 head each, spaced in a circular orientation. Ed instructed all of the bosses to move the cattle counter-clockwise in order to reduce the chances of head-on collisions when sorting the cattle back into larger groups. After giving his orders Lemmon rode to a small butte with a view of the entire roundup grounds, occasionally riding down to give instructions. Incredibly, the 500 cowboys managed to work five

⁵⁵ Rhonda D. McPherson, "The Roundup of 1902," *Mountains of History 2.0: Teaching American History Through the Black Hills*, <http://moh.tie.net/>, accessed 20 December 2010.

⁵⁶ Sudlow, *Homestead Years*, 178 and Hall, *Roundup Years*, 515-516.

cattle herds each day, finishing the entire cleanup of 50,000 head—a job that could have taken two weeks or more—in only four days.⁵⁷

For Lemmon, the Peno Flats roundup marked one of the high points of his life. He had put his twenty years of cattle handling experience to the test and passed with unquestioned success. Physically, Lemmon was short and crippled, but when working cattle in the saddle he towered above other men. He may not have looked as natural on a horse as “Buffalo Bill” Cody, but no one doubted his remarkable skill.⁵⁸ Ed’s success stemmed largely from ambition and an intense desire to demonstrate that his infirmity was no match for his determination. Natural talent, combined with a tendency to outwork every man in camp, paid off in the widespread recognition of his abilities. Ed believed he had bossed the world’s largest roundup—taking over for a man who did not feel up to the task—and in so doing earned the respect and admiration of other cowboys. Lemmon had always felt comfortable on the range, but handling a group of 50,000 cattle validated his belief in his own abilities. Now forty, he was in his prime and making a name for himself. As Anderson recalled in a 1950 interview, “Ed Lemmon, who handled this Roundup, was always considered to have been easily the best all-around cowman in South Dakota. His ability to work a large group of men to get the best results, his knowledge of cattle, always knowing just what they were thinking about – was phenomenal.”⁵⁹ Ed could not have asked for higher praise.

⁵⁷ *BFB*, 23 December 1932; *BFB*, 24 August 1934; WSA, Vol. 7, p. 2; Sudlow, *Homestead Years*, 178-179; and J. Leonard Jennewein and Jane Boorman, Editors, *Dakota Panorama* (Mitchell: Dakota Territory Centennial Commission, 1961), 360.

⁵⁸ Louis S. Warren, *Buffalo Bill’s America: William Cody and the Wild West Show* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), x-xi.

⁵⁹ Sudlow, *Homestead Years*, 179.

Expansion of the Sheidley enterprises continued in 1898, even as one era in the company's history came to a close. William, the last of the original company founders, passed away that year; like his brother George, William willed his shares of the cattle operation to Sarah Sheidley. Lemmon also transferred his Sheidley Cattle Company stock in 1898, selling it to range foreman Sam Sheffield. Ed wanted to free up capital so he could buy into another one of Lake and Tomb's ventures, a livestock enterprise known as the Lake, Tomb & Lemmon Company. The new company continued its relationship with the Sheidley family and marked its cattle with the Reverse L7 brand. Since 1880 Lemmon had worked for various cattle outfits owned or controlled by the Sheidleys, including D.H. Clark & Co., the Sheidley Cattle Company and Lake, Tomb & Co. He continued that relationship with Lake, Tomb & Lemmon, for although the exact accounting of these businesses is unclear, the Sheidley name was affiliated with them all. Ed's decision to sell out of the Sheidley Company was probably motivated by a desire to more fully participate in the business portion of the cattle operation, an aspect previously controlled almost entirely by managers in Kansas City. It also made sense financially, as Lemmon would eventually earn a fifteen percent ownership stake in 53,000 head.⁶⁰

His interest in the fiscal management of Lake, Tomb & Lemmon was probably heightened during their annual business meeting in Chicago, which continued a tradition the Sheidley brothers had started years before. Each year since becoming general manager of the Sheidley Cattle Company, Lemmon had met Lake, Tomb, George and William Sheidley and the other partners for several weeks of winter meetings. They reflected on the season's results, arranged marketing opportunities with potential buyers

⁶⁰ Smith and Harry, *Trail of the Sheidley Cattle Company*, 168-170; *BFB*, 3 March 1933; and Faith Historical Committee, *Faith Country Heritage*, 278.

and discussed plans for the coming year. Ed usually took a room at the Great Northern, an expensive hotel at the corner of Dearborn Street and Jackson Boulevard downtown. After several weeks in the noisy city center he inevitably longed for the calm and quiet of the open range and sought cheaper lodgings on west 39th Street, not far from the Union Stockyards. Throughout the 1890s Lemmon spent months in Chicago, but never truly felt comfortable there. He disliked the “adulterated air,” congestion and artificiality of city life. Lemmon was a man who always preferred the “\$6 California trousers” cowboys wore to the three-piece suits of the company’s financial backers. He also never quite got over the fashion of wearing pant legs overtop of boots. An intensely practical man, Lemmon found it very difficult to “pull my trouser legs out of my boot tops and . . . let them drag under my heels, gathering up all dust and refuse on the streets.”⁶¹

Ed attended the annual Chicago meetings by himself, always leaving his family back in South Dakota. In 1891 Lemmon had moved Bertha and their three sons, James, Roy and George, from the Flying V headquarters outside of Buffalo Gap to a small house in northern Rapid City, possibly on what is today Lemmon Avenue. On February 13, 1896, the family moved into a modest home at the corner of Quincy and Seventh streets near the city center. If anything Ed visited his wife and children even less frequently when they lived in Rapid City, since the town was ninety miles from the Flying V’s range on the Moreau River. Life on the Great Plains was fun, exciting and fulfilling for Ed and he demonstrated little desire to spend time with his family. By the late-1890s, about the time the United States reaffirmed its national manhood by winning a “splendid little war” against Spain, Lemmon suffered a blow to his honor that challenged his dominion over

⁶¹ *BFB*, 6 December 1935 and *WSA* Vol. 11, p. 18.

his wife.⁶² Fed up with his lack of attention, womanizing and overall indifference, Bertha—only in her twenties—divorced Ed. Even though he had done little to deserve Bertha’s loyalty, Ed was probably angered over the split and it appears he held a strong resentment toward her that lasted to the end of his life. As with his mother Lucy, Ed is almost completely silent about his first wife, mentioning her only a few times in his more than 800 pages of reminiscences. When he did write of Bertha, Ed did not call her by name, referring to her only as “my wife” and in one strikingly cold reference “the mother.”⁶³

Characteristically, Lemmon did not quit seeking companionship after his divorce. At the January 1900 National Live Stock Association annual meeting in Fort Worth, Texas, he became envious of cattleman Scotty Philip’s “lady escapades.” Philip had earned a substantial fortune in cattle and buffalo ranching—his wife Sarah was half Cheyenne, which gave him legal grazing access on the Cheyenne River Reservation where they lived—and spent lavishly on food, drinks, jewelry and lace stockings for women at the convention. As a result, Philip “became well acquainted and on rather intimate terms with all the ladies, with whom he seemed . . . a favorite.” Lemmon was chagrined by these developments, which rendered him “rather on the scrub order.”⁶⁴ Ed redeemed himself two months later when he married Rosella B. Boe at Edgemont, South

⁶² Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 6 and Matthew Basso, Laura McCall and Dee Garceau-Hagen, *Across the Great Divide: Cultures of Manhood in the American West* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

⁶³ *BFB*, 12 October 1934; Bamble, “Tentative Biography of the Lemmon Family,” Lemmon Public Library, George E. Lemmon File; and Grabow Collection, James H. Lemmon and Bertha Reno genealogical documents. The exact year of their divorce is unknown, but it occurred sometime between 1895 and 1899.

⁶⁴ Charles F. Martin, *Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention of the National Live Stock Association* (Denver: Denver Chamber of Commerce, 1899), 325; *BFB*, 11 August 1933; *BFB*, 6 November 1936; *BFB*, 15 January 1937; and WSA Vol. 7, pp. 9-10.

Dakota, on March 4, the day of her twenty-fourth birthday. Rosella was six years younger than Bertha and almost twenty years younger than Ed, who would turn forty-three in May. The similarities between Lemmon's marriages were striking. Both women were young and attractive, possessed limited financial resources and married following a brief courtship period. They also shared a complete lack of understanding regarding Ed's character. But Lemmon was a well-known, respected cattleman, on solid financial footing and with strong prospects for the future—qualities that appealed to Rosella. He could also be charming, an attribute that enhanced his ability to make a lasting first impression and probably helped win over both of his wives. But his charm faded with time and like his marriage to Bertha, Ed's relationship with Rosella would end in divorce.⁶⁵

After suffering through a decade of childrearing with virtually no assistance from her husband and years of loneliness caused by his extended absences, Bertha probably would have fumed over the way Ed indulged Rosella in their first few months of marriage. He bought her expensive gifts, catered to her desires and treated his new bride and two sisters-in-law to a five-day honeymoon trip to Chihuahua, Mexico. The couple thoroughly enjoyed themselves, touring a brewery (where Ed could not finish the only two beers he ever tasted), visiting a factory where they watched workers weaving exquisite rugs (“of course, we then had to buy one”), witnessing a cock fight, gambling in the casinos and attending a bull fight (“the most exciting performance I ever witnessed”). When they returned to South Dakota Ed secured a house for Rosella in Spearfish, fifty miles north of Rapid City in the northern Black Hills. Lemmon's new “home” was closer

⁶⁵ *Lemmon Leader*, 25 May 1964 “Mrs. Lemmon Rites Held at Sturgis” and *Rosella B. Lemmon v. George E. Lemmon*, 12th Judicial Circuit, SD (1927).

to the Flying V range on the Moreau River, but being outside of Rapid City also made it far easier to avoid accidental encounters with his ex-wife. This concern disappeared the following year after Bertha married Joseph Pitt in a very small ceremony at her Rapid City home; no doubt anxious for a fresh start away from Ed, a short time later the new couple moved the boys 600 miles southwest to Palisade, Colorado. For the next eight years Ed would have limited contact with his sons.⁶⁶

* * * * *

During the 1890s Lemmon's reputation for cattle handling skill, widespread knowledge of the region's topography and ability to get along with a broad range of personalities made him a popular cattleman. It also placed his services in high demand. As general manager of the Flying V he traveled throughout the country on cattle-buying trips, building up the Sheidley Cattle Company's herds to as many as 60,000 head. In the spring he regularly served as the boss for many of the region's general roundups and in the fall guided the "shaping" of nearly every beef animal his outfit shipped to Chicago. As a cattle buyer, roundup boss and general manager, Lemmon saddle-handled tens of thousands of animals per year. His experience working with large herds, efficiency in leading roundups and tremendous longevity enabled him to work an incredible number of cattle during his open range days. Within a few years Lemmon would be recognized as having saddle-handled more cattle than any other cowboy—perhaps a million head. But the days of open range cattle ranching were numbered, as Lake and Tomb foresaw; they addressed this potential change by purchasing the NUN ranch in Texas and acquiring the

⁶⁶ WSA Vol. 7, pp. 9-10; Bamble, "Tentative Biography of the Lemmon Family," Lemmon Public Library, George E. Lemmon File and Grabow Collection, James H. Lemmon and Bertha Reno genealogical documents.

Big Dry range in Montana. By the beginning of the twentieth century Lemmon held a respectable share in a burgeoning cattle enterprise, Lake, Tomb & Lemmon, fulfilling the dream he had envisioned as a common range cowboy more than a decade earlier. Still, he was unsatisfied and began looking for an opportunity to secure a tract of land for cattle grazing that could forestall the end of the open range for a few more years. Lemmon found his opportunity in a familiar place: an Indian reservation.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 192; WSA, Vol. 13, p. 5; Hall, *Roundup Years*, 19; and Blasingame, *Dakota Cowboy*, 221.

Chapter VII: The Largest Fenced Pasture in the World

Ed Lemmon was no stranger to grazing cattle on Indian lands in western South Dakota, having illegally ranged beeves on the Great Sioux Reservation from the Sheidley Cattle Company's first arrival in Dakota Territory in 1880 until the reservation was divided into the Standing Rock, Cheyenne River, Pine Ridge, Rosebud and Lower Brule reservations in 1890. Although Lemmon's Flying V outfit ran its cattle outside of reservation boundaries for most of the 1890s, many other white cattlemen continued to trespass on the reservations. In the early 1900s federal officials in the Department of the Interior, including Commissioner of Indian Affairs William A. Jones, began to investigate the possibility of leasing Indian lands in South Dakota to white ranchers. The Standing Rock Indian Reservation, which straddled the North Dakota-South Dakota state line just west of the Missouri River, emerged as a focal point in the battle between the country's pro-grazing and anti-grazing forces; it also became home to a privately controlled lease larger than the state of Rhode Island, an extensive enclosure Lemmon called "the largest fenced pasture in the world."¹

The Standing Rock Indian Reservation, bordered on the south by the Cheyenne River Reservation and on the north and west by the Cannonball and Missouri rivers, respectively, covered more than two million acres of northern Great Plains prairie. The reservation received its name from a stone formation resembling a woman with an infant strapped to her back, located near the agency headquarters at Fort Yates, North Dakota. The Standing Rock Sioux included several bands: the Hunkpapa and Sicasapa Lakota; the Hunkpatina and Cuthead Dakota; and the Yanktonai Nakota. These bands tended to

¹ WSA, Vol. 13, p. 5; *BFB*, 31 January 1936; Iverson, *When Indians Became Cowboys*, 42; and *Life Magazine*, Vol. 11, No. 14, 6 October 1941, 108-109.

live in separate locations, with the Dakota and Nakota residing primarily on the North Dakota side, the Hunkpapa in the central portion and the Sicasu in the south, next to the Cheyenne River Reservation. Some Sicasu also lived at Cheyenne River, along with members of the Miniconjou, Itazipco and Oohenumpa bands. The settlements on Standing Rock were located near water sources such as the Grand River, which flowed east to west through the reservation, leaving vast areas with no permanent structures.²

Leasing land on Standing Rock had several advantages, from Jones' perspective, and in seeking to establish leases he was "doing what I consider to [be in] the best interests of the Indians."³ Born in 1844 in Wales, Jones emigrated to the United States with his parents at age seven. He grew up in Wisconsin, becoming an educator and serving as superintendent of Iowa County schools from 1877 to 1881. He then moved into banking and business, founding the First National Bank of Mineral Point, Wisconsin, and investing in a zinc mining company in the same city. He resigned his positions in both endeavors in 1897 when President William McKinley appointed him as Commissioner of Indian Affairs.⁴ Jones took office ten years after the passage of the Dawes General Allotment Act, which had opened the Great Sioux Reservation to white homesteaders and resulted in a significant loss of Indian land.⁵ As commissioner, he dedicated himself to making Indians responsible for their own welfare, following a "well-known policy of doing away as fast as possible with tribal funds." A devoted

² Sprague, *Standing Rock Sioux*, 7 and Robert W. Larson, *Gall: Lakota War Chief* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 174-175.

³ Wisconsin Historical Society Archives (WHS), William A. Jones Papers, 1892-1911, MSS 495, "William A. Jones to Rev. Frank P. Woodbury," 15 January 1902. The majority of the WHSA documents cited in this chapter are found in box 1, folders 1-2; box 2, folders 1-4; and box 5, folders 8-9, which will be cited collectively as the "Jones Papers."

⁴ WHSA, Jones Papers, Biographical sketch.

⁵ McDowell, *The Dispossession of the American Indian*, 1 and Banner, *How the Indians Lost Their Land*, 257-258.

Republican, he sought to cut government spending on the reservations and believed that raising livestock offered the greatest opportunity for Indians on South Dakota's reservations to become self-sufficient.⁶

By 1901 Jones knew the tribes did not yet have the cattle numbers necessary to become self-reliant, but thought that grazing leases could solve this and several other problems plaguing the reservations. He was keenly aware that white cattlemen had illegally used reservation grass in western South Dakota for years. Dozens of large and small ranchers ran thousands of head—perhaps as many as 50,000 animals on the Cheyenne River Reservation alone—within reservation boundaries with no compensation to the tribe. Illegal grazing was difficult to track and because trespassing cattle forcibly removed from the unfenced reservations could easily return within a few days, it was even more difficult to stop. George H. Bingenheimer, the Indian Agent at Standing Rock, did not have a clear understanding of the policy regarding illegal grazing, asking Jones, “Have I the right to impound these cattle and horses for trespass and hold them until a reasonable settlement is made, or can they only be turned back across the line?” This ambiguity was in part a product of Bingenheimer's inexperience—he had only been the agent since 1898—and part a lax federal policy that took no great pains to punish trespassing ranchers. In addition, the prevalence of “squaw men”—white men (such as rancher Scotty Philip) who married Indian women and thus acquired legal access to reservation grasslands—threatened to undermine Jones' vision of the future on these reservations. The “squaw men” grazed thousands of their own cattle on the reservations and in some instances, contracted with outside ranchers to utilize the grasslands for their

⁶ WWSA, Jones Papers, “William A. Jones to Rev. Frank P. Woodbury,” 15 January 1902.

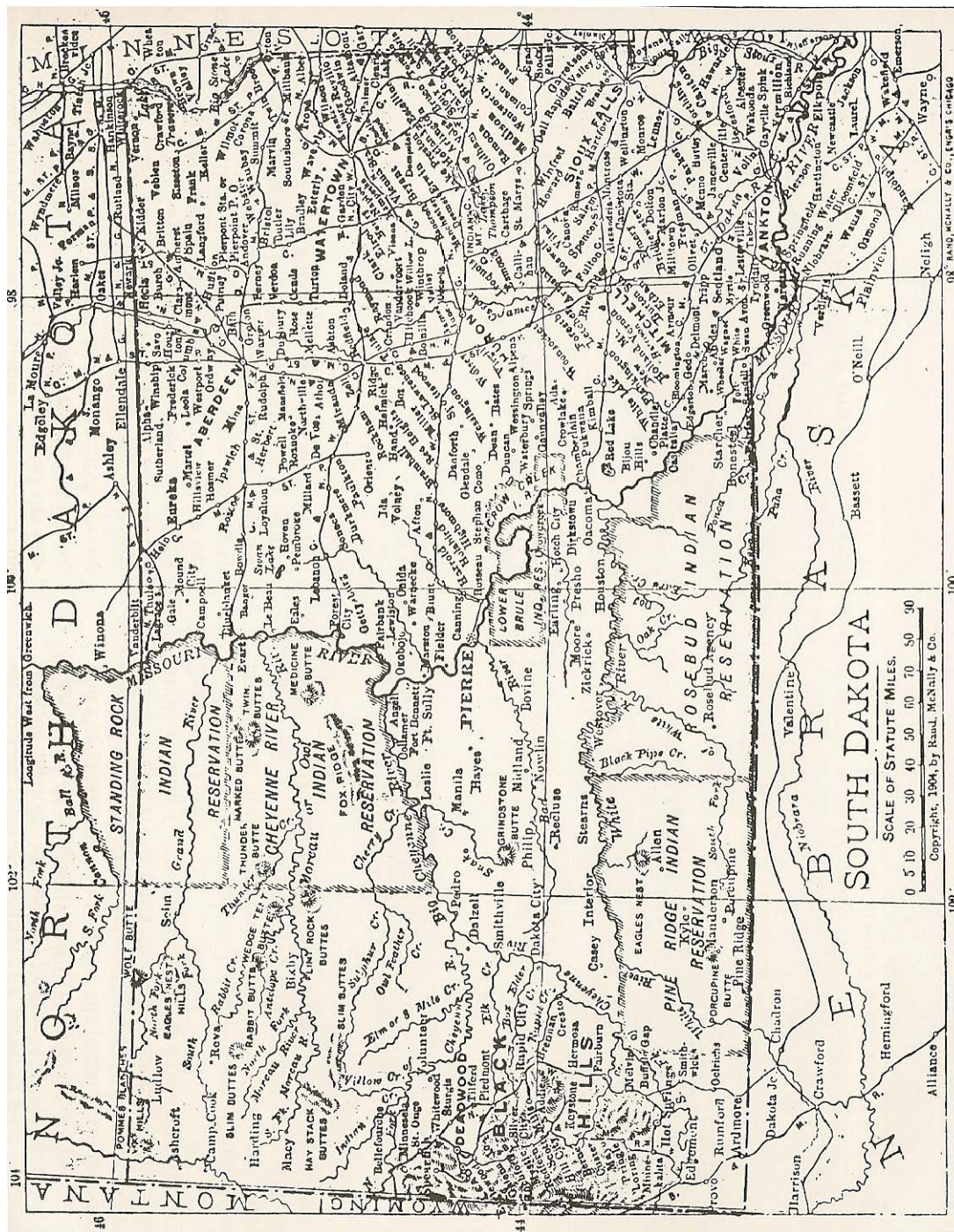
stock as well, depriving Indians of a key potential source of income. The commissioner found it “manifestly unfair and unjust . . . to permit a few intermarried whites and progressive mixed-bloods to monopolize practically all the common lands . . . whereas if the lands were leased for the benefit of the tribe, all would share alike in the financial results.”⁷

Jones began developing a plan for leasing a portion of Standing Rock that would include several conditions to address these problems. He wanted a limit to the number of cattle on the range, so the prairie would not lose its productivity through over-grazing. To accomplish this he expected the lessee to erect a fence around the entire pasture, which would become the tribe’s property once the five or ten-year lease ran out. The fence would protect Indian crops and settlements from intruding livestock and prevent white ranchers from illegally trespassing on the reservation once the lease ended. The profits would be used to finance tribal purchases of cattle, thus eliminating all or most of the government’s financial obligations to care for the Indians. With a number of cattle outfits looking to expand their holdings and increasing numbers of new homesteaders threatening to end the era of open-range grazing, Jones figured that a secure, long-term lease would be attractive for many cattlemen and lead to high bids. Jones saw leasing Standing Rock as a cost-saving measure that addressed illegal grazing, one of the key challenges facing Indian self-sufficiency on the reservations of western South Dakota.⁸

⁷ WWSA, Jones Papers and Iverson, *When Indians Became Cowboys*, 40-41.

⁸ WWSA, Jones Papers.

Figure 7.1. South Dakota at the Turn of the Twentieth Century.



Source: Faith Historical Committee, *Faith Country Heritage, 1910-1985* (Pierre, SD: State Publishing Company, 1985), 9.

Federal officials were not the only ones interested in leasing the Standing Rock Reservation to white ranchers. The Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad had arrived on the east bank of the Missouri River in 1900, terminating the line at a small ramshackle community called Evarts. The Milwaukee sited Evarts across the river from the north-south line dividing the Standing Rock and Cheyenne River Reservations, hoping to capitalize on the cattle grazing there and anticipating an opportunity to extend the railroad west across the Missouri. Although initially not much more than a haphazardly constructed collection of crude wooden buildings, Evarts thrived as a livestock shipping point because the railroad made several investments to ensure its success. It erected a large stockyard in town and constructed substantial holding pens across the river to the west. Hired men dug “dipping” facilities—channels filled with lime, sulfur and other anti-parasitic solutions in which herds of cattle were immersed as a means to eradicate diseases like scabies (a contagious skin disease) and the widely maligned Texas Fever. The Milwaukee also built a pontoon bridge and later provided a ferry service so ranchers would not have to chance swimming their cattle across the river—a dangerous activity that could result in the deaths of cattle and cowboys.⁹

To facilitate trailing cattle across the reservations to Evarts the railroad reached an agreement with the Cheyenne River Indian Agency, securing the use of a six-mile-wide section of land in the extreme northern portion of the reservation, a parcel known as “the strip.” The strip was a fenced thoroughfare extending from the reservation’s western border eighty miles east to the Missouri River, with the northernmost fence running along the Standing Rock Reservation’s southern boundary. The fence featured gates to allow

⁹ Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 251; Blasingame, *Dakota Cowboy*, 35-36; and Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 231-232.

access to the trail and eventually the six-mile-wide right-of-way contained several stock dams for watering cattle. By arrangement with the cattlemen, sheep were banned from the strip and the Sioux Indians on Cheyenne River received twenty five cents for each beef animal trailed there.¹⁰ The existence of the strip and the large number of cattle grazing in western South Dakota—both on and off the reservations—helped make Evarts one of the largest livestock shipping points on the Missouri River. In 1904 alone the Milwaukee line shipped almost 40,000 head from the Evarts terminal, many of them Reverse L7 cattle owned by Ed Lemmon. The railroad wasted no time looking to expand on these profits and as early as 1901 began undertaking surveys to extend the line across the river. The Milwaukee also sent agents into the region to test the Sioux Indians' reaction to the possibility of opening the reservations for cattle grazing, which, as George Kennan, a correspondent for New York City's *The Outlook* magazine noted, "would be profitable for the stockmen, and . . . increase the business of the railroad."¹¹

The Sioux on the Standing Rock and Cheyenne River reservations found that the questions surrounding grazing leases had no easy answers. As historian Peter Iverson has demonstrated, in the first decade of the twentieth century reservation Indians were still posing fundamental questions about their altered existence. How should they make a living? How should they use the land? And if "outsiders asked for access to lands that few or no one occupied or used, they said, then perhaps we can agree to it. However, if it is truly our land, do we not have the right to say no?" These difficult questions made for

¹⁰ Ibid. and Blasingame, *Dakota Cowboy*, 218.

¹¹ *The Railway Age Magazine*, Vol. 31, No. 6, 8 February 1901, 108; WHSA, Jones Papers, *The Outlook Magazine*, 29 March 1902, 759; Stan Johnson, *The Milwaukee Road's Western Extension: The Building of a Transcontinental Railroad* (Coeur d'Alene, ID: The Museum of North Idaho, 2007), 27-29; and James Frederic Hamburg, *The Influence of Railroads upon the Processes and Patterns of Settlement in South Dakota* (New York: Arno Press, 1981), 258-263.

unclear answers, particularly when they involved a government many Indians had ample reason to distrust.¹²

In May 1901 Agent Bingenheimer held two councils at Standing Rock to present a proposal for charging white cattlemen to graze on the reservation. The Milwaukee Railroad also sent a representative, a man named Hunter, to encourage the Indians to accept grazing leases. The plan called for the development of a permit system, whereby white ranchers would be charged one dollar per head per year for cattle already grazing on the reservation. While this approach fell short of Jones' vision for a full-scale lease, he believed it would be more palatable to the tribe because it did not change the current arrangement a great deal, except to generate financial returns; after all, thousands of cattle were already grazing there illegally, so their owners might as well pay for the privilege. Mr. Hunter told the Indians that the arrangement "is for your interest and ours. It will give you a dollar a year for every critter and every calf that is branded. It will give us the hauling of those 10,000 cattle every year." In addition, the permit holders would pay fifty cents per ton for all the hay they cut themselves and a higher figure for any hay the tribe provided. "At present," he stated, "you will get nothing for this land that lies useless."¹³

A small contingent of Sioux, the members of the Returned Students' Association, supported the proposal. These (generally) younger Indians had left the reservation to attend boarding schools such as Hampton Institute in Virginia or Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania and returned to the reservation after graduation. Considered by

¹² Iverson, *When Indians Became Cowboys*, 34-35.

¹³ WWSA, Jones Papers, Senate Hearing, February 4, 1902 "Additional Statement of William A. Jones."

Bingenheimer to be the tribe's most progressive members, they recognized the economic advantages of the plan and urged its passage. This group was in the minority, however, and in response to the proposition representatives of the older generations stated that they already had 15,000 head of their own cattle and 7,500 horses grazing on the reservation and that dividing \$10,000 between the 3,700 reservation residents would do much less good than selling their own stock. Many tribal members believed that rather than reducing illegal grazing, the permit system would lead to even more cattle trespassing on the reservation. Despite the urging of the Returned Students' Association members, most of the Sioux on Standing Rock were skeptical of any new agreement with the federal government and rejected the plan.¹⁴

Jones was disappointed in the decision, but undeterred. He continued to press for reservation leases, writing that "I would very much like to have the surplus lands [on the Standing Rock and Cheyenne River reservations] used for grazing, but cannot do so without the Indians' consent and it seems, at present, we are unable to secure it."¹⁵ At the time Jones operated under an interpretation of federal law that required a three-fourths vote of all the male Indians over age eighteen to approve the leases. Throughout the summer of 1901 Jones worked with Bingenheimer to try to convince the men on Standing Rock that some type of charge for grazing would benefit the tribe.¹⁶ The Milwaukee Railroad continued to encourage leases as well. In June an unidentified railroad

¹⁴ WWSA, Jones Papers; Donal F. Lindsey, *Indians at Hampton Institute, 1877-1923* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995); and David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995). These types of debates were not limited to the Sioux. See Paul C. Rosier, *Rebirth of the Blackfeet Nation, 1912-1954* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001).

¹⁵ WWSA, Jones Papers, *The Outlook Magazine*, 29 March 1902, 759 and *Ibid.*, Senate Hearing, February 4, 1902 "Additional Statement of William A. Jones."

¹⁶ United States Senate, Hearings Before the Committee on Indian Affairs, "Leasing of Indian Lands," (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902), 13-15.

employee—possibly Hunter—stopped at rancher William Wade’s home in south-central North Dakota, stating that he was “looking over” the reservation with the expectation of leasing it. Wade’s small ranch was situated just north of the reservation boundary and since his cattle trespassed there, he had a strong interest in keeping its grasses available for his herd. In an effort to convince Wade to support the reservation leases, the man told him that Commissioner Jones was involved in acquiring them. In the coming months this innocuous statement would provide the tinder for a fiery debate over reservation grazing leases.¹⁷

* * * * *

That September, as the fall cattle shipping season began to heat up, President McKinley traveled to Buffalo, New York, to attend the Pan-American Exposition. On the afternoon of September 6 he was greeting the public at the Temple of Music when an anarchist named Leon Czolgosz fired two shots, severely wounding the President. Over the next several days McKinley appeared to be recovering, but an infection developed and he died on September 14, 1901. His forty-two-year-old Vice President, Theodore Roosevelt, took the oath of office that afternoon and became the youngest President in American history. Born in 1858 to a wealthy New York family, Roosevelt was a sickly child who spent much of his time reading and studying nature. As a young man he embraced exercise and a “strenuous life” as a means to overcome his physical limitations. He graduated from Harvard University in 1880 and served in the New York State Assembly. In early 1884 Roosevelt’s wife and mother died within hours of each other; later that year, disillusioned by party politics at the Republican National Convention, he sought

¹⁷ United States Senate, Report from the Committee on Indian Affairs, “Leasing of the Indian Lands on Standing Rock Reservation,” 9 June 1902.

respite at a remote ranch in western North Dakota. Roosevelt lost most of his cattle herd during the severe 1886-1887 winter and returned to New York, where he once again became involved in politics, serving as New York City Police Commissioner and Assistant Secretary of the Navy. After leaving his post to volunteer for duty in the Spanish-American War, Roosevelt was elected as New York's Governor in 1898 and became McKinley's running mate in the 1900 Presidential election. His succession to the Presidency in 1901 played a key role in Lemmon's acquisition of the Standing Rock lease.¹⁸

On October 4 Secretary of the Interior Ethan Allen Hitchcock wrote to Commissioner Jones granting him permission to implement the "permit system of taxation for resident cattle and the permit system of pasturage for outside cattle on the Standing Rock reservation." Within a month of Roosevelt taking office the administration—possibly due to Jones' urging or perhaps at the behest of the new man in the Oval Office—adjusted its interpretation of federal law, allowing Indian Agents to charge white cattlemen for grazing on the reservation without a vote of the Indians living there. Jones notified Bingenheimer of the decision and the agent spread word to railroad officials and area ranchers, including William Wade and Ed Lemmon, that the Standing Rock Reservation would be legally opened for cattle grazing starting in the spring of 1902. Bingenheimer called a council and told the Indians that the Department of the Interior was going to implement the permit system on the reservation, explaining that white ranchers would now have to pay for grazing cattle under similar terms to those

¹⁸ Louis L. Gould, *The Presidency of Theodore Roosevelt* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 1-18; Kathleen Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt: A Strenuous Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Publishing, 2002), 199-201; Morris, *Theodore Rex*, 3-16.

outlined five months earlier. He also described a new provision that called for instituting a one dollar tax per animal on each Indian family that owned more than 100 cattle. The limit was designed to prevent “squaw men and enterprising mixed-bloods” from using a portion of the range greater than their share, but imposed a burden many Indians thought unfair. Jones and Bingenheimer took little notice of their objections. Based on the new legal interpretation, they “did not contemplate securing the consent of the tribe for its [the system’s] inauguration, neither did it require such action.”¹⁹

The following month Jones began to explore options for implementing a grazing plan more extensive than the permit system outlined in October and similar to his initial ideas for leasing Standing Rock. The permit system would generate about \$10,000 each year, but Jones believed the reservation had the potential for far greater returns. No accurate surveys of Standing Rock had been completed and his reservation maps were incomplete, but it appeared to Jones that roughly two million acres could be leased with minimal impact to the tribe. He estimated that the range could support one cow for every forty acres—a low stocking rate—which would allow grazing for up to 50,000 head. The lessee (he rightly believed that leasing to one outfit rather than several would make administration much easier) would fence the area to protect Indian settlements and to ensure the stocking rate was not abused. Jones estimated that a lease of three cents per acre would earn about \$60,000 per year—\$1.20 per head and six times more than the

¹⁹ United States Senate, Report from the Committee on Indian Affairs, “Leasing of the Indian Lands on Standing Rock Reservation,” 9 June 1902; WWSA, Jones Papers, “W.A. Jones to Geo. H. Bingenheimer,” 9 October 1901; and “William A. Jones to Editor, *The Outlook*,” 12 April 1902.

permit system. Over five years it would generate enough revenue to buy an impressive cattle herd and move the Standing Rock Sioux one step closer to self-sufficiency.²⁰

Jones had no experience managing a livestock enterprise, however, and overestimated the feasibility of his plans. On December 23 he published notices in the major stock newspapers of Chicago, Omaha and Kansas City announcing that bids would open on January 10, 1902, for grazing leases on a large tract in the western two-thirds of the Standing Rock Reservation. He also wrote personal letters to cattlemen and railroad officials announcing the opening. John J. Roche, the Secretary/Treasurer of the Omaha Cattle Loan Company and a friend of Jones', responded that the proposed conditions "knock me out." The cost of such a lease was far higher than their company could afford and he did "not believe that you can get reasonable parties to lease the land at the figures you name, and in addition to this, pay for fencing it and then give the fencing away at the end of five years to the Indians."²¹ As Jones would soon learn, northern Great Plains cattlemen were shrewd businessmen who would not pay high rates for land they had been utilizing at no cost for more than twenty years.

Three days after the commissioner published the lease offering, 771 of the 983 adult male Indians on the Standing Rock Reservation (seventy-eight percent) voted to authorize a five-year grazing lease on the reservation's "unoccupied portions." The document, which the Sioux considered an agreement, included a number of additional stipulations, including a rate of one dollar per head per year; proper fencing and adequate maintenance of the fence, paid for by the lessee(s) and which the tribe would own after

²⁰ WWSA, Jones Papers.

²¹ WWSA, Jones Papers, "J. J. Roche to William A. Jones," 30 December 1901.

the lease ended; and provisions to address disease control.²² The tribe, “fearing that the ‘permit system’ would be worse for us than the regular mode of leasing,” adopted the plan under the condition that a committee of three Indians and Agent Bingenheimer would mark the boundaries of the tract to be leased. Apparently tribal leaders and Bingenheimer verbally agreed to the latter provision because it was not included in the written document the Indians signed, which “covered only the bare fact of their consent to the leasing of lands.” To help achieve this favorable vote the Milwaukee Railroad had secretly employed Louis P. Primeau, a bilingual mixed-blood Sioux who served as an interpreter, to help persuade his fellow Indians to support opening the reservation for livestock grazing. As compensation for his lobbying efforts Primeau received \$500 and an annual pass on the Milwaukee road.²³

At the time of the vote Jones believed that the consent of the Standing Rock Sioux was unnecessary for him to lease their land. The Attorney General had determined in October that the federal government held the final say in the terms of any reservation lease and Jones operated under that interpretation. A few months later, when the nature of the lease came into question, the commissioner claimed a different interpretation of the law, noting that

it has been pointed out that the terms of the leases as drawn do not agree with the tribal consent, intending to convey the impression that the Department had entered into an *agreement* with the Indians relative to leasing their lands and had then broken faith with them.

²² United States Senate, Hearings Before the Committee on Indian Affairs, “Leasing of Indian Lands,” (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902), 14, 27-28.

²³ WSHA, Jones Papers and Herbert Welsh, *The Action of the Interior Department in Forcing the Standing Rock Indians to Lease Their Lands to Cattle Syndicates* (Philadelphia: Indian Rights Association, 1902), 3-5. Louis Primeau had previously served as interpreter for Indian Agent James McLaughlin. See Utley, *Lance and the Shield*, 263, 287-288.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The council proceedings are in no sense an *agreement*—unless it be an agreement among the Indians themselves, to which this Department is in no degree a party. The law provides that surplus tribal lands ‘may be leased by authority of the council speaking for such Indians . . . in such quantities and upon such terms and conditions as the Agent in charge of such reservation may recommend.’ The law, therefore, does not contemplate that ‘the council speaking for such Indians’ shall do more than give its consent to the leasing; the quantity of land to be leased, and the terms and conditions are to be left of the Agent in charge, subject, of course, to the directions of the Department.²⁴

Regardless of his future re-interpretation, as Jones viewed the situation in December 1901 the tribe had clearly voted in favor of leasing, which simply reinforced his authority. The commissioner believed that the Attorney General’s opinion gave him, through Agent Bingenheimer, full discretion for determining the size, location, stocking rates, leasing price and all other relevant details of a lease on the Standing Rock Reservation. All Jones needed to complete his plans were willing ranchers.

One of the cattlemen interested in the Standing Rock lease was Ed Lemmon. For several years he and his partners, Thomas Tomb and R. C. Lake, had recognized that the days of open range cattle grazing were coming to a close. Newcomers with a handful of cattle had hindered the expansion of large-scale operations on the northern Great Plains since the late 1880s; by the twentieth century most cattlemen were taking steps to address the situation. When settlers began homesteading sections of land and fencing off the range in western South Dakota during the 1890s, Lake and Tomb purchased land in

²⁴ WWSA, Jones Papers, “William A. Jones to Editor, *The Outlook*,” 12 April 1902 and United States Senate, Hearings Before the Committee on Indian Affairs, “Leasing of Indian Lands,” (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902), 11, 13.

Texas and secured additional grasslands in Montana.²⁵ Leasing Standing Rock offered a unique opportunity to continue their operations with few significant alterations.

Lemmon, Lake and Tomb met for their annual meeting in Chicago that winter—as they had for a number of years as employees of the Sheidley Cattle Company—and probably discussed the challenges and opportunities involved with a reservation grazing lease.

During their years of meeting in the Windy City the trio had come to know a number of railroad executives, including those of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul, which had its headquarters there. Ever since the Milwaukee founded Evarts, the railroad had expressed strong interest in stocking greater cattle numbers on the Standing Rock and Cheyenne River reservations. Lemmon, Lake and Tomb knew the Milwaukee had participated in discussions with the Sioux on Standing Rock earlier that May and likely consulted with its executives to gain insight into the negotiations on the lease. It was probably during their time in Chicago that the partners in the Lake, Tomb & Lemmon Company decided to try to acquire a lease on Standing Rock.

Lemmon and Lake arrived in Washington, D.C. on January 8, 1902, to submit a bid. Their strategy called for Lemmon to seek the lease in his name, with Lake and Tomb providing financial support. Lemmon met Commissioner Jones the following day and became one of six parties, including William Wade and Omaha cattleman W. I. Walker, to submit bids. Walker, who had known Lemmon for several years, had also traveled to Washington to see about the lease. In the advertisement Jones had announced that more than 2.1 million acres would be available, with the rate determined on a per

²⁵ Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 164-164. Lake, Tomb and Lemmon had keen insight in this area—more than 100,000 homesteaders would settle in western South Dakota between 1900 and 1915. Nelson, *After the West was Won*, xiv.

acre basis. By January he realized that his poor map far overstated the available acreage and notified the bidders that the actual tract included roughly 1.25 million acres—the entire western two-thirds of Standing Rock—for which he hoped to receive a minimum bid of three cents per acre.²⁶

Commissioner Jones opened the sealed bids on January 10 and Lemmon and Walker quickly emerged as the frontrunners. Two other parties had submitted higher bids, but they were “wholly inconsistent with the terms of the advertisement soliciting proposals” and Jones rejected them. The highest offer came in at 3.75 cents per acre, but included provisions allowing the outfit to trail cattle to the Evarts railhead over the eastern third of the reservation—the portion not included in the lease. The two companies could afford to submit higher bids because their shareholders anticipated a dramatic expansion in acreage as they trailed their beeves to market over the course of “a month or two.”²⁷ This approach was probably not unlike the shaping technique Lemmon had used on the ranges northeast of Belle Fourche, where his cattle spent most of the grazing season far out on the range and then were moved to a special location for finishing on the drive. The rejected proposals also would have allowed the companies to avoid using the strip to bring their cattle to Evarts. If these outfits could circumvent the twenty-five cent per head toll on the strip and access grass outside of the actual lease boundaries, their ventures could prove profitable even with higher bids. Jones objected to the notion of grazing outside the set boundaries because trespassers had been the

²⁶ WSHA, Jones Papers.

²⁷ United States Senate, Hearings Before the Committee on Indian Affairs, “Leasing of Indian Lands,” (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902), 22-23.

impetus for proposing the lease and he saw these requests as a continuation of the former practice.

Lemmon and Walker submitted the next highest bids. Both had proposed an identical figure—3.05 cents per acre—and complied with all the provisions outlined in the advertisement, including a deposit of five percent of the entire bid amount. Since both were present during the bid opening they discussed the matter with Jones and agreed to divide the 1.25 million acres into two portions, with Lemmon receiving an L-shaped tract in the extreme north and west of roughly 780,000 acres and Walker taking the remainder, a rectangular section of 460,000 acres. Lemmon's lease would include Standing Rock's relatively unoccupied areas and allow for watering on the Cannonball and Grand rivers. Walker's portion was closer to Evarts, but had fewer acres, included several settled areas and the only substantive water available came from the Grand River. This agreement was satisfactory to Jones, particularly because it would result in an additional fifty-four miles of fence being constructed, which would revert to the Indians when the lease expired in 1907.²⁸

Almost immediately the proposed Lemmon and Walker leases, which had not yet been executed, came under scrutiny. On January 13 three Standing Rock Chiefs, Thunder Hawk, Walking Shooter and Weasel Bear, sent a telegram to Democratic Senator James K. Jones of Arkansas—a former chairman and current member of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs—requesting an investigation into the proposed leases. They asserted that 400 families opposed the leases because the cattle would overrun their crops and farms. In addition, the Indian Rights Association (IRA), a

²⁸ WSHA, Jones Papers and United States Senate, Hearings Before the Committee on Indian Affairs, "Leasing of Indian Lands," (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902).

Philadelphia-based advocacy group, made a series of assertions regarding the leases, claiming they violated treaty obligations and that the cattle would damage the Indians' crops along the rivers. Later the IRA would add several additional charges, including that the Indians were not consulted prior to making the lease; the lease price was too low; the amount of land was too great; the land should not be leased at all and the railroad was the driving force behind its issuance. In response to these charges Senator Jones requested a hearing before the committee to explore the circumstances surrounding the proposed Standing Rock lease. The committee held its first hearing on January 16.²⁹

During the inquiry Commissioner William Jones explained his actions over the previous year, outlined the extent of trespassing on Standing Rock, described the Attorney General's opinion regarding leasing Indian lands without their consent and clarified how he had arrived at the terms of the proposed leases for Lemmon and Walker. The commissioner also read a letter from former Standing Rock Indian Agent James McLaughlin, in which he pledged strong support for grazing leases.³⁰ Because McLaughlin had a reputation for honesty and fair dealings with the Indians—even though he and Commissioner Jones shared the paternalistic attitude toward Indians that characterized many white leaders of the day—his determination that “it is in the best interests of the Indians that the western portion of the reservation . . . should be leased” carried great weight with committee members. In addition to the commissioner's testimony and McLaughlin's letter, questionable statements from South Dakota Senator Roger J. Gamble, in which he suggested offering concessions to smaller ranchers trespassing on the reservation, convinced Senator Jones that something had to be done to

²⁹ Ibid. and WHSA, Jones Papers.

³⁰ Larson, *Gall*, 174-196.

address illegal grazing. By the end of the hearing he seemed ready to allow one or two grazing leases on the western portion of Standing Rock. The committee closed the meeting without reaching a decision, but planned to reconvene the following week.³¹

While the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs met in Washington, D.C., to debate the merits of grazing leases, in south-central North Dakota William Wade penned a letter that further exacerbated the situation. A few days earlier he had heard rumors that the Milwaukee Railroad had acquired the lease on Standing Rock for the unbelievable price of just 1.3 cents per acre. Incensed at having lost the lease to a lower bidder, on January 16—the same day as the committee hearing—Wade wrote to Senator Jones denouncing the “wrongs being done the Sioux Indians” on Standing Rock. Ignorant of the facts and no doubt recalling his conversation with the unidentified railroad employee six months earlier, Wade claimed that the lease was given “to a company in which the Commissioner of Indian affairs is connected” and asserted that “a thorough investigation will show some dark objects only slightly under cover.” In the coming weeks Wade’s accusations would lead to an intensive investigation of William Jones.³²

The Senate Committee on Indian Affairs met again on January 23, but took no definite action in regard to the lease. Lake and Lemmon, not content to stand by and see how the congressional committee would address the issue, requested assistance from South Dakota’s junior Senator, Alfred B. Kittredge, who favored the leasing of Indian lands. Senator Kittredge worked with the White House to arrange a meeting between Lemmon and President Roosevelt, which took place on January 31. Roosevelt and

³¹ United States Senate, Hearings Before the Committee on Indian Affairs, “Leasing of Indian Lands,” (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902).

³² WWSA, Jones Papers, Senate Hearing, February 4, 1902 “Additional Statement of William A. Jones.”

Lemmon had much in common: they were both intelligent, ambitious and characterized by a restless energy that suffused their personalities. During the meeting they discussed cattle ranching in Dakota, Lemmon's lifelong passion and a topic on which the President had some expertise, having spent portions of 1884-1886 at his Maltese Cross and Elkhorn ranches in the badlands of what would become North Dakota. Apparently Roosevelt enjoyed talking with Lemmon, for according to Ed, the meeting "resulted in Roosevelt's order to Secretary of the Interior Hitchcock to approve my lease."³³ The President also met with a delegation from Standing Rock, which included chiefs Thunder Hawk, Walking Shooter and Weasel Bear as well as interpreter Louis Primeau. The Indians had begun to reconsider their position regarding leases on the reservation's unoccupied areas and during the meeting Roosevelt and the delegation agreed that both the Lemmon and Walker leases would be approved.³⁴

The following day, February 1, 1902, Lemmon signed a lease granting him an L-shaped tract of 788,480 acres in the northern and western portions of Standing Rock at a rate of 3.05 cents per acre annually for a period of five years. Lemmon's lease would cost the Lake, Tomb & Lemmon Company about \$24,000 per year, less than half the revenue Jones had hoped to generate, but more than twice as much as the proposed permit system. Walker's 460,800-acre lease was also initiated, but not finalized due to the necessity of acquiring a bond, which he had yet to secure. In this the financial backing of Tomb and Lake proved invaluable, as it ensured the rapid approval of Lemmon's lease. Ed could not place cattle on the tract until June 1, but would be allowed to start fencing it in March because under the terms of the lease the entire border

³³ Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 192.

³⁴ WSHA, Jones Papers.

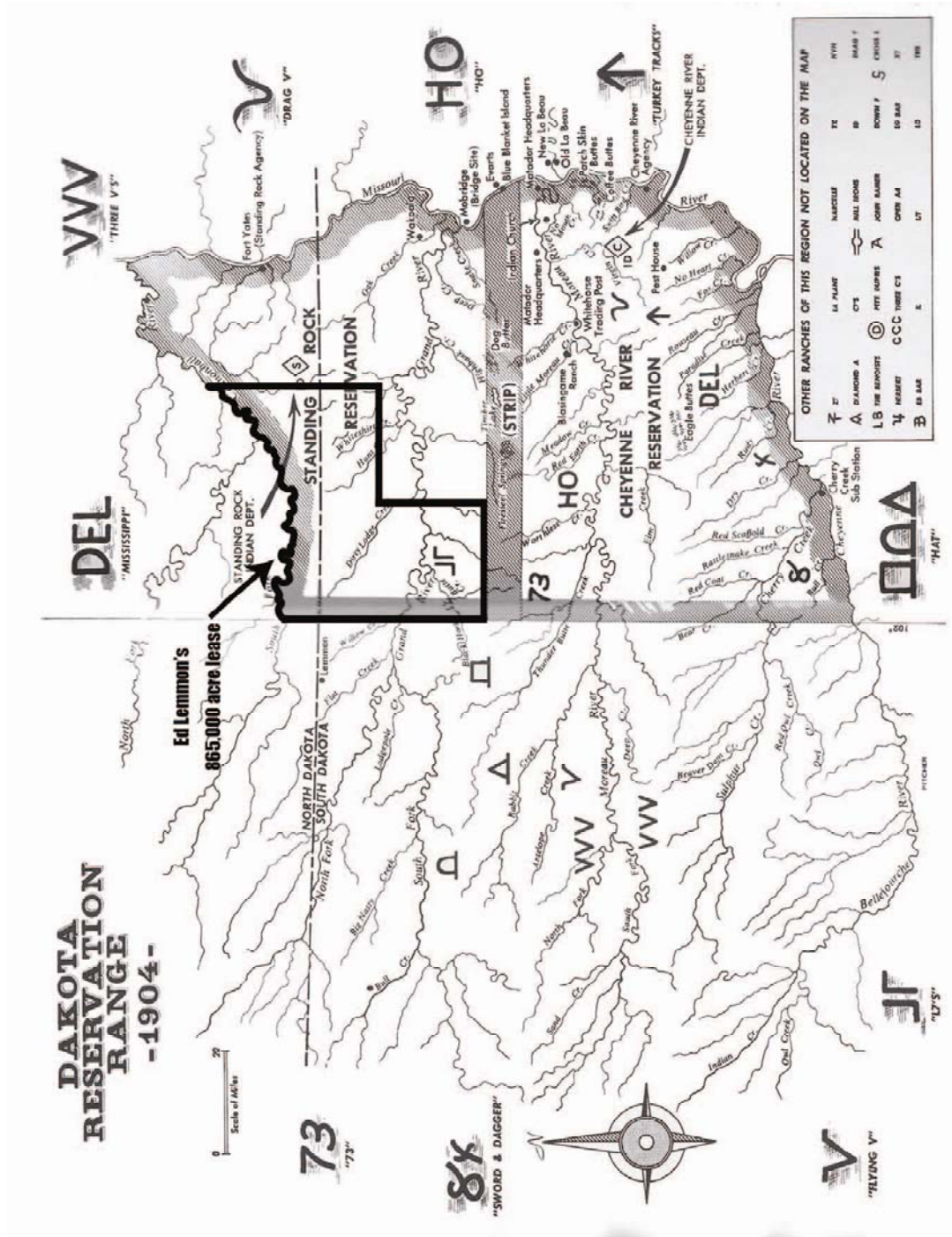
fence—roughly 200 miles’ worth—had to be completed by June 1, 1903. Lemmon’s lease called for the posts to be spaced two rods (thirty-three feet) apart, which would necessitate setting approximately 32,000 posts and stringing them with three strands—600 total miles—of barbed wire.³⁵

For a brief moment Commissioner Jones likely believed the questions regarding leases on Standing Rock to be over. Congress had held hearings with no finding of fault, the President had given his blessing and the Indians appeared to be in favor as well. But any feelings of satisfaction probably ended when he received a subpoena to appear once again in front of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs on the evening of February 4. The committee called the hearing to investigate an issue raised by the Standing Rock Sioux regarding the specific boundaries of the Walker lease. Most tribal members—including a majority of the Hunkpapa and Sicasu Lakota living in and around the lease—did not object to the boundaries of the Lemmon lease, which encompassed the reservation’s relatively uninhabited areas. But many expressed strong disapproval of the boundaries of the Walker lease, which included several settlements as well as farms belonging to a number of Indian families. The delegates believed that Walker’s cattle would ruin their crops and expressed a desire to determine the boundaries of the lease for themselves, as they had outlined in the December 1901 agreement granting permission for the leases. The Sioux believed they had reserved the right to determine the extent of the tract to be leased; now they wanted Congress to affirm that right. If they could not select the boundaries, the Sioux would not support the Walker lease.³⁶

³⁵ WSHA, Jones Papers and *BFB*, 15 September 1933.

³⁶ WSHA, Jones Papers.

Figure 7.2. The Standing Rock and Cheyenne River Indian Reservations, including Ed Lemmon's 865,000 acre lease, 1904.



Source: Ike Blasingame, *Dakota Cowboy: My Life in the Old Days* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 321. Map edited by Tiffany Sanderson.

To the Commissioner of Indian Affairs this demand was troublesome, but irrelevant. He had just brokered a deal to lease the entire 1.25 million acre tract and still believed he had the right to determine its extent without the Indians' consent. Despite the relative inaction of the Committee on Indian Affairs thus far, most of its Senators believed otherwise. As Arkansas Senator Jones remarked to Commissioner Jones, "So far as I am concerned . . . the law requires that these Indians shall consent to whatever lease shall be made . . . [and] I do not [propose] leaving it to you to say that they shall agree to a lease that they have not consented to."³⁷ The commissioner's pride contributed to his hesitancy to let Indians choose the boundaries, but his reluctance was also a product of logistical concerns. Jones recognized that the Walker lease had several problems that could not be overcome if the Indians altered the boundaries as they proposed. By fencing out the settlements—which were located near the Grand River and other important waterways—cattle grazing on the lease would have very little access to water or would have to travel great distances to reach it. The decreased acreage, lack of water access, a complicated fencing structure, questions about who would pay for the additional fencing and which party would be responsible for its upkeep created numerous challenges that Commissioner Jones found insurmountable. He knew that if the Indians set the Walker lease boundaries, the tract would not be viable for grazing and the financial returns would prove far less than he anticipated. Once again, the committee hearing ended without definite action.

Over the next few months third-party critics of the grazing leases continued to voice their opposition in forums both public and private. The IRA increased its

³⁷ WWSA, Jones Papers, Senate Hearing, February 4, 1902 "Additional Statement of William A. Jones."

involvement, publishing several articles attacking the leases and likely providing the funding for attorney William M. Springer to contest them in court. The IRA's antagonism reflected its members' understanding of the situation on the western cattle ranges, namely that "the Indians' cows never have calves, whereas the white man's always have twins."³⁸ Reporter J. A. Truedell of the Philadelphia *Ledger* also expressed his concerns, asserting collusion between Commissioner Jones and the Milwaukee Railroad and stating that the leases had "the color of fraud." *The Outlook's* George Kennan wrote two lengthy articles on the subject, claiming that the commissioner showed a complete "disregard for the interests of the Indians." The Standing Rock Reservation's Christian missionaries and schoolteachers wrote letters to the committee contending that the government should not sanction the leases because they would result in overgrazing and within two years the range would be destroyed. In addition, details began to emerge regarding Louis Primeau's arrangement with the Milwaukee Railroad to convince the Sioux to accept the proposal. And luckily for the commissioner, the free passes he and his wife received to travel on the Chicago & North Western Railroad did not become public, nor did his letter to North Western Railroad general freight agent Thomas S. Rattle, assuring him that the Bureau of Indian Affairs had no intention of changing its current freight shipping contracts from the Northwestern line at Forest City to the competing Milwaukee Road at Evarts. Had this correspondence come to light, Jones may have faced even more difficult questions about his decision to award the leases.³⁹

³⁸ Welsh, *The Action of the Interior Department in Forcing the Standing Rock Indians to Lease Their Lands to Cattle Syndicates*, 1.

³⁹ WWSA, Jones Papers.

The arguments made by the IRA, Truedell, Kennan and other advocates opposing the Standing Rock leases were largely a product of idealistic visions and personal philosophies, not facts. They tended to ignore the problems caused by illegal grazing and focused on developing grand conspiracy theories that painted the leases as yet another attempt to steal Indian lands. Of course their contentions were not without some merit; the railroads and the cattlemen who sought to acquire the leases had earnings in mind, not the Indians' welfare, and tried to secure deals that ensured a profitable outcome. But William Jones understood the prevalence of illegal grazing far better than his opponents and developed a concrete proposal for ending it. Jones obviously sought to implement grazing leases without the consent of the Indians, yet he did so out of a firm belief that his course of action was the one best for the tribe. The commissioner corresponded with the railroads, even accepting free annual passes, but he did not conspire with them to defraud the Sioux. He also recognized the reservation's environmental limitations. The semi-arid climate was not conducive to growing crops, but it was ideal for producing grass. He believed that raising cattle offered the most promising long-term solution for Indian self-sufficiency; it was, as he saw it, the best possible outcome for a people displaced from their traditional lands, shunned by white Americans, victimized by unscrupulous ranchers, with few possibilities for advancement and subject to waning public interest in financial support. Jones and the idealists in the IRA viewed the situation from different perspectives. Where the IRA saw virgin grasslands primed for grazing by Indian ranchers, Jones saw wasted resources poached by opportunistic whites; where the IRA advocated Indians raising and selling their own stock, Jones observed unfulfilled potential because the tribes had not fully embraced stock raising as a

profession. From the beginning Jones and his opponents had the same objective in mind—creating a better situation for the Indians living on Standing Rock. They simply had differing ideas for how best to reach that goal.⁴⁰

The controversy over grazing leases on the reservation also coincided with a national debate over the use of the public domain. Beginning in the 1880s large-scale ranchers from Texas to the Dakotas had begun fencing off portions of the open range to prevent homesteaders from breaking up the sod. Shortly after taking office President Roosevelt had ordered the cattlemen to remove the fences. In December 1901, in response to pressure from large cattle companies who believed that “it be leases or go out of the cattle business,” Congress passed a bill to allow cattlemen to lease (and fence) the public domain. In April 1902 Roosevelt met with Bartlett Richards and William Comstock, owners of the 200,000-acre Spade Ranch in Nebraska; Murdo McKenzie of the large Matador outfit and future namesake of Murdo, South Dakota; A.S. Reed, President of the Western Nebraska Stock Growers Association; and several other influential cattlemen to discuss fencing on the range. The President refused to reverse his decision, stating, “Gentlemen, the fences will come down.” This declaration caused a heated exchange between Roosevelt and Richards, with the former vowing to get the situation under control. He subsequently vetoed the “lease law” and throughout 1905 and 1906 followed up on his promise by arresting and/or fining a number of cattlemen, including Richards, who had erected barbed wire fences on public lands. “Roosevelt’s Roundup,” as it came to be called, demonstrated the President’s willingness to back up

⁴⁰ WSHA, Jones Papers and Welsh, *The Action of the Interior Department in Forcing the Standing Rock Indians to Lease Their Lands to Cattle Syndicates*.

his policies with action. It also made cattlemen more interested in seeking grazing leases on the reservations, as a means to avoid encroaching homesteaders.⁴¹

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As the weather on Standing Rock grew warmer and the 1902 spring roundup season approached, the status of grazing leases on the reservation remained uncertain, in part because the Sioux Indians living there were not unified in support or opposition. The members of the Returned Students' Association favored the Lemmon lease, but it is unclear how they felt about the proposed Walker tract and its inclusion of several settled areas. Some objected to Lemmon fencing his lease (he had hired men, including a number of Standing Rock Sioux, to start work on the project in March) while the matter was still being contested. Others continued to assert that the tribe should determine the boundaries of the Walker tract and supported leasing it under those conditions. A few opposed leasing any ground under any circumstances, but this minority was far overshadowed by those who believed leasing offered new opportunities. Without question many of the Sioux who supported grazing leases did so based on the belief that the proposed system represented the best deal they could get. Past actions by the federal government had jaded a number of the tribe's members, including most of its leaders, and the fear that they would lose even more land helped push them toward accepting—if not necessarily approving of—at least one of the leases.⁴²

By early May 1902 the controversy over Lemmon's lease had faded to the point that Ed felt comfortable taking a buggy out to survey his new empire for the first time.

⁴¹ Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 222-224; Smith and Harry, *Trail of the Sheidley Cattle Company*, 174-175; Yost, *Call of the Range*, 208-214; and Graybill, *Policing the Great Plains*, 124-130.

⁴² WSHA, Jones Papers.

When he reached a tall butte near Leaf-on-the-Hill Creek and looked out across the prairie “he could not see the end of my domain,” because it extended twelve miles to the north, twenty-eight miles to the south, sixteen miles to the east and forty miles to the west. He reveled in the expanse of his new kingdom, which offered a near perfect situation—enough acreage to employ his favored open range grazing techniques, but “when fenced no man could trespass on me as had been the case.”⁴³ Ed no doubt missed the irony of his statement, for he had been a trespasser on Indian lands for decades and in the eyes of some, his lease was simply a continuation of the former practice.

To address this perception, in late May Roosevelt named friend and fellow conservationist George Bird Grinnell as a “Special Confidential Indian Agent” and sent him to Standing Rock to rectify the situation with the Hunkpapa and Sicasu Sioux. It appears the President chose Grinnell, a man he completely trusted and who had ample experience with Indians, instead of Commissioner William Jones as a gesture of good faith to the Sioux, who naturally viewed Jones with skepticism.⁴⁴ Grinnell and former Indian Agent James McLaughlin held several councils with tribal leaders to correct any misperceptions regarding Lemmon’s lease and to negotiate adjustments to accommodate some of their objections. On May 23, the day of Ed’s forty-fifth birthday, Lemmon—whom the Standing Rock Sioux called *Taspaze* (“yellow apple”), because the Lakota language had no word for “lemon”—signed an agreement to fence off an occupied portion of his lease along the Grand River in exchange for additional unoccupied acreage in the northeast corner. The Sioux viewed *Taspaze*’s willingness to compromise as an

⁴³ *BFB*, 13 January 1933.

⁴⁴ Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 76-81.

encouraging sign. This simple gesture, which even gave Lemmon a few additional acres, helped ease the tensions between them. For months Ed had been the subject of dozens of complaints, particularly in regard to his early fencing of the lease. Following the agreement and Lemmon's hiring of dozens of Indians for fencing and freighting jobs, most of the objections subsided. Over the next five years *Taspaze* would treat the Standing Rock Sioux with liberality, just as he had done the Oglala on Pine Ridge, and would come to enjoy an amicable relationship with the tribe.⁴⁵

While Lemmon's acquisition of the huge five-year lease became the high point in his career as a cattleman, for Jones the Standing Rock conflict marked one of the lowest during his tenure as commissioner. Despite the relative acceptance of the Lemmon tract by the Indians, the controversy surrounding the Walker lease had not subsided. The Sioux continued to insist on the right to mark its boundaries and the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs agreed. The myriad challenges of trying to lease the pasture under such conditions proved too much for Walker and Jones, and since the Secretary of the Interior would not approve the Walker lease without the consent of the tribe, they failed to finalize it. Jones' vision of generating revenue on 1.25 million acres of Standing Rock grass would not come to fruition.

In addition to this professional failure, Jones' personal character had also been called into question. Rancher William Wade's accusation that he had colluded with the Milwaukee Railroad had become public and several opponents of reservation grazing cited Wade's letter as a sign of the fraudulent circumstances surrounding the leases. Senator James Jones, who received the letter and overlooked its negative portrayal of the

⁴⁵ WSHA, Jones Papers.

commissioner, had sent it to a reporter, which resulted in its widespread publication. The Senator apologized to Commissioner Jones for the oversight and vowed to clear his name. On May 26 he called a meeting of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs to review Wade's claims and determine the extent of Commissioner Jones' involvement with the railroad. The Senator subpoenaed Lemmon, Lake, Walker, Wade, Truedell and the commissioner and thoroughly examined the issue. Under testimony it became clear that Wade's accusations had no basis in fact and that "Commissioner Jones had no connection, direct or remote, with the leases in question, and that his conduct in connection with them was entirely unselfish." One week after the hearing Wade sent a letter of apology to the commissioner, begging his pardon for acting without all the facts. Jones probably did not get the letter for several months, having embarked on a well-deserved retreat to the Pacific Coast.⁴⁶

For Jones, the stress and controversy of the Standing Rock leases had not been worth the end result. As he later wrote to J. W. Davis, a member of the Boston Indians Committee, another Indian advocacy group, "If I had understood the conditions at Standing Rock as I do now, I should not have recommended the approval of the leases." Jones wished that he had not pushed for the leases because his actions resulted in a damaged reputation and a tremendous amount of anxiety, but he understood the situation of illegal grazing perfectly well. Before, during and after the public outcry Jones believed that leasing Indian lands where white trespassers roamed indiscriminately was a sound approach. His hesitancy to state this to Davis likely came from the fact that he did not understand (and had not considered) such strong public opposition to a plan that

⁴⁶ United States Senate, Report from the Committee on Indian Affairs, "Leasing of the Indian Lands on Standing Rock Reservation," 9 June 1902 and WSHA, Jones Papers.

seemed to make a great deal of sense. He simply could not believe that anyone would oppose generating income off of a practice that had already been taking place for decades. Addressing this apparent lack of common sense represented only a small portion of the challenges Jones and the Department of the Interior faced in regard to the “Indian question.”⁴⁷

Given the varied viewpoints and disparate feelings about how to work with the tribes, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs found it difficult to please all interested parties, as did the Indian Agents who answered to him. As George Bird Grinnell remarked in a letter to President Roosevelt, “I sometimes think that I would hesitate to recommend the angel Gabriel for the position of Indian agent, a place where temptation, opportunity, worryment, and insufficient pay combine to break a man down.” Indian Agents were generally believed to be ill-qualified political appointees and many of them earned such a reputation. In 1903 President Roosevelt sought to rectify this situation on Standing Rock by replacing Bingenheimer with someone having more “patience, judgment, tact, and interest in Indians than he possesses.” The Standing Rock leasing controversy no doubt played a key role in Bingenheimer’s dismissal. It also taught Commissioner Jones to be wary of additional efforts to graze the reservations of western South Dakota. In August 1902, just two months after the final Standing Rock hearing, Jones received a request to lease a portion of the Pine Ridge Reservation in southwest South Dakota. Not wanting to duplicate the controversy of Standing Rock and in spite of support from several parties, including the Milwaukee Railroad, which continued to push for reservation grazing leases, he refused to pursue the matter. Even with this minor

⁴⁷ WSHA, Jones Papers.

setback, white ranchers would continue to graze cattle on Indian lands for years to come.⁴⁸

* * * * *

In early summer 1902 the founders of the Lake, Tomb & Lemmon Company began the process of occupying their new lease on the Standing Rock Reservation. Ed and Rosella sold their home in Spearfish and moved to a boarding house in Fort Yates, North Dakota, but as usual Ed spent the vast majority of his time on the range. To help manage the operation the company brought in Bird Rose, the seasoned wagon boss they had selected to oversee the NUN ranch in Texas six years earlier, as a partner in the enterprise. During the entire period of the lease Rose would serve as Ed's right-hand man. There was no shortage of work to be done. In addition to conducting the annual spring roundup, Lemmon and Rose needed to drive perhaps 30,000 cattle from their existing range near the forks of the Moreau River to the reservation, a distance of about seventy-five miles. To provide additional stock for the new lease the outfit arranged to send 6,500 NUN yearlings north via rail, in addition to their annual purchase of about 17,000 southern cattle. They also had to oversee the construction of a perimeter fence, the length of which seemed to be growing daily.⁴⁹

After signing the initial 788,000-acre lease in February, Ed added additional acreage during the May 23 agreement, but he had also expanded his fencing responsibilities to include several settlements along the Grand River. Further, the inaccuracy of the reservation surveys Commissioner Jones used in determining its size

⁴⁸ WSHA, Jones Papers; Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 55-70, 83-100; Iverson, *When Indians Became Cowboys*; and Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 229.

⁴⁹ Lemmon Public Library, George E. Lemmon File, "G.E. 'Dad' Lemmon Summary" and *BFB*, 3 January 1936.

meant that Ed had even more land in the lease than planned. All told the additional increases put Lemmon's total lease at 865,429.5 acres, probably the world's largest fenced pasture at that time. In the 1880s the XIT outfit in Texas had enclosed more than three million acres with barbed wire, but by the turn of the twentieth century this huge expanse had been subdivided into more than ninety smaller pastures, leaving the title of "world's largest" to Lemmon.⁵⁰

The expanded territory and additional fencing around the settlements came to roughly 270 miles of three-wire fence, which required 810 miles of barbed wire and more than 43,000 fence posts. To get the posts, wire and other necessary supplies to Standing Rock, Lemmon employed sixty Indian freighting crews. He paid the freighters one cent per mile per 100 pounds of cargo, which during the course of the five-day round trip earned each team between \$17 and \$20. The freighters seemed pleased with their pay, which proved higher than their other primary wage-earning jobs: scouting and police work. Lemmon, whose father James had instilled in him an intimate knowledge of freighting, appreciated their skill, claiming "they at all times did good work along these lines." In recognition of their efforts and to foster a feeling of goodwill between his outfit and the Sioux, following the completion of each large delivery *Taspaze* would butcher a steer or two and hold a feast, just like he had done for chiefs Red Cloud and Young Man Afraid of His Horses almost twenty years earlier at Pine Ridge. In addition

⁵⁰ Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 162; Graybill, *Policing the Great Plains*, 123-124; J. Evetts Haley, *The XIT Ranch of Texas and the Early Days of the Llano Estacado* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 84-88; *BFB*, 3 March 1933.

to freighting, Lemmon hired more than 300 Indians—almost one third of the adult male population at Standing Rock—to build the fence, which they completed in 1903.⁵¹

During the congressional hearings regarding the lease James McLaughlin had called the 1.25 million acre territory “the best virgin range of any tract of similar area in the Northwest . . . capable of maintaining 100,000 head without impairing the range or exhausting it.”⁵² Thousands of cattle had been grazing on that portion of the reservation for years, so it was hardly “virgin range” in the way that the southwest portion of the Great Sioux Reservation had been “virgin” when the Sheidley Cattle Company first arrived in Dakota Territory in 1880. Likewise, his suggested stocking rate of twelve acres per animal far overestimated the range’s carrying capacity (the cattle population the range could sustain indefinitely), which was probably closer to half his figure. Including the cattle grazing on the NUN ranch in Texas, the Lake, Tomb & Lemmon Company owned about 53,000 head at the end of the 1902 shipping season, with perhaps 40,000 of those grazing on the 865,000-acre Standing Rock pasture. The resulting stocking rate—almost twenty-two acres of grass per animal—marked the upper margins of the lease’s carrying capacity. In short, Lemmon pushed the limits of his pasture, but did not graze it to exhaustion. Although he and Rose each owned a fifteen percent stake in the outfit, the equivalent of 8,000 head apiece, Lemmon remained a relative outsider in regard to the business dealings of the company. He knew how to put pounds on beeves, but he “never gave thought to the source our monies were to come from for the [next] season’s new investment” and due to the tremendous capital outlay necessary to purchase 810 miles of

⁵¹ *BFB*, 7 October 1932; *BFB*, 6 April 1939; and *BFB*, 15 September 1933.

⁵² United States Senate, Report from the Committee on Indian Affairs, “Leasing of the Indian Lands on Standing Rock Reservation,” 9 June 1902, 24.

fencing materials and 17,000 cattle as well as provide wages for 300 fencers, Lemmon owed Lake about \$96,000 in 1902. Yet with cattle bringing roughly \$24 per head in Chicago, he had great confidence in his ability to make the lease pay off and called this period “the pinnacle of our supremacy.”⁵³

Lemmon’s acquisition of the lease may have prevented encroachment by homesteaders and other cattlemen, but it could not defend against Mother Nature. A severe winter in 1902-1903 took a heavy toll, as the company lost twenty-five percent of its Standing Rock herd. Remarkably, losing more than 10,000 cattle to the weather did not have a debilitating impact on their finances, as most of the lost animals were of poor quality or had been purchased far below market value.⁵⁴ The bigger loss, from Lemmon’s perspective, came with the death of his father James on March 22, 1903 at age seventy-two. Outside of brother Hervey, James had been Ed’s most important role model. With his father’s passing Ed’s sister Alpharetta became his only living immediate relative. They interred James’ body in the Oak Grove Cemetery, alongside his wife Lucy and sons Hervey and Moroni. A short time later Alpharetta sold the Thayer County farm, severing Ed’s last direct tie to Nebraska. Throughout his life the country surrounding the Little Blue River in south-central Nebraska held a special place in Ed’s heart. At and around Liberty Farm he had survived Indian raids, followed the Pony Express, met Wild

⁵³ *BFB*, 8 July 1932; *BFB*, 24 February 1933; *BFB*, 3 January 1936; *BFB*, 1 January 1937; *BFB*, 6 April 1939 and *WSA*, Vol. 13, p. 5. The \$96,000 Lemmon owed in 1902 would be more than \$2 million in 2010 dollars.

⁵⁴ *BFB*, 13 April 1934 and *BFB*, 3 January 1936.

Bill Hickok and witnessed the country's westward migration firsthand. James' funeral marked the last time Ed would visit his favorite childhood home.⁵⁵

As he did with every major challenge, Ed quickly returned to the business at hand. That summer he oversaw the completion of the perimeter fence and in the fall guided several herds of cattle to Evarts for shipping to market. As he trailed his animals to the strip, Ed likely gathered some of his "stray" cattle and included them in his shipments. Although the east half of the reservation did not come under the lease, as cowboy Ike Blasingame noted, "many L7 cattle drifted over this Indian land" and had to be turned back onto the lease by the Standing Rock Sioux.⁵⁶ Ed also constructed a new log home on the Grand River and moved his wife Rosella out of the North Dakota boarding house. After traveling to Chicago for the company's annual winter meeting, Ed survived another near-death experience during a blizzard shortly after Christmas, relying on luck and a dependable team of wagon horses to guide him to shelter.⁵⁷

By the spring roundup of 1904 the Lake, Tomb & Lemmon Company had settled into ranching within the confines of a pasture. Lemmon had adjusted his open range system to conform to the realities of a fenced enclosure, plowing fire breaks, cutting hay and purchasing oats for winter feed. His roundups had changed as well. Since the vast majority of his Reverse L7 cattle ranged inside a three-wire fence, branding, castrating and sorting them into bunches by age took the place of reading brands and cutting into groups based on ownership. Despite the changes, on May 2 the forty-six-year-old

⁵⁵ WSA Vol. 12, pp. 12-15 and Grabow Collection, unknown newspaper, James Hervey Lemmon, Sr. obituary, 1903.

⁵⁶ Blasingame, *Dakota Cowboy*, 218.

⁵⁷ *BFB*, 13 January 1933; *BFB*, 31 May 1935; and Lemmon Public Library, George E. Lemmon File, "G.E. 'Dad' Lemmon Summary."

demonstrated that he had not lost a step when it came to handling cattle. That day Lemmon and two other men, ‘Coon’ Glover and John Ivy, cut almost 2,700 individual animals from the main herd, an average of 900 head per man. This incredible feat—which Lemmon called “the greatest cutting of cattle in one day to my knowledge”—added to his reputation as the region’s best all around cowboy.⁵⁸

National recognition of Lemmon’s achievements came the following January at the National Live Stock Association annual meeting in Denver, Colorado. In a corridor of the Brown Palace Hotel, Association Secretary Charles Martin, who made it “my business to find out such things,” recognized Lemmon for having saddle-handled more cattle than any man who ever lived—over one million head—and operating the world’s largest fenced pasture.⁵⁹ Lemmon’s accomplishments stemmed from commonplace activities for cowboys—tasks like trailing, roping, cutting and branding—yet he performed them with unrivalled skill and enjoyed such remarkable longevity that he earned a place among the most accomplished men in the cattle industry. While shaking hands in the Denver hotel in early January 1905, Lemmon would have basked in the glow of his success, but also realized that his time as a cowboy, like the days of the open range, was rapidly drawing to a close. He was nearing fifty years old. After thirty years in the saddle Ed’s crippled right leg stiffened up more frequently, he experienced the aches and pains of long forgotten injuries with increasing regularity and his renowned stamina started to show signs of fading. With his five-year lease set to end in mid-1907, Lemmon began thinking about his future—a future outside the cattle business.

⁵⁸ *BFB*, 2 September 1932; *BFB*, 21 April 1933; *BFB*, 31 January 1936; Sudlow, *Homestead Years*, 179; and Schatz, *Longhorns Bring Culture*, 39.

⁵⁹ *BFB*, 3 March 1933; Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 192; WSA Vol. 13, p. 5; and Blasingame, *Dakota Cowboy*, 221.

Throughout 1905 and 1906 the Lake, Tomb & Lemmon outfit continued operating much as it had in previous years, while making preparations for the end of the lease in 1907. Each year Lemmon purchased tens of thousands of young southern cattle, shipping them to Evarts by rail and trailing them to the Standing Rock pasture for fattening. At season's end Lemmon and Rose gathered the mature four-year-old beeves and drove them to the Evarts railhead for shipment to Chicago. In 1905, in order to comply with a new state law designed to control and prevent livestock disease, Lemmon and Rose constructed dipping facilities and dipped more than 26,000 cattle.⁶⁰ Also that year the company sold its NUN ranch in Texas, realizing a profit of \$100,000 on land they had owned since 1896. As the weather turned colder in the fall of 1906 Lemmon began to cut down his seasonal crews to a core group of winter cowboys. His outfit had hired more than two dozen hands that year and settling their wages took a great deal of time. During the process Lemmon began to show his age, becoming "worn out from so much desk work." Ed blamed his fatigue on the fact that "a cow-puncher does not fit" behind a desk, but the reality was that his years on the open range—the broken bones, the exposure to the elements and the strenuous activity of eighteen-hour days—had begun to take their toll. Early the next year Lemmon would sell his interest in the Lake, Tomb & Lemmon Company to Bird Rose, ending the most successful and fulfilling chapter of his life.⁶¹

Pursuing the Standing Rock lease had made so much sense from a business standpoint that Lemmon probably did not dwell on the overall significance of his

⁶⁰ *BFB*, 17 December 1937; WSA Vol. 8, p. 1; WSA Vol. 13, p. 5; and Lee and Williams, *Last Grass Frontier*, 231-232.

⁶¹ *BFB*, 9 September 1932; Lemmon Public Library, George E. Lemmon File, "G.E. 'Dad' Lemmon Summary;" and Yost, *Boss Cowman*, 240.

decision. His entire career had been based on tenets learned while grazing cattle on the open range, yet he chose to operate within the confines of a fenced pasture. Ed's decision to forego the range in favor of a lease with fixed boundaries was a product of changing circumstances, but it also represented a return to a familiar environment. Lemmon had been acquainted with Indians for almost his entire life. *Huste's* years as a trespasser on the Great Sioux Reservation were marked by amicable relations with the Oglala Sioux who called Pine Ridge their home; although initially contentious, *Taspaze's* relationship with the Hunkpapa and Sihasapa Lakota also became one of mutual respect. As Lemmon later recalled, "All in all, my occupancy of the reservation for a term of five years, with practically thirty thousand cattle, was the very most pleasurable of my entire life, and I feel I founded a friendship with the Sitting Bull Indians that will endure for all time and then some, as evidenced by the fact that they call me to lead every function of note staged on their reservation."⁶² For Ed Lemmon, a man entirely defined by working cattle on the vast expanses of the northern Great Plains, the simultaneous end of his career as a cattleman and the demise of the open range may have seemed like fate.

⁶² *BFB*, 15 September 1933 and *BFB*, 21 December 1934.

Chapter VIII: Town Builder

When the cattle shipping season closed in the fall of 1905, a large section of the northern Great Plains remained relatively unsettled. A vast rectangular tract marked roughly on its corners by Pierre, South Dakota; Sheridan, Wyoming; Bismarck, North Dakota; and Miles City, Montana, contained a few dozen settlements and perhaps a handful of incorporated communities. This huge expanse covered a territory about the size of Indiana and included Butte County in South Dakota's northwest corner. The county spanned 7,800 square miles and would later be divided into three "smaller" counties, Perkins, Harding and Butte, the state's second, fourth and seventh largest counties, respectively. Fewer than 4,000 people lived within its boundaries (a quarter of them in Belle Fourche), a population density of just over half a person per square mile—four times less than the threshold marking the end of the frontier, as declared by historian Frederick Jackson Turner thirteen years earlier. For decades cowboys such as Ed Lemmon had ranged beeves on the open range of Butte County and the rest of this sparsely settled region. During the next several years thousands of homesteaders would make their way into the area, claiming free land from the federal government and seeking to capitalize on the promise of tremendous new opportunities.¹

Homesteading west of the Missouri River came much later than in places farther east; between 1900 and 1915 more than 100,000 newcomers arrived in western South Dakota. In western North Dakota just 47,000 people—fifteen percent of the state's population—had settled there by the turn of the century. Lemmon, who spent much of

¹ Doane Robinson, *Encyclopedia of South Dakota* (Pierre: Self-Published, 1925), 990; Hamburg, *The Influence of Railroads upon the Processes and Patterns of Settlement in South Dakota*, 304-305; and Nelson, *After the West Was Won*, 21.

his life tending cattle on the northern Great Plains, played an instrumental role in the development of this region. During his days as a cowboy and cattleman Lemmon had actively tried to stifle settlement. He and the other managers of large cattle outfits attempted to push out small ranchers, fought to secure millions of acres of reservation grass for their exclusive use and did their best to suppress the arrival of homesteaders—all in order to maintain their ability to utilize the open range for cattle production. After leaving the cattle business Lemmon worked equally hard to *encourage* settlement. He helped found several towns, started a land company, held posts in city and county government, established a bank and organized numerous small businesses.²

His contributions to town building began during the winter of 1905-1906, when he helped the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad chart its route across the Missouri River, spawning dozens of new communities and attracting flocks of settlers to the region. That winter Lemmon traveled to Chicago for the Lake, Tomb & Lemmon Company's annual business meetings. For fifteen years he and his partners, Richard Lake and Thomas Tomb, had been gathering there to discuss the season's cattle business and to make plans for the future. In the months he had spent in Chicago Lemmon came to know a number of men who worked for the Milwaukee Railroad, including assistant general freight agent (and future president of the line) R.M. Calkins. Ed's relationship with these employees would prove fortuitous; during a special meeting of the Milwaukee's board of directors held on November 28, 1905, the board authorized the company to construct a railway line "from Evarts, South Dakota, to a connection with the

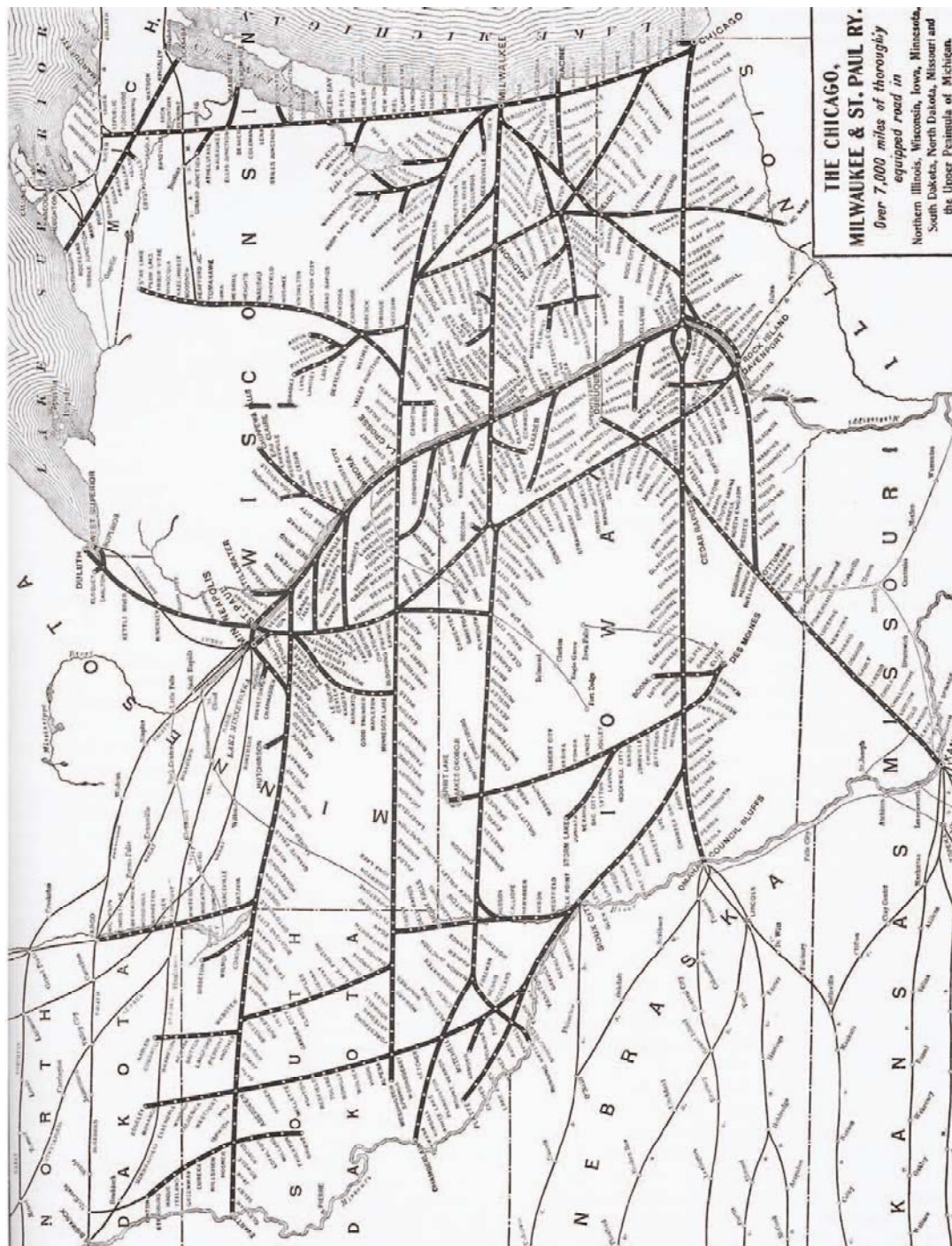
² Nelson, *After the West Was Won*, xiv and Elwyn B. Robinson, *History of North Dakota* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 176.

Pacific Railway Company in the State of Washington . . . work on the same shall commence forthwith.”³

The Milwaukee Railroad had expanded greatly in the thirty-three years since it first arrived in Dakota. Its network extended throughout the eastern half of Dakota Territory, reaching Yankton (the territorial capital from 1861 to 1883), Sioux Falls, Mitchell, Aberdeen, Fargo and dozens of smaller towns. The Milwaukee had two terminals on the east bank of the Missouri River, Chamberlain (which it reached in 1881) and Evarts (1900). During its three decades of expansion the Milwaukee had faced constant competition from the rival Chicago & North Western Railroad, which also owned a large network in Dakota and operated two Missouri River stations, one at Pierre and the other at Forest City, the small railhead from which Lemmon had struggled to ship beeves in 1895. In the early 1900s the competition intensified as both railroads set out to be the first to extend its tracks from the Missouri to the Black Hills. The Milwaukee began building west from Chamberlain while the North Western commenced construction at Pierre. Meanwhile, in an attempt to capitalize on the increasing bounty of western lands—grain, livestock, coal, timber, minerals and precious metals—and better position itself against the North Western, in 1905 the Milwaukee Road purchased the Pacific Railway Company of Washington and used the acquisition as the impetus to expand its line all the way to the Pacific. The proposed 1,500-mile extension was a major step for the Milwaukee and pushed the company far beyond its traditional bases of

³ Milwaukee Public Library, Milwaukee Road Archives, series 3, box 6; *New York Times*, 29 November 1905 “St. Paul’s Pacific Line Formally Authorized;” *New York Times*, 3 December 1905 “New Pacific Coast Line;” Schmidt, *The West As I Lived It*, 371; Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 4; and August Derleth, *The Milwaukee Road: Its First Hundred Years* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002), 204. Calkins became President of the Milwaukee Railroad in 1918.

Figure 8.1. The Milwaukee Railroad Network at the Turn of the Twentieth Century.



Source: Rick W. Mills, *The Milwaukee Road in Dakota* (Hermosa, SD: Battle Creek Publishing Company, 1998), 24.

operation. The road maintained thousands of miles of track in Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa and other Midwestern states; the acquisition of the Pacific Railway signaled a strong, determined push toward the West Coast.⁴

One of the immediate logistical obstacles to building the transcontinental line was finding a feasible route across the Missouri River, the largest natural impediment east of the Rocky Mountains. The Milwaukee had been investigating the possibility of westward expansion for at least five years and had conducted a number of surveys from Evarts in order to site a bridge across the span. The location's topography and geology made this proposition quite difficult, however. The tall bluffs on the river's west side rose between 100 and 200 feet above those on the east and featured a rough, broken landscape that would require significant and expensive cutting and grading prior to laying the track. Further, the rock formations beneath the water may have been insufficient for supporting a bridge. The steep grade, additional costs and poor foundation would make running locomotives at that location impractical; as a result, the Milwaukee's engineers had been searching for an alternate site.⁵ Calkins mentioned this difficulty during the winter of 1905-1906 while Ed was visiting his friends in the railroad's construction department. Calkins lamented that "Our engineers have run a total of eighteen preliminary surveys west from Evarts . . . none of which have been successful." Lemmon was an aging, crippled cattleman, not a trained engineer, but he had a strong familiarity with the

⁴ Derleth, *The Milwaukee Road*, 158-175, 204; Rick W. Mills, *The Milwaukee Road in Dakota* (Hermosa, SD: Battle Creek Publishing Company, 1998); Milwaukee Public Library, Milwaukee Road Archives, series 3, box 6; and Cronin, *Nature's Metropolis*.

⁵ Milwaukee Public Library, Milwaukee Road Archives, "Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway Co. History of the Location and Construction of the Lines West of Mobridge, South Dakota, by Valuation Sections and Subsidiary Companies," (Chicago: Valuation Department, 1925), 1-6, Milwaukee Road Archives, <http://milwaukee-road-archives.com/Construction/ValuationSections1a-1c.pdf>, accessed 4 March 2011; Johnson, *The Milwaukee Road's Western Extension*, 53-55; and Julius Skaug, *Mobridge: Its First 50 Years* (Aberdeen, SD: North Plains Press, 1980), 21.

landscape west of Evarts. During his twenty-five years in Dakota Ed had earned widespread recognition for his knowledge of the country. As a brand rep, trail guide, roundup boss and cattle buyer Lemmon traveled extensively and developed an unrivaled knowledge of the western prairies. He knew the land intimately; his attention to detail and unmatched professionalism meant that Ed made a point to know every butte, knoll, wooded draw, buffalo wallow and creekbed where cattle might seek shelter. He understood the country as only those who spent their entire lives on the plains could; with ranches separated by miles of open space, misjudging a location by only a fraction of a mile could mean hours on horseback (or on foot) before reaching help. Ed's quarter-century of experience, coupled with four seasons of cattle handling on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, meant he was uniquely positioned to help the Milwaukee Railroad site a bridge across the Missouri River.⁶

Lemmon immediately recognized the challenges of proceeding west from Evarts and proposed an alternative. As Ed recalled, his route would "necessitate abandoning the town of Evarts and dropping back to Glenham, thence crossing the Missouri River at the mouth of the Grand River, following along the west bank of the Missouri to the mouth of Oak Creek and continuing up the basin of Oak Creek on an easy water grade." The Grand River entered the Missouri twelve miles upstream from Evarts, so the route would require building several miles of new track as well as leaving behind what had been one of the country's most lucrative cattle shipping points. But Lemmon knew the flat bottomlands of the Grand would prove more workable for locating a bridge than the steep

⁶ Schmidt, *The West As I Lived It*, 371; Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 48; and Lemmon Centennial Committee, *Lemmon: The First 100 Years* (Lemmon: Print Shop, 2007), 1. In his various writings Lemmon is not consistent about the timing of his meetings with Calkins. Given the Milwaukee Railroad's construction timeline, the meeting must have occurred in the winter of 1905-1906.

bluffs west of Evarts. The next day he returned with a map of the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, “upon which I penciled with a red pencil, a route beginning at the mouth of Grand River on the west bank of the Missouri River to the head of Flat Creek near the present site of Reeder [North Dakota].” A short time later the Milwaukee Railroad sent engineers out to survey the route and deemed it “thoroughly practical and feasible.”⁷

The railroad quickly set to work. In 1906 the Milwaukee completed the line from Glenham to the east bank of the Missouri River, twelve miles away. As work crews and materials began accumulating in preparation for bridge construction, a settlement sprang up. A white sign along the tracks labeled the location MO. BRIDGE and workmen soon began calling the town Mobridge. That fall the Milwaukee announced its proposed route to the Pacific. The line would pass through the Standing Rock Reservation, over land obtained pursuant to a March 2, 1899 act allowing railroads to acquire rights of way through Indian reservations. The tracks would follow the North Dakota-South Dakota border, arc northwest into Montana and cut across to the town of Butte—650 miles from Mobridge—where the Milwaukee Road would connect with the Jawbone Railroad and continue west to the Pacific Coast.⁸

While the Milwaukee began construction in earnest in 1906, Lemmon raced to take advantage of an incredible—but closing—window of opportunity. Because he had helped the railroad plan its proposed route, Ed received assurance from Calkins that he would be “given an opportunity of knowing beforehand its exact location by legal

⁷ Schmidt, *The West As I Lived It*, 371; Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 48; and Milwaukee Public Library, Milwaukee Road Archives, “Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway Co. History of the Location and Construction of the Lines West of Mobridge, South Dakota,” 1.

⁸ Mills, *The Milwaukee Road in Dakota*, 22; Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 252; Derleth, *The Milwaukee Road*, 172-173; and Milwaukee Public Library, Milwaukee Road Archives, series 3, box 6.

government description.” To capitalize on this information Ed purchased roughly 1,300 acres worth of scrip, which he intended to trade for land adjacent to the proposed rail line. The scrip Lemmon bought cost him \$8.50 per acre and consisted of documented paper vouchers for land. The federal government had issued a vast array of scrip for numerous purposes—as compensation to soldiers who could not homestead their full allowable acreage; in exchange for private property appropriated through eminent domain; as lands railroad companies could sell to generate capital for constructing their lines; and several others. In many cases the scrip’s original owner could not or did not care to exchange it for lands located elsewhere, so he sold the scrip to dealers for cash. The dealers would then re-sell the scrip to individuals who often exchanged several different types for larger, consolidated tracts of land. Lemmon used this approach, along with his knowledge of the railroad’s route, to set about building a fortune. In 1906 he “scripped” land along the proposed routes at several different sites, including one promising location four miles west of the western border of the Standing Rock Indian Reservation.⁹

In early 1907 Milwaukee Railroad officials contacted Lemmon and asked him to return to Chicago. As a token of appreciation for his assistance the railroad offered to establish “a major town site west of the Reservation line, upon one of the tracts which I had filed my ‘scrip.’” Ed initially suggested his level piece of ground four miles west of Standing Rock, but the railroad objected to that location because it was in North Dakota. In 1889 the state constitutions of both North Dakota and South Dakota had included language prohibiting the manufacture or sale of “intoxicating liquors.” The citizens of

⁹ Schmidt, *The West As I Lived It*, 371; *BFB*, 21 June 1935; Lemmon Centennial Committee, *Lemmon: The First 100 Years*, 1; and Adams County, North Dakota, Register of Deeds, “Grantee Index to Deeds,” 1904-1910.

South Dakota voted to remove the provision in 1897, but North Dakota retained its prohibition clause and remained dry. Railroad officials believed that “in order to make it a real boom town, the saloon with its attendant evil would have to be tolerated,” so Lemmon’s townsite would need to be in South Dakota. Ed had another tract four miles west of his first site, which straddled the North Dakota-South Dakota state line. He had purchased this parcel hoping to establish a town that would serve as the county seat for two counties—one in each state. The second location was acceptable and the railroad purchased a portion of Ed’s land for the site. E.D. Sewall, Assistant to the President of the Milwaukee Railroad, told Ed, “We will name the proposed city ‘Lemmon’ and it will be up to you to make it a thriving and successful city.”¹⁰

A short time later Ed sold his shares in the Lake, Tomb & Lemmon Company and left the cattle business to focus his energies on developing the new community of Lemmon, South Dakota. His efforts proved successful. As he recalled, “There immediately sprung up one of the oddest and thriftiest of squatter settlements ever known to the prairie country of the west. It was known as ‘tent town’ and while there were a number of lumber shacks and shell-like frame structures, it was principally a tent town and as such attracted attention far and wide because of its novelty and ‘wide open’ spirit of the place.” The town became the first community established—in either North Dakota or South Dakota—in the vicinity west of the Standing Rock Reservation. As a result “a great many would-be businessmen who wanted to get in on the ground floor in the anticipated boom” asked Ed for permission to build on his land, adjacent to the tracts he

¹⁰ Walter W. Spooner, *The Cyclopaedia of Temperance and Prohibition* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1891), 102, 126-127; Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 238; and Elwyn B. Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 219, 258-259.

had sold to the railroad. While the tent town thrived and awaited the arrival of the railroad, forty miles up the proposed rail line Ed worked to establish another community in southwest North Dakota.¹¹

His ambitious plan for a dual county seat town in Lemmon depended on redrawing county boundaries in both states. Butte County, South Dakota, would need to be reorganized, as would the adjacent Hettinger County, North Dakota, which included present-day Hettinger and Adams counties. This was not an unreasonable goal, as numerous counties in the region were founded or received new boundaries during this time. Ed's strategy necessitated founding another town along the Milwaukee Road in the western half of Hettinger County. He planned for the western portion to become a separate county, of which his new town would serve as the seat. Such an arrangement would then free up the community of Lemmon to become the seat of a second county formed out of the east half of Hettinger and the western portion of present-day Sioux and Grant counties. With this in mind Ed purchased several sections of land along the proposed railroad route near present-day Reeder, North Dakota, probably using the remainder of his government scrip and funds from the sale of his Lake, Tomb & Lemmon stock. He lived near what would become Reeder for more than a year, peddling his land to settlers and attempting to split Hettinger County in two. In his efforts Ed also contacted other landowners along the proposed railroad route, including the Hilton family, who owned land near Ed's would-be county seat. He urged the Hiltons to sell to the railroad, but apparently the family had profited from a similar situation in eastern Dakota, and "when approached by [Milwaukee Land] company officials . . . [the Hiltons]

¹¹ Schmidt, *The West As I Lived It*, 371 and Lemmon Centennial Committee, *Lemmon: The First 100 Years*, 1-2.

placed their price so high that the company would not pay it.” While negotiations there stalled, the town of Hettinger, North Dakota, launched a successful promotion of its community; on April 17, 1907, when Governor John Burke split Hettinger County north and south, rather than east and west as Ed hoped, the city of Hettinger—not Reeder—became the Adams County seat. Yet his efforts were not without reward; Governor Burke appointed Ed as an Adams County commissioner, a post he would hold for two years. During his term as commissioner Ed further contributed to the development of Adams County, paying “out of my own pocket near all the labor bills on the Court House we were building” in Hettinger.¹²

As Ed threw himself into town development, the Milwaukee Railroad continued to expand. Unlike the Union Pacific’s approach to construction in the 1860s, the Milwaukee did not build its track from east to west. Building commenced at several locations along the intended route, which decreased construction time and spawned a number of towns seemingly in the middle of nowhere. Workers managed to span the Missouri River with a temporary timber and pontoon bridge in September 1907, two months before the first Chicago & North Western train crossed a completed railroad bridge at Pierre. The Milwaukee replaced its temporary structure at Mobridge with a 2,970-foot bridge the following year and began freight service to Miles City, Montana, on August 30, 1908. Ten months later on July 4, 1909, the Milwaukee Railroad initiated full freight service from Seattle to Chicago via its completed transcontinental route.¹³

¹² Ibid. and Lemmon Public Library, George E. Lemmon File, “G.E. ‘Dad’ Lemmon Summary.”

¹³ Skaug, *Mobridge*, 21-23; Mills, *The Milwaukee Road in Dakota*, 22-23; Derleth, *The Milwaukee Road*, 172-173; Johnson, *The Milwaukee Road’s Western Extension*; and Milwaukee Public Library, Milwaukee Road Archives, series 3, box 6.

When the first Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul train reached the city of Lemmon in the fall of 1907, the burgeoning community hosted a tremendous welcome party. Platted on September 24 of that year, the town came to life on October 3, the day of the lot sale. At least 2,000 people attended to bid on more than 200 city lots. Following the sale the residents of tent town rushed to move into the city before winter. Within a short time Lemmon featured

eight saloons, seven lumber companies, one half dozen general stores, one strictly clothing, three livery and feed stables, four blacksmith shops, one haberdasher store, two drug stores, three hotels and at least eight cafes, two photographers, four churches, two newspapers, three doctors with offices, two dental offices, four barber shops, three with baths attached, five lawyers with offices, five real estate and sale agencies . . . one club room, skating rink [and a] general utility hall.

During the lot sale Ed purchased a few for himself, intending to resell them to new businesses as the community expanded.¹⁴

While caught up in this whirlwind period of development, Ed probably did not stop to contemplate the dramatic ways in which his life had changed. For more than twenty-five years he had tried to suppress the settlement of the northern Great Plains in order to maintain the open range for cattle grazing. Now he had removed himself from the cattle business—the truly defining part of his life—and embraced the inevitability of settlement. And that is probably how Ed saw the rapid influx of settlers—as inevitable. For years Richard Lake and Thomas Tomb had been preparing to exit the open range cattle business due to shrinking access to grazing lands. Rather than attempt to hang on

¹⁴ WSA Packet 3, pp. 8-9; *BFB*, 31 August 1939; Lemmon Centennial Committee, *Lemmon: The First 100 Years*, 3-8; Hamburg, *The Influence of Railroads upon the Processes and Patterns of Settlement in South Dakota*, 416; Lemmon High School Sociology Class (1989), Ken Ashmore, Instructor and Carolyn Penfield, *The Face of Change: Lemmon, South Dakota Main Street Businesses, 1907-2007* (Lemmon: Lemmon Centennial Committee, 2007).

in a potentially losing situation, Ed cashed out his interest in the cattle business and invested in land and towns. Always a practical man, he did not see a contradiction in refocusing his efforts from hindering settlement to becoming an aggressive town builder. Ed's father had taught him the value of entrepreneurship and encouraged him to undertake new ventures. Ed believed his young community offered tremendous opportunities for success; yet he failed to recognize that it also posed significant risk.

* * * * *

Ed's second wife Rosella probably relished the change in her husband's career. In the eight years since they married Ed had moved his bride from a comfortable home in Spearfish to a temporary boarding house at Fort Yates and then to a rough cabin on the Standing Rock Reservation. When the community of Lemmon began to expand in 1908, Ed built her a large house on the western outskirts of town. The two-and-a-half-story structure featured an open porch, a bay window, detailed wood accents and expensive fixtures. Ed must have spent a great deal on the home and furnishings because "no pains were spared in selecting the best." Thirty-two-year-old Rosella enjoyed the new lifestyle that accompanied Ed's financial success and soon began to travel widely. In the coming years she would visit Texas, California, Washington, Illinois, Wyoming and other states, spending as much as \$1,600 per trip. Rosella's thirst for travel even forced Ed to trek across the country to Los Angeles in order to get her signature on the Lemmon townsite deed.¹⁵

Ed further expanded his business ventures that year, purchasing a large interest in the First State Bank of Lemmon and serving as its president. The bank also doubled as

¹⁵ *Rosella B. Lemmon v. George E. Lemmon*, 12th Judicial Circuit, SD (1927) and *BFB*, 5 November 1937.

headquarters for his land company. In addition to a number of lots in Lemmon, Ed bought and sold dozens of land parcels in North and South Dakota, totaling several thousand acres. He homesteaded and purchased land under his own name, his wife's name, as the First State Bank and in connection with the Moore Land Company, owned by M.E. Moore. Ed also attempted to start a cement block plant with entrepreneur O.G. Bickford, to capitalize on the construction taking place. It appears that the fifty-one-year-old former cattleman discovered a renewed sense of satisfaction in his endeavors and demonstrated a remarkable exuberance. In keeping with his activity while working on the open range, Ed kept a hectic schedule, refocusing his uncommon energy on the area's growth and development.¹⁶

He also increased his involvement in civic activities. During his ranching career, Ed had been involved in few organizations outside the cattle business, though he did serve one term as a commissioner in Fall River County from 1884-1885. His participation in the Western South Dakota Stock Growers Association had stemmed from a desire to reduce stock losses to rustlers, yet Ed would serve as a member of the organization's executive committee until 1914—seven years after selling his Lake, Tomb & Lemmon Company shares. His focus shifted once he embraced the role of town builder. In 1908 he funded a major Fourth of July celebration which brought over 5,000 people to Lemmon. Such events were important for community-building in rural areas where weeks might pass before a homesteader saw his nearest neighbor. While adults shared a meal together and discussed the events of the day, their children played games

¹⁶ Lemmon High School Sociology Class (1989), *The Face of Change*, 19; Adams County, North Dakota, Register of Deeds, "Grantee Index to Deeds," 1904-1910; Perkins County, South Dakota, Register of Deeds, Land Records, 1908-1945; and Lemmon Centennial Committee, *Lemmon: The First 100 Years*, 5.

and made new friends. When families interacted at these celebrations, they forged bonds that strengthened the new community.¹⁷ Ed's support of such events, cheerful demeanor, love of jokes and stories, widespread reputation for honest dealings and penchant for giving random gifts of candy to children earned him universal respect and the community-wide appellation of "Dad." In addition to his duties as an Adams County, North Dakota, commissioner ("actually serving many months after moving to the new town of Lemmon"), Dad acted as chairman of the Lemmon city council and was elected as a county commissioner in newly formed Perkins County, South Dakota. Apparently no one questioned his ability to serve simultaneously as a commissioner in two separate counties in two different states. Perhaps the fact that a portion of the growing community—called North Lemmon—had emerged on the North Dakota side of the railroad tracks played a role in this unusual circumstance. Yet even in this capacity Ed could not realize his dream of making Lemmon a county seat town.¹⁸

In January 1909 Perkins County voters went to the polls to determine the new county seat. Their options included Lemmon, easily the county's largest town and most important railhead; Bison, a small locality near the county center that featured four sod houses, a grocery store and a post office; and Meadow, another tiny locale twelve miles east of Bison. Despite Lemmon's obvious potential, its location in the extreme northern edge of the county did not make it accessible to settlers in the southern portion sixty-five miles away. In a close contest Bison edged Lemmon as the new county seat, 1001 to 987. Meadow received fifty-six. Bolstered by the results, Bison began to attract settlers;

¹⁷ Nathan Sanderson, "More Than A Potluck: Shared Meals and Community-Building in Rural Nebraska at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *Nebraska History* Vol. 89, No. 3 (Fall 2008), 120-131.

¹⁸ Lemmon Public Library, George E. Lemmon File, "G.E. 'Dad' Lemmon Summary;" Lemmon Centennial Committee, *Lemmon: The First 100 Years*, 3-11; and Tidball, *Taming the Plains*, 39.

in February the town started constructing a courthouse and making preparations to take over from Lemmon, where the county commissioners had met prior to the election. But a majority of the commissioners, including Ed, had backed Lemmon as the county seat and refused to relocate. The Lemmon Commercial Club even appealed the results, but to no avail. On April 27, 1909, a heavy wagon pulled by ten oxen left Lemmon en route to Bison, filled with books, office equipment and official records. Three weeks later the final load left Lemmon, settling the question for good and ending Ed's dream of establishing his town as a county seat.¹⁹

While city and county organization commenced in western North and South Dakota, the Milwaukee Railroad continued its efforts to expand. Two years earlier a national recession known as the Panic of 1907 had shut down railroad construction in the Dakotas. The recession lasted for more than a year and resulted in Congress creating the Federal Reserve System. In 1909 with the recession over and its transcontinental line completed, the Milwaukee began exploring further development in the western half of both states. On May 19 the board of directors voted to recommend the construction of "two lines of railway, one the Grand River Line and the other the Moreau River Line to a point beyond the Cheyenne Reservation as far as may be deemed necessary." Company officials had not forgotten Ed's phenomenal knowledge of the terrain and called upon his services once again to help chart a route from Mobridge southwest into the heart of western South Dakota. For eight days Ed guided the "President's party,"—a collection of railroad officials including President Albert J. Earling, two vice-presidents, the chief engineer, the general livestock agent, townsite agents and construction contractors—on a

¹⁹ Sudlow, *Homestead Years*, 2-6.

tour of the area “to take observations preparatory to the location of a branch line, now known as the Isabel branch.” During the trip Ed showed them the practical routes; in return they informed him that the lines would be constructed based on his recommendations. Ed felt a strong feeling of satisfaction when others recognized him for his skill and accomplishments; he never turned down an opportunity to showcase his talents. In fact, Ed enjoyed the sensation so much that he refused to accept the \$800 railroad officials offered for his assistance. The following year the Milwaukee commenced construction on two branch lines, the first a sixty-mile section from a point just west of Mobridge running southwest to what is now Isabel, and a second from Moreau Junction (later called Trail City), a town on the Isabel line, to the present-day city of Faith. The new lines reached both communities in 1911. Also in 1910, the Milwaukee built a third branch from McLaughlin, South Dakota, northwest to the present-day site of New England, North Dakota.²⁰

Part of the impetus for the railroad’s expansion was an expected rush of new settlers to the region. On May 29, 1908, Congress had authorized the Secretary of the Interior to open more than 1.5 million acres of “surplus” unallotted lands on the Standing Rock and Cheyenne River reservations for homesteading. Milwaukee officials expected newcomers to converge there because similar openings on the Rosebud Reservation in south-central South Dakota had attracted thousands of applicants in just a few days. Between July 5 and July 23, 1904, more than 100,000 people registered for fewer than 2,500 homesteads (160 acres each). After the land drawing, settlers had filled Rosebud,

²⁰ *BFB*, 13 January 1933; Hamburg, *The Influence of Railroads upon the Processes and Patterns of Settlement in South Dakota*, 325-344; Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 48-49; Robert F. Bruner and Sean D. Carr, *The Panic of 1907: Lessons Learned from the Market’s Perfect Storm* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 4-5, 197; and Milwaukee Public Library, Milwaukee Road Archives, series 3, box 6.

triggering the appearance of numerous towns and the shops, banks, eating establishments and other businesses. Hoping to capitalize on the would-be settlers homesteading the Standing Rock and Cheyenne River reservations, the railroad began advertising the sale of lots in towns it had established along the line. Between 1909 and 1912 eleven railroad towns emerged in Corson County, which consisted of the South Dakota portion of the Standing Rock Reservation. The North Dakota line (between McLaughlin and New England) passed through a dozen different communities, spread over 132 miles. The branches Ed helped chart in 1909 also saw development, as fourteen towns were platted in Dewey and Ziebach counties (which covered most of the Cheyenne River Reservation) along what became known as the Isabel and Faith branches.²¹

The opening of the reservations began a period of tremendous community development. For the Indians living on Standing Rock and Cheyenne River, however, history had repeated itself. This latest land grab probably jaded many, including the members of the Returned Students' Association, who had advocated working with the federal government during the fight over the Standing Rock lease seven years earlier. The allotment of their land forced the tribes to reassess their plans for the future and led to fundamental problems as they struggled to adapt to a system based on the individual rather than the group.²² The 1909 allotment also signaled an irreversible shift in the way the entire range country would be utilized. For decades, large cattle outfits, including the Matador, Flying V, Diamond A, Turkey Track and others, had grazed cattle on the open

²¹ Hamburg, *The Influence of Railroads upon the Processes and Patterns of Settlement in South Dakota*, 325-352; Mills, *The Milwaukee Road in Dakota*, 23; and Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 253-254. A fifteenth town, Faith, formed the terminus of the Faith branch line and is just across the border in Meade County.

²² Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 309-313.

ranges, both on and off the reservations. When homesteaders began to arrive en masse, fences appeared across the landscape and plows tilled under some of the tall prairie grasses. Although stock raising, not farming, would eventually prove to be the most effective use of the grasslands in much of western North and South Dakota, this determination would come only after several years and scores of busted homesteaders. In 1911 South Dakota Governor Robert S. Vessey signed a bill requiring stockmen to pay restitution to property owners whose crops were damaged by cattle or horses. A 1907 state law had limited this provision to all counties east of the Missouri River. West River counties were exempt, unless an individual county voted to implement it; the 1911 bill repealed this exemption, signaling a significant shift in the expected use of land in western South Dakota. As the *Glenham State Journal* remarked:

The wide ranges of the past have gone forever; the thousands of cattle that once roamed in big herds; the South Dakota prairies farther than the eye could stretch are a thing of the past. Dotted everywhere are small homesteads; crossed by three lines of railroads; smaller but better kept herds already are commenced; and the big cattlemen shedding a tear for the old days, are silently adapting themselves to the environment brought about in the new and rapidly settling state.²³

Ed Lemmon probably did long for days gone by—the familiar creak of saddle leather and tug of the reins as he guided his mount; the sight of a large herd breaking a rise in the distance; the smell of horse sweat and singed hair around the branding fire; the nervous excitement of a nighttime stampede; the spectacular sunsets over endless waving prairies. For three decades Ed had lived such a life and now it was gone. Yet he not only adapted to the changing times, he thrived. As in everything he did, Ed brought enthusiasm and

²³ Mary and Dale Lewis, *LeBeau: A Sputtering Flame* (Wasta, SD: Lewis Publishing, Inc., 2008), 96 and Hamburg, *The Influence of Railroads upon the Processes and Patterns of Settlement in South Dakota*, 310.

energy to the role of town builder. In the coming decade he would spend the bulk of his time—and his fortune—pursuing this new vocation.

* * * * *

Ever since Ed's first wife Bertha had moved to Colorado with their three sons in 1901, the boys had had little contact with their father. In the fall of 1909 Ed's eldest son James, then twenty-one, moved to Lemmon to join "Dad" in business. He apparently did not harbor any ill will toward Ed, who had made a habit of fatherly absenteeism. Part of James' reason for moving to town probably stemmed from Lemmon's emergence as a thriving community. Since setting up the town site in 1907 the Milwaukee Railroad had invested heavily, constructing a two-story depot and maintaining a busy rail yard with a main track and six sidings. The community continued to grow in 1909 when the nearby reservation land opened up; in addition to new settlers and businesses, Lemmon became home to the area's U.S. land office. By 1911 Lemmon had 1,255 residents, making it the largest town between Miles City, Montana, and Aberdeen, South Dakota—a distance of almost 400 miles.²⁴

Other developments helped ensure Lemmon would remain one of the region's principle business hubs. After the railroad's arrival in Faith in January 1911, neither the Milwaukee nor the Chicago & North Western made any significant expansions in South Dakota. Ed had helped guide the routes for the only railroad lines that would ever enter northwest South Dakota and southwest North Dakota. In four short years, from 1907 to 1911, hundreds of miles of railroad track had been laid and dozens of towns had been

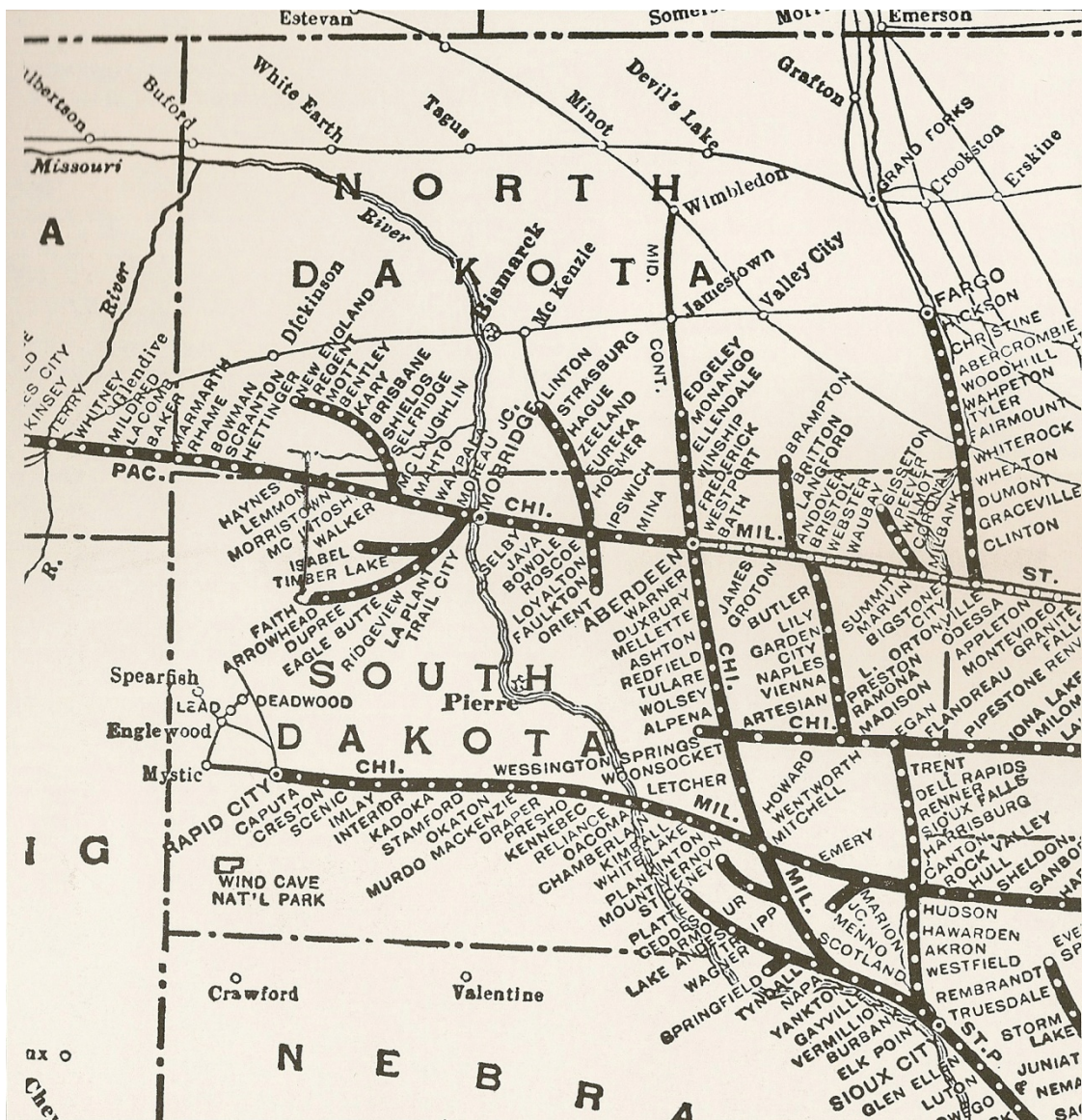
²⁴ *Lemmon Leader*, 6 February 1968 "J. Lemmon Rites Held Tuesday;" Robinson, *Encyclopedia of South Dakota*, 993; Lemmon Centennial Committee, *Lemmon: The First 100 Years*, 14; Jennewein and Boorman, *Dakota Panorama*, 234; *Perkins County Signal*, 26 April 1911 page 1.

founded. These towns—most named by railroad officials—became the region’s defining features and left a lasting legacy for their namesakes. On the main line Indian Agent James McLaughlin gave a town his name, as did the McIntosh brothers, construction contractors for the Milwaukee. W.I. Walker, the Nebraska cattleman who bid against Ed for the large Standing Rock pasture in 1902 and then took it over after the initial contract ended in 1907, also lent his surname to a townsite. The town of Thunder Hawk received its moniker from the Sioux Indian Chief who had opposed Ed’s grazing lease several years earlier, while Wakpala, Mahto and Watauga all came from the Lakota language. On the branch lines in South Dakota, Isabel, Timber Lake, Trail City, Faith, Dupree, Lantry, Eagle Butte, Laplant and others grew at varying rates, but would never reach the size of Lemmon. The North Dakota branch featured Maple Leaf (South Dakota), Selfridge, Shields, Leith, Elgin, New Leipzig, Mott, Regent, Havelock and New England. Ed was not the driving force behind the founding of these towns, but the expansion of the Milwaukee Railroad and the simultaneous arrival of thousands of new settlers resulted in the rapid settlement of the region.²⁵

As the second decade of the twentieth century opened, Ed continued to expand his investments beyond Lemmon. With James’ assistance, Ed bought town lots and installed branch locations of his First State bank in the small communities of Meadow and Daviston. Neither had a railroad, but both towns had two qualities that appealed to Ed: first, they were located in the central portion of Perkins County and could attract business from the county’s southern settlers; second, they were not the town of Bison. As the

²⁵ Hamburg, *The Influence of Railroads upon the Processes and Patterns of Settlement in South Dakota*, 366 and Workers of the Writers Program of the Works Projects’ Administration in the State of South Dakota, *South Dakota Place Names* (Vermillion, SD: University of South Dakota, 1941).

Figure 8.2. The Milwaukee Railroad Network in the Northern Great Plains (1930s).



Source: Rick W. Mills, *The Milwaukee Road in Dakota* (Hermosa, SD: Battle Creek Publishing Company, 1998), 65.

county seat Bison had far more business potential than Meadow or Daviston, but Ed retained his scorn for the small collection of sod houses that had stolen his dream of establishing a county seat in Lemmon. He almost certainly avoided doing business there out of spite. It is also possible that he retained a small glimmer of hope that Lemmon could still get the county seat, if the Isabel railroad line continued its westward extension and bypassed Bison. Ed's resolution to refrain from doing business in the county seat—even though he served as a county commissioner—demonstrated a critical flaw in his business acumen: at times, emotion could coerce him into bad decisions.²⁶

Entrepreneurs rarely lack confidence and Ed spent vast sums trying to further develop the community. Throughout the 1910s he engaged in various enterprises while James established himself in business. James initially worked as a clerk for the First State Bank, then rose to director and by 1916, to executive vice-president. In July 1912 he married twenty-year-old Della Donovan, a delicate young woman who had just graduated from high school two months before. Also that year Ed and three other Lemmon businessmen—Ole S. Quammen, F.A. Finch, and T.O. Ramsland—founded the Lemmon Brick & Tile Company. The company planned to utilize the area's abundant clay deposits, known locally as "gumbo," to make brick, tile, hollow blocks and other products. These men were also actively involved in the Yellowstone Trail Association, a town-promotion and road-improvement organization founded in Ipswich, South Dakota, in 1912. The association sought to develop an improved road to accommodate tourists traveling to Yellowstone National Park by automobile. The Yellowstone Trail passed through Lemmon and would later become part of the national highway system as U.S.

²⁶ Nelson, *After the West was Won*, 86-88; Sudlow, *Homestead Years*, 52, 151-152; Lemmon Centennial Committee, *Lemmon: The First 100 Years*, 14.

Route 12. In September 1913 Ed ended his association with the First State Bank, selling his shares to Montana banker J.C. Kinney. Ed had served as its president since 1908, but it appears he wanted to free up additional time and money for use in a different venture: land speculation.²⁷

The land bonanza of the early 1900s had brought throngs of “honyockers” into western North and South Dakota, settling on homesteads of 160 or 320 acres. Homesteading east of the Missouri River, where productive soils and adequate moisture made farming profitable, proved a far different experience than West River. The semi-arid grasslands west of the 100th meridian received only half to three-quarters of the rainfall of areas farther east, making crop-raising difficult. Should a farmer manage to harvest his crop, the yields often proved far less than he could expect in Iowa, Minnesota or eastern Dakota. Settlers who believed they could farm at a profit quickly discovered that most of the western prairie lands were better suited for grazing cattle or sheep. In recognition of these challenges, in 1909 Congress passed the Enlarged Homestead Act, which granted settlers 320 acres, double the amount offered in the original 1862 Homestead Act. Despite the additional acreage, in many instances settlers found that the land was simply not productive enough to support a family. In addition, once the five-year prove-up period ended and a homesteader gained title to the land, he became obligated to pay taxes on it. Lacking ready cash and unable to meet the tax burden, many newcomers petitioned for a “general leave of absence” of one year from their homesteads

²⁷ Lemmon Centennial Committee, *Lemmon: The First 100 Years*, 71; Lemmon Petrified Wood Park, “Yellowstone Trail Summary, Lemmon, SD,” Yellowstone Trail Association, “History of the Yellowstone Trail,” http://www.yellowstonetrail.org/yt_history.htm, accessed 12 March 2011; *Perkins County Signal*, 17 September 1913 “Meeting to Boost Trail;” and *Perkins County Signal*, 29 October 1913 “Trail Meeting Big Success.”

to find work in non-agricultural jobs, so they could pay the taxes on their recently acquired lands.²⁸

During the 1910s thousands of acres in the region started passing through “final proofs,” in which settlers acquired title to the lands they homesteaded; many of these landowners found themselves unable to pay their property taxes. In the Lemmon tax district alone, more than 2,200 new tracts came up for taxation in 1911. Perkins County became one of three West River counties to “show an increase of a million or more dollars in their valuation figures on real estate.”²⁹ The emergence of so many new taxable acres laid a heavy burden on the settlers; Ed, ever the businessman, stepped in to capitalize upon the situation.

Lemmon started contacting landowners with tax delinquencies and offered to purchase their land by paying off the back taxes. Within a short time he acquired a number of parcels in North and South Dakota. In several instances the landowners transferred their property via quit-claim deed without an actual purchase; since such a deed did not guarantee that the seller actually owned the land, Ed made some of these deals in good faith. In at least a few of his quit-claim deed transactions Ed may have taken on the property with the intention of returning it to the former landowner in the future, once he could afford the taxes. Lemmon probably agreed to such arrangements (on a very limited basis) with no expectation of making a profit—he did them as a favor to a friend or to help ensure the long-term viability of his community. In other instances

²⁸ *Perkins County Signal*, 16 August, 1911 page 1; Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 253; Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 87-89; Timothy Egan, *The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006), 56-67; and Jonathan Raban, *Bad Land: An American Romance* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).

²⁹ *Perkins County Signal*, 12 July 1911 page 1.

Ed was less altruistic and bought properties outright (it is unclear exactly where the funds came from, but he probably bought land both with cash and on credit), planning to sell them at a profit. Ed was not the only local land speculator and he sold numerous parcels to other brokers. He made dozens of purchases and acquisitions during the 1910s, controlling thousands of acres on the county tax rolls. In order to earn the money necessary to reacquire their homesteads, a number of former landowners left the area and sought work elsewhere. Many of these families did not return.³⁰

This situation also pushed some of those who stayed toward political activity, in the hopes of improving their situation through government action. In 1911, in anticipation of the upcoming 1912 elections and in response to increasing progressive activities nationwide, area producers formed a Farmer's Equity Union to defend against playing "right into the hands of trusts and speculators [sic] every time [we] have a good crop and lose hundreds of millions of dollars." The group planned to join with other farmer's organizations to form a "national union that will control shipments to the central markets sufficiently to prevent low, unjust prices." Local producers believed in the potential of reform groups and sought to reduce the power of trusts, railroads and grain speculators through organized activity. Although Ed was involved in land speculation, he did not draw the ire of the local Union. As the town founder, he enjoyed a position of standing within the community and his business had little impact on the price farmers

³⁰ Adams County, North Dakota, Register of Deeds, "Grantee Index to Deeds," 1904-1910, 1910-1924; Perkins County, South Dakota, Register of Deeds, Land Records, 1908-1945; and *Rosella B. Lemmon v. George E. Lemmon*, 12th Judicial Circuit, SD (1927).

received for their crops. His well-known good nature and generosity toward children and adults also helped him avoid becoming one of the Union's targets.³¹

The Farmer's Exchange Union had good reason to oppose the actions of railroad companies, however. Lemmon and the small town of White Butte ten miles west were the only two communities in South Dakota that did not benefit from a 1910 state law cutting express railroad shipment rates by thirty percent. Rates for all other South Dakota cities were reduced on long hauls, significantly easing a major burden for farmers, ranchers and urban businessmen. The Milwaukee Railroad would not give discounts to these towns because "the railroad travels through North Dakota a few miles before it reaches Lemmon," allowing its officials to claim that "the South Dakota law does not apply." Area citizens were naturally displeased with this interpretation, arguing that "it makes no difference to the company whether their rates are just or unjust so long as they can collect them." Eventually the Milwaukee reduced its rates; but only four years after it helped establish the town, the railroad found Lemmon's citizens galvanized against its practices. While the community avoided many of the more radical aspects of the larger agrarian movement then emerging across the nation, its progressive inclinations led voters to approve citywide prohibition in 1912 (a remarkably ironic development, since the town owed its existence to the fact that South Dakota allowed alcohol and North Dakota did not) and later that fall to join their fellow South Dakotans in supporting trust-busting Teddy Roosevelt in his ill-fated bid for re-election to the presidency.³²

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³¹ *Perkins County Signal*, 14 June 1911 page 1 and Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 117.

³² *Perkins County Signal*, 19 July 1911 page 1; *Ibid.*, 1912-1915; *Lemmon Herald*, 1916-1917; *Lemmon Tribune*, 1917-1920; and Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 259-264.

By the time the Great War broke out in 1914 Ed had established himself in various businesses in and around his hardscrabble community on the North Dakota-South Dakota border. Using money earned through the sale of his Lake, Tomb & Lemmon Company stock he had invested in several ventures, including a concrete block factory, a brick and tile company and the First State Bank. He owned a number of lots in town and had constructed a handful of buildings on Main Street. Ed controlled thousands of acres in South Dakota and North Dakota, including several parcels near the town of Reeder. Yet for all his efforts, Ed's businesses were not doing well. The concrete block factory failed to take off. The brick and tile company could not manufacture a viable product from the local soil. And he began to lose money on his land purchases because he could not find buyers willing to pay his asking prices. His newfound wealth came with numerous expenses as well. Ed supported his youngest son, George Reno, who had also moved to Lemmon and would live there until 1936. He covered the labor bills for construction of the Adams County courthouse and threw an expensive Fourth of July celebration for his fledgling community. He had built a large home and Rosella furnished it at no small expense. She traveled across the country, spending casually and conspicuously. Ed paid burdensome tax bills on various pieces of unsalable land. Little by little, his fortune was slipping away.

But Ed's health remained remarkably intact, even after a series of automobile-related accidents. The first occurred in early 1913 when the fifty-five-year-old broke his right wrist while trying to start his "flivver." As he turned the crank to engage the motor, the engine backfired, spinning the handle and fracturing his wrist. For those who knew Ed's approach to motor vehicles, this event was not unexpected. When the town of

Lemmon began to grow Ed had traded in his saddle for a horseless carriage. But technological advancements could not change a lifetime of acquired habits and he handled his new mode of transportation with the same vigor and recklessness as he did his strong-willed horses—always at break-neck speed. Ed’s aggressive driving led to numerous accidents and following the 1913 incident the local newspaper noted that “the day is coming when Ed will probably acknowledge that a broncho no matter how wild and untamable, is the safer instrument of transportation.” He doubtless would have agreed. Two years later his car “turned over on me near Meadow, S.D. breaking my right leg in two places.” This marked the fourth time Ed had broken his right leg and he spent a month on crutches after the incident. In 1922 “while cranking up my wife’s flivver on a side hill, the clutch flew in and the car ran over me, breaking my left shoulder blade and throwing my shoulder out of place.” This break healed badly and five months after the accident Ed took a train to Aberdeen to have a physician re-break the shoulder and set it properly. In 1929 he experienced yet another mishap when the sixteen-year-old girl driving his Ford “turned it over,” breaking his right shoulder. And in 1930 when Ed tried to dislodge his stuck Model A Ford, the car rolled backward and pinned him underneath. After two hours of “scraping with my hands and finally with my pocket knife” he managed to free himself. Through it all, Ed still had “health to spare . . . although I present a rather ungainly figure.”³³

While Ed continued to thrive despite his accidents, Rosella felt that her health had begun to deteriorate. She claimed to suffer from “neuritis and rheumatism,” which rendered her “not physically able or fit to do any work or engage in any occupation.” To

³³ *Perkins County Signal*, 15 January 1913 page 5; *BFB*, 16 February 1934; and *WSA* Vol. 12, pp. 4-5.

relieve her suffering Rosella continued to indulge in extended trips, taking “treatments for weeks at a time at sanitariums in and [sic] effort to relieve or cure her.” In addition to traveling widely, Rosella spent her time redecorating their home, purchasing new clothes, attending dances and in general enjoying the fruits of Ed’s success.³⁴

Ed knew that his business ventures were not paying off as he had hoped. He even turned some of his land parcels over to Perkins County to cover his taxes. In an attempt to regain control over his dwindling finances and capitalize on high wartime prices, in 1915 he and his son James started in the sheep business. For a renowned cattleman like Ed, an investment in sheep demonstrated his dire situation. For decades he had been the most widely known and successful cattleman on the northern Great Plains. And while he had never been particularly antagonistic towards sheepmen, Ed probably shared the sentiment held by most other cattle ranchers—sheepmen were an inferior lot. Ed noted that “Many and various were the differences between sheep and cattle men . . . and many were the obstacles placed by cowmen and cowboys in the nomadic movement of the woolly blatters.”³⁵

Now less than a decade after selling out of the cattle business, Ed began tending some of those “woolly blatters” himself. Twenty years later he recalled the experience: “After the open range was in a manner a thing of the past and sheep somewhat took the place of cattle, we found the old broken-down cowboy invariably made a good sheep-herder, especially if he had been a good beef herder, and the older and more decrepit, if he could set a horse all day, the more competent he was in the new role.” Himself an old, broken-down cowboy, Ed was more than competent, but tending sheep must have been a

³⁴ *Rosella B. Lemmon v. George E. Lemmon*, 12th Judicial Circuit, SD (1927).

³⁵ Slatta, *Cowboys of the Americas*, 186 and *BFB*, 17 April 1936.

blow to his pride. That October he and James purchased 2,500 head and moved them to a tract of land in North Dakota. At times their sheep also grazed on school sections—the two sections of land in each township leased to farmers and ranchers with the proceeds supporting the local school. In order to look after the flock, Ed moved out of his house in Lemmon and stayed in sheep camp. After seven years of sleeping indoors he probably welcomed the opportunity to spend his nights under the prairie stars once again.³⁶

The following year Ed and James expanded their livestock operation by purchasing 400 head of cattle from Minnesota, running them on land they owned in Corson County, South Dakota, on the Standing Rock Reservation. James had done well since arriving in Lemmon in 1909. After a successful stint at First State Bank, in 1915 he started as secretary/treasurer of the Western Livestock and Investment Company. Within two years he became the principle shareholder in a similar venture known as the Dakota Livestock and Investment Company. He kept an office in the Palace Hotel on Main Street (until the building burned down on November 10, 1917) and probably used his position to help Ed re-enter the livestock business. They bought 300 more cattle in 1918 and an additional 4,200 in 1919, with Ed traveling to Arizona to procure them. He spent almost a month near Prescott, attending a roundup and reveling in the action. For a brief period he had returned to his life of twenty years earlier—traveling the country by train in search of high-quality, low-cost cattle; swapping stories with cowboys on the range; and conducting business as an important man of the world. But back in Lemmon, Ed still could not get a handle on his finances. In 1917 and 1918 his name appeared on the rolls of those owing back taxes in Perkins County. He completed his final term as

³⁶ *Perkins County Signal*, 13 October 1915 page 5; *Lemmon Tribune*, 5 December 1918 page 7; and *BFB*, 2 April 1937.

commissioner during the latter year, but the embarrassment of his tax delinquency must have been acute. Ed experienced an additional setback in 1920, when he suffered a complete loss on the 4,200 head of Arizona cattle.³⁷

North-central South Dakota experienced a slight drought during 1919 and the dry conditions limited the forage available for Ed's cattle on his Standing Rock ranch. Had the 1919-1920 winter been mild, the majority of his underweight beeves may have reached spring alive. Unfortunately, heavy snow fell in mid-October, followed by freezing rain and low temperatures. His thin Arizona cattle, unused to a frigid northern winter and inexperienced at finding grass beneath the snow, fared poorly. By March, very few remained alive. Later that month a warm spell arrived and appeared to signal the approach of spring. While his cowhands rode to Morristown to attend a dance, Ed remained at the ranch. That evening a spring blizzard rolled in, burying Ed's cabin in snow and trapping the men in town. When the weather finally cleared a week later, they returned and noticed a lone steer lowing near the cabin. The cowboys entered and found Ed—still very much alive—sitting near the fire. Dejected and no doubt unnerved by the noise outside, he supposedly said, "Take the rifle and shoot that belling son-of-a-bitch, because he's the last one." This failure must have hit Ed particularly hard because he had never before lost money on a cattle herd.³⁸

³⁷ *Lemmon Herald*, 12 January 1916 "James H. Lemmon in New Office;" *Lemmon Tribune*, 22 November 1917 "Delinquent Tax List;" Lemmon Centennial Committee, *Lemmon: The First 100 Years*, 180; *BFB*, 29 April 1938; WSA Vol. 8, p. 14; WSA Vol. 12, pp. 8-9; WSA Vol. 13, pp. 6-7; and Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 103-104.

³⁸ "Summary of 1919 Arizona Cattle Loss," Ed Texley Collection, George E. Lemmon Papers and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, South Dakota Climate Division 2, Palmer Modified Drought Index, May-October 1919, <http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/temp-and-precip/time-series/index.php?parameter=pmdi&month=10&year=1919&filter=6&state=39&div=2>, accessed 27 March 2011.

As President Warren G. Harding prepared to take the oath of office in March 1921, Ed's business ventures in town and land enterprises had become a near total loss. With his other sources of income foundering, the sixty-three-year-old, who had already lived to see fifteen different presidents take office, continued with the enterprise he knew best—raising livestock. That year Rosella moved out to Ed's cow camp near McLaughlin, where she cooked and kept up the small "Indian shack" Ed and his Sioux cowhands shared. For two years Ed ran perhaps 1,500 head on his land near Spring Creek on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation. Having spent two decades heading a large cattle outfit and dismissing groups of less than 100 head as insignificant, Ed probably resented the size of his herd and longed for the days of the open range. As he wrote years later during the Great Depression, "there will always be enough farmers to hinder stocking in great numbers and the range will have to be handled with that in mind. The west-river country is a cow country and that's the way it should always have been." Unsatisfied with an operation that could not meet his expectations, Ed finally closed out his cattle business for good in June 1923. He was sixty-six years old.³⁹

Beginning with the founding of Lemmon, Ed had thrown himself into the role of town builder, working tirelessly and spending no small portion of his personal fortune trying to establish communities in North and South Dakota. He provided leadership and financial support to several area towns, not unlike the wealthy Billings family had done with their Montana namesake city during the late nineteenth century. Like Frederick Billings, Ed Lemmon demonstrated what historian Carroll Van West has described as "a

³⁹ *Rosella B. Lemmon v. George E. Lemmon*, 12th Judicial Circuit, SD (1927); Yost, *Boss Cowman*, 241-245; Sudlow, *Homestead Years*, 184-187; and Hall, *Roundup Years*, 77-78.

tradition of civic capitalism.”⁴⁰ When Ed retired from business in 1923 Mobridge had 3,500 residents, Lemmon more than 1,100, Hettinger over 800 and Reeder 250. Almost 8,000 people lived in Perkins County, South Dakota, while 5,500 resided in Adams County, North Dakota. The expansion of the railroad, opening of homestead lands on the Standing Rock and Cheyenne River Reservations and efforts of men like Ed had played a crucial role in the region’s development.

Yet as the city of Lemmon grew, its namesake regressed; in many ways Ed had sacrificed his own prosperity for the good of the town, but he was not a martyr. Just as portions of the northern Great Plains experienced boom and bust—Perkins County may have had 8,000 residents in 1920, but 11,000 people had called it home a decade earlier—so too did Ed Lemmon. He could not manage to keep his wealth, but the effect of Ed’s efforts—railroads, towns and families—remains evident even in the twenty-first century. It might be tempting to dismiss Ed’s endeavors as quaint, given the region’s relatively sparse population and geographic isolation, both then and now. One may also consider his actions insignificant, because he failed in so many of his town-building efforts. But such judgments lack perspective. Lemmon, South Dakota, may not have been Chicago, but it served as the most important economic and social hub of a region covering hundreds of square miles. That it did not become Chicago surprised no one, given the tremendous environmental and geographic differences in the regions surrounding the two communities. But for those homesteaders who came to the area Ed Lemmon helped

⁴⁰ Carroll Van West, *Capitalism on the Frontier: Billings and the Yellowstone Valley in the Nineteenth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 4, 133-161.

develop, his small rural community served their needs in much the same way the Windy City did the entire Midwest.⁴¹

Despite the setbacks (and perhaps because of them), Ed could not simply drift into a quiet retirement; it was not in his nature. While his son James took the helm as the family businessman and continued to guide the growth and development of the Lemmon area, Ed sought to tell his story—and the story of an industry and a region—through a series of articles, reminiscences and other writings. During the next two decades Ed would spend the majority of his time crafting a legacy.

⁴¹ United States Census Bureau, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920, Volume I Population* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921) and Cronin, *Nature's Metropolis*.

Chapter IX: Legacy

Few people can work at something for more than half a century without having difficulty letting go. Ed Lemmon was no different. When Lemmon sold the last of his cattle in 1923, his retirement marked the end of a fifty-three-year career as a cowboy, reservation trespasser, roundup boss, cattleman and town builder. Having lost much of the fortune he had earned in the cattle industry to land speculation, failed businesses and his wife's excessive spending, Ed began looking for a way to maintain the notoriety he had earned as one of the most well-known cattlemen on the northern Great Plains. The short, bald, sixty-six-year-old had always thrived on activity, but after numerous broken bones and a lifetime spent outdoors Ed's aging body could not muster the unfailing energy of his youth. Despite an expanding waistline and crippled leg, he still longed for the action of riding, roping and herding cattle. Since he could no longer experience the "blood and thunder" of the range in person, he took to reading extensively about the West. Ed consumed western books by Zane Grey and other authors with vigor, reliving his own adventures with cowboys, Indians and outlaws through their pages. He also took to writing his own stories, compiling (largely) factual accounts of his life. He had loved listening to stories since childhood, when his father vividly described harrowing incidents in Oregon, California and other places. Ed continued this tradition in cow camp, entertaining cowboys with (sometimes embellished) accounts of his own adventures and those of his family. In retirement, he acquired a typewriter and made the transition from punching cows to punching keys. When newspapers started publishing his reminiscences, Ed realized, as Montana pioneer Granville Stuart had, that "his personal story had become his greatest asset." Ed wrote as a way to remember and relive the

“good old days,” though he also sought financial gain from the endeavor. Above all, Ed produced hundreds of pages of stories, recollections, insights and opinions as a means to secure his place as a founding figure in the West. He was building a legacy.¹

Ed’s interest in publishing stories about his life first emerged in 1925, when he sought out an editor to compile his recollections into a book. In the August 16, 1925 edition of the *Anaconda Standard*, the Montana newspaper published a long article about Lemmon and his efforts to get Mrs. E.C. Kurtz to help complete a “history of his life and experiences in the West.” The Kurtz family had once lived in Lemmon and Ed traveled to Montana to seek their assistance. He had not yet taken to writing his reminiscences and instead planned to tell them to Mrs. Kurtz so that she could organize and edit them into a volume for publication. It is ironic that Ed’s initial foray into history appeared in the *Standard* because Anaconda, Montana, was only twenty-five miles from Deer Lodge, the town that prospector, rancher, vigilante and foreign diplomat Granville Stuart had advocated as Montana’s state capital years earlier. As one of Montana’s most important men, Stuart had received widespread recognition in the state’s newspapers, including the *Standard*, and in 1925—the same year Lemmon began dictating his personal history—Stuart’s memoirs, titled *Forty Years on the Frontier*, appeared in print. Stuart’s experiences in cattle ranching and town building overlapped with Lemmon’s and it seems likely that the Anaconda newspaper recognized their similarities and sought to attract readers by featuring several of Lemmon’s stories.²

¹ Milner and O’Connor, *As Big As The West*, xii and *BFB*, 27 January 1933.

² Milner and O’Connor, *As Big As The West*; *Anaconda Standard*, 16 August 1925 “Stirring Story of Great Western Range Told for First Time by Man Who Herded 55,000 Cattle in Five States,” reprinted in Nebraska State Historical Society, G.E. Lemmon Collection, MS0959, box 1, folder 1.

Mrs. Kurtz's efforts at compiling Ed's reminiscences resulted in a few being printed as newspaper articles, but she could not complete the challenge of organizing them into a book. In the winter of 1926 after some of Ed's stories appeared in the *Lemmon Tribune*, James encouraged his father to continue to seek out an editor, promising "to go in on it" if they could be published. Later that year, Ed began working with North Dakota historian Lewis F. Crawford on a book project based on Lemmon's experiences as an open range cowboy. Rather than dictating the accounts as he had with Mrs. Kurtz, Ed typed them and sent the sheets to Crawford for editing. Crawford, who served as superintendent of the State Historical Society of North Dakota, had already published several works, including a biography of frontiersman Ben Arnold (Connor). His experience made him well-qualified to edit Ed's stories, but the old cattleman's poorly written and haphazardly organized submissions made the job very difficult. As Ed noted in a December 7, 1926 handwritten letter to his new editor, his recent writings were "absolutely the first typing I ever did, so do not criticize my work." He also knew that some of his accounts contained fictitious or unverified information, but hoped they could rival some of the "blood curdling stories" currently in print. He wrote,

I realize you are going to have trouble living my stories up as to tales so, bear in mind I have at least 10 more good Indian stories. If any of them are good, also bear in mind there is no fiction excepting the petrified buffalo story and possibly Tom Tinkham's Denver to Beatrice ride, also possibly my Great, Great, Great, Grandfather's story of falling from the log cabin, left among the Indians. I can vouch for all others, as they are truth and not fiction.³

³ Yost, *Boss Cowman*, 310-311; State Historical Society of North Dakota, George E. Lemmon Papers, MSS 20019, "G.E. Lemmon to Lewis F. Crawford," 7 December 1926 and *Ibid.*, biographical sketch of Lewis F. Crawford, <http://history.nd.gov/archives/manuscripts/inventory/10058.html>, accessed 25 March 2011.

Ed typed his stories in a rambling, free-flowing style that often covered decades of time and several different topics in only a few paragraphs. He followed wherever and whenever his memories took him, with entertainment, education and self-promotion as the ultimate goals. His writings could best be described as the stories he had told around the campfire put down on paper. While Ed possessed an exceptional memory and had a broad range of experiences on which to draw, organizing his numerous jumbled accounts posed an immense challenge for Crawford and several other would-be editors, including Nellie Snyder Yost. In 1969, twenty-five years after Ed's death, Yost would publish a volume of his reminiscences titled *Boss Cowman*. She described the challenges involved in the endeavor:

Lemmon had written his story after the fashion of most elderly people when reminiscing, recounting the events as he recalled them, with no continuity whatsoever. He often began a story and then was reminded of another, whereupon he promptly took off on a new track, and perhaps even a third, before that chapter of his life was ready for newsprint. In later episodes he would go back to the unfinished stories. Consequently, it took endless digging and sorting to put the tales together at all, and then into a meaningful sequence.⁴

Crawford suffered through the same difficulties Yost experienced, and he continued to receive regular submissions from Ed throughout the 1920s.

While Lemmon engaged in writing his reminiscences, Rosella soured over their current financial situation. Ever since they married in 1900, Rosella had enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle due to Ed's involvement in a series of successful cattle ventures. When his fortune started to run out in the 1910s, she grew increasingly frustrated. Unlike her husband, who valued material things primarily for their functionality, Rosella loved her beautiful home and expensive clothes. Ed enjoyed spending time with common

⁴ Yost, *Boss Cowman*, 311.

cowboys on the range, but such an environment was completely foreign to his wife. She had detested living in the Indian shack on Standing Rock and resented Ed for forcing her to cook and clean for his Indian cowboys. Rosella became irate when she discovered that Ed had cut off her line of credit at several stores because he no longer had the funds to cover her expenses. Rosella reached her breaking point in the mid-1920s when she had to move to the second floor of their once opulent home so they could rent the first floor to boarders. In addition to acquiring a series of debts related to his failed livestock endeavors, Ed had again fallen behind on their property taxes. He leased the house to generate enough income so they could avoid foreclosure and continue living there. On April 19, 1927, a month before Ed's seventieth birthday, Rosella filed for divorce.⁵

She immediately attempted to discredit her husband in order to win a financial settlement. Rosella alleged that Ed and James were conspiring to conceal more than \$50,000 worth of property and sheep, so he could deprive her of just compensation. She further claimed that Ed deliberately sought to "injure and wrong" his wife by refusing to pay any bills or taxes for no reason other than "to aggravate, annoy, [and] harass" her. Despite the abundant evidence, Rosella could not bring herself to admit that her husband was broke. She asserted (through her attorneys) that

during all of the time since his marriage . . . [Ed] has been and now is a man of much more than ordinary business ability and capacity, during all of said time engaged in business activities in rather a large way; possessed of and handling large business and property interests and has received and is accustomed to receive and is able to make and receive a substantial and sufficient income from his business and business activities and ample [income] with which to provide plaintiff's needs in the way of support, food, clothing, medical attention and the necessaries of life.

⁵ *Rosella B. Lemmon v. George E. Lemmon*, 12th Judicial Circuit, SD (1927).

Despite Rosella's accusations, the court determined that Ed had "no money or property of any kind" except the house and one small parcel of land. As such, he avoided paying alimony, but had to cover her court costs and attorney's fees. He also had to sell Rosella the house and the four lots on which it sat—valued in total between \$2,500 and \$4,000—for "one dollar and other valuable considerations in hand." The divorce became final on October 27. Ed, who had moved in with James and Della several months before, continued to stay with his son and daughter-in-law while Rosella occupied (and rented part of) the house. She would live there until 1933, when she sold it and moved to Sturgis.⁶

* * * * *

Ed Lemmon had been broke long before the 1929 stock market crash that devastated Wall Street and kicked off the Great Depression, so the nationwide financial distress and accompanying drought did not immediately affect him any more acutely than the rest of the local population. Throughout the 1930s Ed spent several months of each year living in the Don Pratt Hotel in Belle Fourche, where he worked as a wool buyer for the National Wool Marketing Corporation based in Boston, Massachusetts. His son James had become heavily involved in the sheep business and in the familiar turnaround that tends to come with old age, Ed looked to James as his primary benefactor. James owned several large flocks, which he ran in Grant and Sioux counties in North Dakota; helped found and sat on the board of directors for the Co-Operative Wool Growers of South Dakota, a wool marketing consortium; and, among many other business and civic ventures, served as president of the National Wool Marketing Corporation. In this

⁶ Ibid.; *Lemmon Leader*, 28 May 1964 "Mrs. Lemmon Rites Held at Sturgis;" and Perkins County, South Dakota, Register of Deeds, Land Records, book 158, page 425.

capacity he no doubt helped his aging, destitute father get a job with the company. James also became actively involved in the local Northwest Production Credit Association (PCA), a New Deal program President Franklin Roosevelt established in 1933 as part of the Farm Credit Act. During his twenty-four years as manager of the PCA, James would develop it into South Dakota's largest livestock loan company.⁷

While James expanded his business interests, Ed spent much of his time typing his reminiscences. On April Fool's Day 1932, Ed's first article (titled "My First Entrance into the Dakotas") appeared in the *Belle Fourche Bee* under the heading "Developing the West." His "Developing the West" columns would become his regular forum for sharing stories, regional and personal history, open range cattle handling tactics and thoughts on a wide variety of subjects, including the current news of the day. Ed typed many of his articles on the back of Don Pratt Hotel stationary and submitted them to the newspaper for editing. He gave them colorful titles in an attempt to draw readers: "Settling Quicksand With Bodies of Buffalo on Emigrant Trip Early in 1883," "The End of Three Toes, the Killer," "It Was a Long, Long Trail, With Many Hardships, But the Competent Trail Boss Brought His Animals Through in Good Shape on the Ninety to One Hundred Day Trip," "Killing of Jack Horn and Criticisms Therefore" and hundreds of others. Preparing his columns for print must have been a chore because Ed supplemented his very poorly typed stories with handwritten footnotes, strikethroughs, re-writes, additions, corrections and (often) illegible scrawl. The old cattleman recognized his limitations in

⁷ Lemmon Public Library, George E. Lemmon File, "G.E. 'Dad' Lemmon Summary;" David M. Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); *Lemmon Tribune*, 30 October 1958; *Lemmon Leader*, 8 February 1968; Worster, *Dust Bowl*; Egan, *The Worst Hard Time*; and Paula M. Nelson, *The Prairie Winnows Out Its Own: The West River Country of South Dakota in the Years of Depression and Dust* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1996). In 1944 James also helped found the South Dakota Association of Cooperatives, serving as its president until 1956.

this regard, noting that “I know nothing about Paragraphing Or punctuations,, which will have to be done by Type,Setter.”⁸

Once published, Ed’s articles offered a unique perspective into life in the West. As a long-time resident of the northern Great Plains, his stories appealed to readers’ natural fascination with history. Lemmon remained one of the area’s most recognized figures, with a widespread reputation as an exceptional cowboy and influential cattleman. The *Belle Fourche Bee* pieces probably increased his notoriety. He sought to produce factual accounts of his life; when Ed did stray into areas beyond his personal expertise, he usually noted that his comments were based on hearsay, with the implication that all of his other works could be taken as fact. Ed’s writings included numerous errors—ranging from dates and places to circumstances and participants in particular events—but since he produced the vast majority of his stories strictly from memory and the discrepancies did not portray him in a more favorable light, most of his inaccuracies were honest mistakes.

Lemmon’s reminiscences provided a wealth of information about life as a range cowboy, but many of his articles simply attempted to extol the value of his own activities as a cattleman and town builder. Ed had an interesting life and on some level he probably felt obligated to share his worldliness with others. If he had not suffered from stage fright, Ed could have been one of the region’s most popular speakers at banquets, weddings, funerals and other gatherings. But since he was afraid of public speaking, he used the only other available means of sharing his experiences—the written word. Yet for all of his story-worthy exploits, Ed also appears to have suffered from writer’s block. He began what would become more than a decade of weekly newspaper articles when he

⁸ “Fifty-Three-Years-Of-Open-Range-Cattle-Handling,” Ed Texley Collection, George E. Lemmon Papers and WSA, “Developing the West” collection.

was seventy-five, so it is not surprising that he often failed to recall new material for his columns. When he could not summon any personal stories from memory, Ed reflected on current events or shared secondhand tales, with a good measure of added hyperbole. Lemmon did not always differentiate between first and secondhand experiences, which caused consternation among his would-be publishers.

During the 1930s Ed made numerous attempts to get his writings published. Although he kept sending stories to Crawford, the historian was busy finishing a three-volume *History of North Dakota* (printed in 1931) and made little progress on Lemmon's project. Never known for his patience, Ed began looking for other options. In 1933 he began writing letters to the Nebraska State Historical Society, requesting information and sending copies of his recollections. A.E. Sheldon, secretary of the Historical Society, corresponded with him and sent out his submissions for review. The results were not favorable. Reviewer George Hansen wrote Sheldon several letters detailing the inaccuracies of Lemmon's stories; in one instance Hansen described critical errors in Ed's account of "Wild Bill" Hickok's 1861 killing of David McCanles, James Woods and James Gordon at the Rock Creek Pony Express station. Hansen suggested that Ed's stories not be published. Even famed author and historian Mari Sandoz reviewed Lemmon's writings, noting that "They are full of glaring inaccuracies, etc., that even my limited knowledge detects but there is without doubt a personal flavor and if the man could write at all he could make something worth reading, both as history, if he would be willing to do a little checking, etc., and as good narration. But as it stands!" Excerpts

from a few of Ed's stories made their way into Nebraska State Historical Society publications, but Lemmon longed for something more substantial.⁹

When Crawford passed away in 1936, his books and papers—including many of Lemmon's typed stories—passed to North Dakota Congressman Usher L. Burdick. As the Congressman recalled:

Among them [Crawford's papers] was the mass of material which Lemmon had forwarded, including cattle history, history of wild men of the west, wild women of the west, cattle trails from Texas, the cow days in the Black Hills, and data of Lemmon's experiences on the range. It is apparent that Crawford never got around to write the story. I also found many photographs which Mr. Lemmon wanted used. I discovered at once that this was a most interesting mass of material and should be published.

I got in touch with Mr. Lemmon in 1936 and agreed to write the story, utilizing any spare time I had aside from the arduous duties confronting a Congressman. I assembled the material and classified it preparatory to writing the final draft, but I was confronted by the same problem that delayed Mr. Crawford. Mr. Lemmon kept up a brisk submission of articles, some of which I received in manuscript form. A great amount of this data was in slightly different form from what I already had, but there was little difference in the facts. The work of comparing these articles and hunting for new facts has been a long and arduous undertaking.

Burdick's efforts continued throughout the 1930s and 1940s, finally culminating in a manuscript for *History of the Range Cattle Trade of the Dakotas* shortly after Lemmon's death in 1945.¹⁰ Ed spent many of his later years publicizing the events and experiences of his active life. He wrote columns for the *Bee*; sent stories to Burdick, the Nebraska State Historical Society and other authors and publishers; he even participated in the U.S. Works Progress Administration's Federal Writers Project, submitting a number of

⁹ Lewis F. Crawford, *History of North Dakota* 3 Vols. (Chicago: American Historical Society, 1931); Nebraska State Historical Society, G.E. Lemmon Collection, MS 0959, box 1, folder 1; George E. Lemmon, "July 12, 1861, Date of Rock Creek Tragedy; Letter," *Nebraska History* Vol. 14, No. 3 (1933), 198-199; and George E. Lemmon, "Interesting Stories of Early Nebraska," *Nebraska History* Vol. 15, No. 2 (1934), 110-113.

¹⁰ Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 1-2 and Yost, *Boss Cowman*, 310-312.

accounts to record-keepers for the Wyoming State Library. Lemmon also served as a source of information for other authors. He corresponded with August H. Schatz as he prepared to write *Longhorns Bring Culture*, a history of southwestern Dakota Territory. Ed and former Western South Dakota Stock Growers Association detective Sam Moses shared their recollections with Schatz and read portions of his manuscript prior to its publication. Ed's reputation as an authority on western cattle handling caused amateur historian Raymond S. Griffiths to declare in 1940 that "Lemmon is one of the best living authorities on range history. His ability to remember details and even the smallest incidents is phenomenal. He has been a source of information for stories and books about the old west as it was and as it has been distorted." With his personal fortune gone and the days of open range cattle ranching a distant memory, writing became Ed's greatest opportunity—however remote—for financial success. It also served as a chance for him to remain relevant. With few possessions to pass on, Ed worked diligently to develop a legacy that could carry on after his death.¹¹

Although Lemmon spent a great deal of time writing during the early 1930s, he remained active, attending fairs, ribbon cuttings and celebrations. In 1932 he participated in several important events. In June the organizers of the new Petrified Wood Park in Lemmon honored Ed during the ceremony; that July he led the processional parade during the "Old Timers Picnic," a large gathering of former open range cowboys held near Bixby; and in early September Ed attended the dedication of a new monument to Lakota Sioux Chief Sitting Bull. Throughout the decade he became a regular at the old timers' events, rarely missed an area rodeo and managed to enjoy himself despite the

¹¹ WSA, WPA Collection, "Pioneer Cabinet," Articles by G.E. Lemmon; Kansas Historical Society, E.P. Lamborn Papers, MS 156, box 2, folder 15; Schatz, *Longhorns Bring Culture*; and Hall, *Roundup Years*, 77.

difficult times of the Depression. With help from his son James, Ed eked out a living, “still eating three squares per day and doling out candy to the kids.”¹²

In June 1936 Ed and James were in Belle Fourche registering for the South Dakota Stock Growers Association’s annual meeting when they received word that Ed’s youngest son George had died. George had moved from Colorado to Lemmon in the 1910s, working at Ed’s banks and as a brand inspector for the Stock Growers. After the United States entered World War I, he enlisted and served at Camp Funston, Kansas, until 1919. After being discharged, George joined his father and older brother in their sheep enterprise and later went into business for himself in Montana. He married Mildred Spear and the couple had two children, James Edward and Harold Marius. On the day he died George and a few friends were swimming in Isabel Lake, two miles north of Isabel, when he suffered a “violent attack of cramps” about 150 feet from shore and drowned. George’s family interred his body in Greenhill Cemetery in south Lemmon.¹³

* * * * *

By the late 1930s, the strain and uncertainty of the Great Depression had finally begun to take a toll on Ed. Although a natural optimist—he expressed hope for the future in his newspaper columns and offered practical advice for conserving moisture and preventing soil erosion—by 1937 his personal financial situation had taken precedence over preserving his legacy for posterity. As he noted, “I do not claim to any great part in developing the West, for my sole aim at times was to add to my exchequer, with very few philanthropic views in my mind, but, oh, how disappointing these last few years of drouth

¹² Lemmon Centennial Committee, *Lemmon: The First 100 Years*, 225; Sudlow, *Homestead Years*, 179; *BFB*, 30 September 1932; *BFB*, 24 August 1934; *BFB*, 14 September 1934; and *BFB*, 8 July 1932.

¹³ *Lemmon Tribune*, 27 June 1918; *Lemmon Tribune*, 18 June 1936; and *Rosella B. Lemmon v. George E. Lemmon*, 12th Judicial Circuit, SD (1927).

and depression have been.” His struggle to earn a living forced Ed to explore creative solutions. For several years he had worked as a wool buyer for the National Wool Marketing Corporation, but at eighty years old he had limited success and could no longer afford to continue living at the Don Pratt Hotel in Belle Fourche. With few other options, Ed wrote to one of South Dakota’s Congressmen, requesting an investigation into his military service. He hoped that since he had guided a military contingent following the 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre, he would be allowed to collect federal benefits and live at the state veteran’s home in Hot Springs. Admission to the veteran’s home required a minimum of thirty days’ military service, however, and since Ed only served as a scout for one day, he did not qualify. During the Depression years Lemmon also attempted to collect reparations from the federal government for the Indian raid on Liberty Farm, which occurred seven decades earlier in August 1864. Ed was disappointed, but not surprised, when the government dismissed his petition for lack of sufficient evidence.¹⁴

Despite his financial hardships, Ed’s good humor rarely failed. He traveled widely, visiting scores of friends and neighbors in Perkins County, the Black Hills, and numerous other places along the way. Although Ed always used a cane—an intricately carved diamond willow featuring fifty brands—he remained relatively unhindered by his crippled right leg. As he noted, “it isn’t a bad stick yet and beats a wooden one by far.” Ed also spent much of his time doting on children. He may have been making up for his lack of engagement as a father to his own sons, but “Dad” Lemmon charmed scores of kids with candy, stories and kindness. In Rose Tidball’s *Taming the Plains*, a history of

¹⁴ Sudlow, *Homestead Years*, 187; *BFB*, 31 August 1934; *BFB*, 5 June 1936; and *WSA*, Vol. 12, p. 10.

Corson County, South Dakota, she described Dad as “a shrewd, persuasive man who didn’t drink or smoke and the children loved him. He usually had a bag of candy for them and would often joke or play games with them.” Another writer summed up a sentiment held by many who knew him: “He was one that once known you never could forget.”¹⁵

Ed’s notoriety in western South Dakota earned him a unique honor in 1941—a full-page picture in *Life* magazine. That September photographer Eliot Elisofon and writer Roger Butterfield traveled to South Dakota and produced a photographic essay titled, “South Dakota: Its Boundless Plains Are Heart of a Continent.” They drove more than 3,100 miles within the state, searching for interesting places and people. Elisofon and Butterfield’s essay featured several unique personalities in a series of small photos, including Governor Harlan Bushfield, State Exterminator A.M. Jackley (who killed 90,000 rattlesnakes in 1940 alone) and South Dakota State College agriculture professor Nils Hansen. Twelve such portraits filled one page and on the opposite, a full-length picture of Dad Lemmon leaning on his carved walking stick. Ed’s wide-brimmed hat hinted at his cowboy past, as did his prominently contorted right leg, which angled sharply away from his hip to a point at mid-thigh, clearly above the knee. His curved leg looked remarkably similar to the asymmetrical cane that he relied on for support. The authors penned the following summary:

The great South Dakotan and great Westerner on the opposite page, George Edward “Dad” Lemmon, was born at Bountiful, Utah, in 1857, began punching cows in Wyoming at 13. His right leg was broken eight times in falls but he went on to saddle-handle more cattle than any man who ever lived—up to 900 in a single day. Once he had the largest fenced pasture in the world (865,429½) acres. In 1907 he staged a sale of prairie

¹⁵ Burdick, *Range Cattle*, 12; Yost, *Boss Cowman*, 215; Tidball, *Taming the Plains*, 38; and Grabow Collection, copy of unknown story written by Nat Pierce, p. 412.

lots on North Dakota border and founded the town of Lemmon, where he lives today.

For Ed, the *Life* magazine feature was one of the highlights of his life. As the *Lemmon Leader* noted in a short article titled “‘Dad’ Lemmon Is Thrilled By Page Picture in Life,” Ed was the “happiest man in the state” when he saw the full-page picture. Beyond the compliments and letters of congratulations he received from a number of area citizens, prominent recognition in *Life* marked the culmination of Ed’s long-time efforts to see his story in print. Although not quite the same as publishing a book, the experience was “very satisfying to say the least.”¹⁶

The *Life* magazine feature would prove to be the last significant moment in Ed’s long and eventful life. He lived in the Palace Hotel in Lemmon during most of World War II, relying on his son James for financial support. In August 1945, just days after the United States dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Ed fell ill. He was taken to the Lemmon hospital, which filled the second story of the Bank of Lemmon building on Main Street. On Saturday afternoon, August 25—just two weeks before the Japanese surrendered to end World War II—George Edward Lemmon passed away. He was eighty-eight. Three days later James placed Ed’s body next to his son George’s in Greenhill Cemetery, on the south side of the community he had founded. The R.S. Evanson Funeral Home charged \$625.90 for the funeral. Since Ed only had \$582.80 worth of assets when he died, James paid the difference.¹⁷

¹⁶ *Life* Magazine, Vol. 11, No. 14, 6 October 1941; WSA Vol. 13, p. 5-6; *Lemmon Leader*, 9 October 1941;

¹⁷ Lemmon High School Sociology Class (1989), *The Face of Change*, 56; *Lemmon Leader*, 29 August 1945; and Perkins County, South Dakota, Clerk of Courts, “Estate of George Edward Lemmon, deceased.”

Figure 9.1. Dad Lemmon as He Appeared in *Life* Magazine, 1941.



Source: Roger Butterfield and Eliot Elisofon, "South Dakota: Its Boundless Plains are Heart of a Continent" *Life* Magazine, Vol. 11, No. 14 (6 October 1941), 109.

Following Ed's death, the Lemmon family slowly disappeared from their namesake town. Rosella, who had moved to Sturgis years earlier, passed away in 1964. Four years later Ed's two remaining sons—James and Roy Edward—also died. Roy had spent much of his career in California as a Hollywood stunt man and returned to South Dakota before his death. He and James were both interred in Greenhill Cemetery. James had been one of Lemmon's strongest businessmen and community leaders, working diligently to promote and strengthen the prairie town. His wife Della, who had experienced a series of physical and mental health problems, passed away in 1970. She and James had had no children.

* * * * *

Ed Lemmon outlived most of his peers and business partners, citing the virtue of vigorous activity for helping to keep him in shape. He claimed that Ben and George Sheidley, R.C. Lake and Thomas Tomb had all died due to “softening of the grain. Too much brain work and not enough manual exercise.” Like Theodore Roosevelt, Lemmon lived a “strenuous life” full of action; since his death, Ed's role in the development of the northern Great Plains has been memorialized in countless ways. Many of his contributions to the region's nomenclature began when he was alive, of course, with the town of Lemmon the most notable example. In 1931 Don MeLoy built a small store fifty miles south of Lemmon, which he named “Usta” in honor of Ed's corrupted Indian name *Huste*. In 1957 the city of Lemmon erected a stone monument in the city park honoring Ed, as part of its fiftieth anniversary celebration. The following year James nominated his father—who was selected—for induction into the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City. In 1969 Nellie Synder Yost published her edited version of Ed's

reminiscences, titled *Boss Cowman*, which helped rekindle regional interest in the pioneer cattleman. Two years later the city of Lemmon started what has become an annual affair—the Boss Cowman Celebration and Rodeo. Taking its name from Yost’s book, the rodeo honors a distinguished area rancher or couple each year as “Boss Cowman Honorees,” a testament to Ed Lemmon’s influence. In 1994 Ed was inducted into the South Dakota Hall of Fame and in the second decade of the twenty-first century, efforts are underway to renovate his house in Lemmon into a museum.¹⁸

Ed Lemmon lived a life full of adventure, excitement, fun and hard work. He loved jokes and stories, slept in bedrolls belonging to other cowboys and rode so recklessly that he broke his leg multiple times in horse falls. At twenty years old he guided trail drives. By age thirty-four he had become range manager for one of the largest cattle outfits on the northern Great Plains, turning a free-spirited bunch of toughs into first-rate cowhands while developing tradecraft and cattle handling techniques copied by other cattle outfits throughout the region. As one of the most recognized authorities on open range cattle handling, his influence extended far beyond the Flying V and Reverse L7 outfits.

In almost ninety years on the Great Plains, Ed Lemmon played an integral role in its growth and development. Even though he tended to favor building a personal financial fortune over bringing settlers into the region, Ed—sometimes unknowingly—became one of the key figures guiding its progress. As a cowboy and cattleman, he relied

¹⁸ *BFB*, 1 January 1937; Faith Historical Committee, *Faith Country Heritage*, 364-365; Workers of the Writers Program of the Works Projects’ Administration in the State of South Dakota, *South Dakota Place Names*, 96-97; *Lemmon Tribune*, 13 June 1957; Yost, *Boss Cowman*; Lemmon Centennial Committee, *Lemmon: The First 100 Years*, 219-224.; *Dakota Herald*, 16 July 2007; Neoma E. Rossow, “Town Founder was also Top Cattleman,” *South Dakota Hall of Fame Magazine* Vol. XX, No. 3 (Fall 1996), 26-27; and Roger Holtzmann, “Boss Cowman’s Own Words,” *South Dakota Magazine* Vol. 23, No. 6 (March/April 2008), 51-56.

on Indian lands—both illegally and legally acquired—to build a cattle empire. When “South Dakota became the scene of the nation’s last big open range cattle frontier,” Lemmon enjoyed a prominent role as one of its most important actors. After he used a lifetime of range skills to guide the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad west across the Missouri River, he became a town builder, helping to found several communities in North and South Dakota and losing a fortune in the process. In his later life, Ed helped define the context in which the region had developed through a series of newspaper articles that also earned him widespread recognition.

Ed’s lifetime of achievements and influence earned him recognition as the “Dean of the Range,” and he came to symbolize the hearty stock of the region’s founders. His skill in open range cattle handling, knowledge of the people and environment of the northern Great Plains and role in its development were unmatched. A few years before his death, the *Rapid City Journal* summed up his life this way: “The story of ‘Dad’ Lemmon is an epic of the last frontier, the great west which still has thousands of ranches, but in which the scene is constantly changing. No living man is better acquainted with this area or has watched its progress more closely through three-score years and ten.”¹⁹ Lemmon could not have asked for a better legacy.

¹⁹ Catherine Draine, Editor, *Cowboy Life: The Letters of George Philip* (Pierre, SD: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2007), 299 and *RCJ*, 26 May 1941 “Dean Of The Range Hopes To Be In Rapid.”

Appendix: Timeline

- 1820: James H. Lemmon, Sr. born in New York
- 1826: Lucy Elizabeth Whitmore born in New Hampshire
- 1852: James Lemmon marries Lucy Whitmore at Marengo, Illinois
- 1853: Hervey Lemmon born in Nebraska
- 1855: Moroni Lemmon born in Utah
- 1857: George Edward Lemmon born in Utah
- 1859: Alpharetta Lemmon born in Utah
Lemmon family moves to Liberty Farm, Nebraska
- 1860: Liberty Farm becomes a stop on the Pony Express route
- 1861: Pony Express ends
James Butler “Wild Bill” Hickok spends an evening with the Lemmon family
Edward Stokes hunts buffalo at Liberty Farm
Civil War begins
- 1862: “Dakota War” begins in Minnesota
- 1864: Indian raids along Platte River and attack on Liberty Farm
Sand Creek Massacre
- 1866: Lemmon family leaves Liberty Farm to join Union Pacific Railroad construction
- 1867: Lemmon family resides in Cheyenne, Wyoming
- 1868: Ute Metcalf absconds with James’ share of their tie-cutting earnings
Ed and Moroni join Cheyenne “juvenile militia”
- 1869: Union Pacific completed at Promontory Point, Utah
James takes possession of “Church Island” horses
Hervey begins career as cowboy with J.W. Iliff in Colorado
- 1870: Ed working as courier for Iliff outfit in Wyoming and Colorado
Lemmon family returns to Nebraska – finds Liberty Farm occupied
- 1871: Ed working for Lawhorn and Hardigan and as mail courier
Ed swims river in pursuit of wounded Indian

- 1873: Ed trailing cattle in Kansas; may have met Wyatt Earp in Dodge City
Lucy Lemmon dies (age 42), buried in Oak Grove Cemetery
Ed witnesses Indian trampled by buffalo
- 1874: McCumpsey family moves into Lemmon home near Kiowa, Nebraska
Ed breaks right leg for first time
- 1875: Ed breaks leg for second time
- 1876: Moroni freighting in Black Hills
Wild Bill Hickok killed in Deadwood
George A. Custer and 7th Cavalry killed during Battle of the Little Bighorn
- 1877: Ed and Tom McCumpsey ride to Ogallala, Nebraska, to find work as cowboys
Ed works for several outfits; begins association with Sheidley Cattle Company
Ed bosses his first cattle drive into the Black Hills
- 1878: Ed working for 100 Cattle Company, managed by George Green
Ed gets caught in severe winter blizzard
- 1880: Ed begins work as range manager for the Flying V outfit (Sheidley brothers)
Ed helps move Sheidley Company operations into southwest Dakota Territory
- 1881: Ed delivers 738 cattle to Standing Rock Indian Agency
- 1880-
1889: Sheidley Cattle Company ranges thousands of cattle on Great Sioux Reservation
Ed develops relationship with Red Cloud and Young Man Afraid of His Horses
Ed leads "Eight Killers" crew
- 1883: Sheidley brothers sell Platte River (Nebraska) range to Alex Swan
Railroads implement standardized time zones across the United States
Ben Sheidley dies
- 1884: Dave Clark negotiates Sheidley Company taxes with Custer County Commission
Ed begins term as Commissioner of Fall River County
Flying V outfit begins shipping cattle to Union Stockyards in Chicago
- 1886: Ed marries sixteen-year-old Bertha Reno at Buffalo Gap, South Dakota
Chicago & North Western Railroad reaches Rapid City
Hervey Lemmon dies (age 33), buried in Oak Grove Cemetery
"Great Die Up," winter of 1886-1887
- 1887: General Allotment (Dawes) Act passed
Bulk of Flying V cattle moved to Moreau River range

- 1888: Ed serving as roundup boss for Sheidley Cattle Company
Dave Clark elected Mayor of Rapid City
Ed completes underwear-only crossing of the Cheyenne River
James Hervey Lemmon born in Dakota Territory
Moroni Lemmon dies (age 32), buried in Oak Grove Cemetery
- 1889: Roy Edward Lemmon born in Dakota Territory
South Dakota becomes fortieth state
- 1890: Ed breaks leg for third time during spring roundup; nearly freezes to death on range; spends months recovering in Nebraska
Dave Clark elected to South Dakota state senate
Ed nearly drowns in Little Blue River
Great Sioux Reservation divided into Cheyenne River, Standing Rock, Lower Brule, Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations
“Ghost Dance” movement reaches Sioux tribes in South Dakota
Sitting Bull killed
Wounded Knee Massacre
- 1891: Ed guides military contingent near Wounded Knee, including artist Frederic Remington
Dave Clark dies (age 33)
Ed takes over as general manager of Flying V outfit
Ed makes first cattle-buying trip to Texas
Ed moves Bertha and children to house in Rapid City
- 1892: Johnson County (Wyoming) War
Western South Dakota Stock Growers Association founded; Ed serves as member of Executive Committee until 1914
- 1893: Frederick Jackson Turner delivers “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago
- 1894: George Reno Lemmon born in South Dakota
Sheidley Company shipping cattle to Chicago from Belle Fourche
- 1895: Ed experiences difficulty shipping 1,350 head to Chicago from Forest City
- 1896: George Sheidley dies
Sheidley Cattle Company purchases NUN ranch in Texas and acquires “Big Dry” range in Montana
- 1897: Ed bosses Peno Flats roundup of 50,000 cattle, 500 men and 4,000 saddle horses
- 1898: William Sheidley dies

Ed sells his Sheidley Cattle Company stock to Sam Sheffield; invests in Lake, Tomb and Lemmon Company (Reverse L7 brand)

Late

1890s: Bertha divorces Ed

1900: Ed attends National Live Stock Association annual meeting in Fort Worth, Texas
Ed marries twenty-four-year-old Rosella Boe at Edgemont, South Dakota
Ed, Rosella and her two sisters honeymoon in Chihuahua, Mexico
Rosella living in Spearfish, South Dakota

1901: Bertha marries Joseph Pitt; family (including Ed's sons) moves to Palisade, Colorado
President William McKinley assassinated

1902: Ed meets President Theodore Roosevelt at White House; acquires 865,000-acre lease on Standing Rock Indian Reservation
Rosella moves to boarding house at Fort Yates, North Dakota

1903: James H. Lemmon, Sr. dies (age 73), buried in Oak Grove Cemetery

1904: Ed cuts 900 head of cattle in one day

1905: National Live Stock Association Secretary Charles Martin recognizes Ed for having saddle-handled more cattle than any man who ever lived—over one million head—and operating the world's largest fenced pasture
Ed and Bird Rose construct cattle dipping facilities and dip more than 26,000 cattle
Sheidley Cattle Company sells NUN ranch in Texas
Ed begins working with the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad to chart a route across the Missouri River

1906: Upton Sinclair publishes *The Jungle*
Ed uses scrip to purchase land for town sites along proposed Milwaukee Railroad line

1907: Ed sells his shares of the Lake, Tomb and Lemmon Company to Bird Rose
Ed founds town of Lemmon, South Dakota
Ed works to grow Reeder, North Dakota
Governor John Burke appoints Ed as Commissioner in Adams County, North Dakota

1908: Ed constructs a two-and-a-half-story home in west Lemmon
Ed purchases a controlling interest in the First State Bank of Lemmon; serves as president

1909: Milwaukee Railroad completes new transcontinental route

Ed begins service as Commissioner of Perkins County, South Dakota
 Bison—not Lemmon—becomes seat of Perkins County
 Ed assists Milwaukee Railroad officials with siting of Isabel and Faith branch
 lines; within two years more than a dozen towns appear along these routes

- 1910: Ed's son James returns to Lemmon
- 1912: James Lemmon marries Della Donovan
- 1913: Ed sells interest in First State Bank; begins to experience financial difficulties
- 1914: World War I begins
- 1915: Ed breaks leg for fourth time
 Ed and James enter sheep business
- 1919: Ed and James purchase 4,000 head of Arizona cattle; none survive the winter
- 1921: Ed and Rosella move to an "Indian Shack" at his cow camp on Standing Rock
- 1923: Ed closes out livestock enterprise after fifty-three years in business
- 1925: Ed begins to chronicle his life and experiences; travels to Montana to dictate
 reminiscences to Mrs. E.C. Kurtz
- 1926: Ed corresponds with Lewis Crawford; hopes to publish a book of his stories
- 1927: Ed and Rosella divorce after twenty-seven years of marriage
- 1929: Wall Street stock market crash marks beginning of the Great Depression
- 1931: Don MeLoy builds a store south of Lemmon named Usta, a corruption of Ed's
 Indian name, *Huste*
- 1932: Ed attends dedication of Lemmon Petrified Wood Park, Fort Yates Fair and Rodeo
 and unveiling of Sitting Bull monument
 Ed's first article appears in the *Belle Fourche Bee*
 Ed working as wool buyer for National Wool Marketing Corporation
- 1933: Ed corresponds with Nebraska State Historical Society; attempts to get stories
 published
- 1936: Lewis Crawford dies; Ed's papers pass to North Dakota Congressman Usher L.
 Burdick, who produces a manuscript titled "History of the Range Cattle Trade
 of the Dakotas"
 George Reno Lemmon dies (age 41), buried in Greenhill Cemetery in Lemmon

- 1941: Ed featured in *Life* magazine
- 1945: Ed dies in Lemmon Hospital (age 88), buried in Greenhill Cemetery
- 1958: Ed inducted into the National Cowboy Hall of Fame
- 1964: Rosella Lemmon dies (age 88)
- 1968: James Lemmon dies (age 80), buried in Greenhill Cemetery
Roy Edward dies (age 74), buried in Greenhill Cemetery
- 1969: Nellie Snyder Yost publishes *Boss Cowman*, a collection of Ed's reminiscences
- 1970: Della Lemmon dies (age 77), buried in Greenhill Cemetery
- 1971: Boss Cowman Celebration and Rodeo begins
- 1994: Ed inducted into South Dakota Hall of Fame

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