

THE MOVE TO THATCHER'S RANCH 1920-1945

In the spring of 1920, Mr. Thatcher wrote my father a letter asking him to come to Pueblo, he wanted to see him. He said he was going to have to do something with the Flying W Ranch in Oklahoma. In 1919, he had given local people an option to buy the ranch and they had been unable to complete a sale. He was going to have to take it back, or sell it.

They talked the deal over for some time. They decided to sell it if they could. If not, they would put it back into operation. Selling it was doubtful, as he said he would have to have cash. He did not want to have to take it back again. My father told him that the Waggoners might buy it since they had purchased the Bell ranch in New Mexico and might buy more land. There were one hundred and five sections of deeded land in the Flying W Ranch.

My father went to see Mr. Waggoner about buying the ranch. At this time, the Waggoners were in the oil business, as most of their ranch had oil on it. They produced the oil, refined it, and sold it on their own. Mr. Waggoner told my father that they were so busy with this "oil mess", as he called it, that they could not expand any more in the ranching business at the time. He also told him he would a lot rather be in the ranching business than in the oil business.

The way this oil business came about, was that Mr. Waggoner had hired a well driller from Fort Worth to come to Electra and dig a water well. Any shallow water in the country was so gypsy that it was not fit for human consumption. They used cisterns and tanks for drinking water. At about six hundred and fifty

feet, the driller struck oil. Mr. Waggoner said, "What in the world are we going to do with that stuff? It has ruined my water well!" None of the land was leased for oil. The oil companies had no interest in it. Someone talked him into forming his own company.

After a sale could not be made, Mr. Thatcher hired my father to run the ranch for him. They started re-stocking with steers, as the recent experience with cows had been disastrous.

Mr. Thatcher traded for a 1918 Model T Ford roadster (one seat). He had his chauffeur, Ted Smack, remove the turtle shell on the back and build a bed on it. This was the first cowboy pickup I ever saw -- it might have been the first one ever made. The Ford Motor company did not make pickups for several years. This car was used to go to town for supplies primarily, as it did not go too well through the sand hills.

My father went into Colorado and New Mexico looking for yearlings to buy. He would buy them in small bunches, have them delivered to a certain man's place on a certain date, then when a considerable number had been assembled, he would hire men to trail them to the ranch. In the fall of 1920, he worked in southeast Colorado, east of Trinidad, around Branson, Kim, and in that area.

He was up in this country around the first of November, when it came up a snow storm. This stopped the cattle buying for a time and he decide he would go home. He borrowed a scoop shovel from a rancher and started home in the snow. He would come to places where the snow looked pretty deep, get out and scout out the most likely trail. There were no graded roads, just trails and ruts to follow. He would drive the best he could after selecting his route. At times, he would become stuck, then the scoop shovel took over until he could go again.

He had been plowing his way for about half a day and he was cold, wet, and tired. He saw in the distance a house with smoke coming out of the chimney. It would be nice to stop, go in, and get warm, he thought. He stopped, went up and knocked on the door, and a lady answered the door. He told the lady that he was cold and wet, and that he would like to come in and get warm. She was very gracious, ushering him right in by the stove. Sitting there visiting about the weather, talking with the children, and passing the time, he asked, "Where is your husband?" She stated, "The s-- o- a b----- has been gone for three days. I don't know where he is." This set him back a bit in asking questions and carrying on polite conversation. He was not accustomed to ladies talking in this manner. He soon got warm, thanked the lady for her hospitality, and left. He thought as he went along, "If she talked about her husband in that manner, what might she say about me?"

Another such trip was made into New Mexico and Mr. Thatcher went along in the Model T. They had been off southwest of Clayton some fifty to seventy-five miles looking at cattle. In the evening, they started back to Clayton. After a time, it became dark. The lights on the Model T were not too good at best. When you slowed down, the lights would become dim. They drove down into a draw, the lights went out, and the steering wheel came off. They sat there in the dark momentarily and Mr. Thatcher said, "Bob, I believe we better get out and lead her." John Thatcher has stated that my father had a sense of humor -- his Uncle Raymond had a sense of humor also. At times when my father and R. C. Thatcher were together, they would converse in a manner that would make the standup comedians of the present time take a back seat. The reason the steering wheel came off was that the Model T was equipped with a gadget that

locked it to prevent theft. This gadget was somewhat out of repair and this allowed the wheel to come off.

After making the necessary adjustments, they were able to get on across the draw. They were wondering if they would make the fifty-some miles to Clayton in the dark. Ahead of them and by the road, they saw a light in a house. They decided to stop and see if they might stay all night. After talking to the man of the house, they decided to stay. They were welcomed and the lady of the house fixed them a meal -- they had had nothing but a lunch of various groceries they had taken with them in the Model T. The people apologized, saying they did not have room in the house for them to sleep, but they could fix a bed in a little out-building. They brought out various amounts of clean bedding and a lantern for light. They fixed a nice bed for them. Bob and Mr. Thatcher retired immediately and my father went right to sleep. Before long, he awakened and Mr. Thatcher had the lantern lit and was holding it near the bed -- he had discovered various bugs that seemed to be lonesome. They had prevented him from going to sleep. Well, some way they managed to stay until it was light enough to get the Ford back on the road. I have heard Mr. Thatcher tell this story several different times. He said, "I could hear them talking to each other when I blew out the light. One would say, 'You hit him on that side and I will get him on this side. Don't let him get away!'" Then he would tell at length how he bathed, disinfected his clothes, and finally decided that he was immune to such critters.

Numerous steers were bought and trailed to the ranch. By 1921, the price of cattle was down and still going down. The summer of 1921, Mr. Thatcher decided to buy more cows. He bought them by the hundreds at \$20 per head. By 1922, there were several thousand cows on the ranch and the steers

were gone.

In the spring of 1923, Dr. Dunaway, federal veterinarian for northwest Oklahoma, discovered an infection of scabies in the cattle in the area. This brought on a dipping program that lasted most of the summer. Most of the nearly three thousand cows had calves. A mixture of lime and sulfur was used as the pesticide. This mixture was put in the dipping vat and had to be heated to 100 degrees to be effective. Then the cattle had to be held in the vat for two minutes. Cows, calves, bulls, and all had to be treated. In addition, a good number of the neighbor's cattle also had to be treated.

After being put through this process, it was very difficult to get the calves back with their mothers in some cases. Even though they were separated into small lots, some of the calves were never claimed by their mothers. The odor of the dip seemed to make it impossible, in some cases, for a cow to find her calf. These cattle were put through this process twice, as it was repeated in 14 days.

In the summer of 1924, Mr. Thatcher decided to spay about 300 cutback two-year-old heifers. Someone had convinced him that they would gain more weight, get fat quicker, and bring more money, if this operation was performed.

My father hired a veterinary and we completed this project in two days. Harry Tanner was present - - he did not think much of a man who would dehorn a cow. He stated, "If the dehorning man had his arms sawed off at the shoulder, the dehorning would probably be discontinued." He indicated, in no uncertain terms, that performing the spaying operation was worse than the dehorning. The cattle were sold later and in many ways, the project was a success. It was never attempted again.

In 1924 and 1925, the Santa Fe railroad was built across the ranch. There were some 13 miles of track

in the pasture. Completion of the railroad in 1925 helped with the marketing situation. However, in some cases, cattle were yet driven to Texline for marketing.

Around 1925, my father was put in charge of the Swearingen ranch, more grass was leased and more cattle were bought. In 1926, Sully Ikard came to help run the ranch and was present until it was sold.

Ranches were leased near Romero, Texas; Las Vegas, New Mexico; Roswell, New Mexico; Canadian, Texas; Mount Dora, New Mexico; Cautes, New Mexico; Gladstone, New Mexico; Clovis, New Mexico; and later, Seligman, Arizona.

In 1927, the Wilson ranch, the OTO ranch, the Buffalo Springs ranch, and the FD ranch were leased. Will May's place and two of the Lujan places were leased. This extended the home ranch from south of Boise City into New Mexico.

Each fall and winter, my father would buy bulls to be brought to the ranch. Only the best range type cattle were bought. They were not the short, chunky type recommended by the so-called "agricultural experts." The quality of these cattle will be discussed later. These bulls came from Kansas, Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming, and Texas. They were bought out of the best purebred Hereford herds in the country.

It was his plan to attend the various livestock shows at Denver, Kansas City, and Fort Worth, as well as visiting the various herds in the various states. One particular time, Mr. Thatcher told my father to come by Pueblo and he would like to go with him to Denver to the stock show. They prepared to leave Pueblo about three a.m. so they would have all day to look at bulls. Before they left that morning, Mr. Thatcher prepared a small "A" shaped suitcase and put in it a gallon jug of high-class spirits of homemade quality. Much time and four Denver Posts were used,

as my father tells it, in preparing this package for safe transport. First it was placed upright in the suitcase with paper all around it. This left the top, or neck, sticking straight up with very little or no packing over the top. There was danger of it being smashed from the unprotected top, so the process was repeated with the jug lying down and with packing all around it. After finishing the job of packing, Mr. Thatcher told my father, " Now Bob, when we get to the hotel and get out, I want you to carry this bag. Don't let the bellboy have it. You hold on to it. If we were to lose it, the trip would be ruined. Besides some "book-of-rules man" might put us in jail." The term "book-of-rules man" will be explained later.

In due time, they arrived in Denver at the Brown Palace Hotel. They got out of the car and unloaded all of their suitcases. Here came the boy to take the bags. He insisted on taking the one that my father was holding. But my father told him, "No, I will carry this one. This is the one that has the money in it." The boy's eyes got as big as silver dollars, and he went on.

Mister Thatcher bought and sold cattle by the thousands, according to market price, pasture price, and conditions in general. He did not "get married to the stock" or try to keep them year in and year out. He bought when they were cheap and sold when they were high. However, the drought situation in the 1930's interrupted the cycle. This will be explained later.

One summer, he had about twelve hundred cows on a place east of Springer, New Mexico, near Gladstone that he had offered for sale. A man from Woodward, Oklahoma, had looked at them twice and had talked to Mr. Thatcher on the phone several times and "bought" them, so it seemed. He again called Mr. Thatcher, wanting to meet him at the pasture on a certain day.

He said he would buy the cattle. Mr. Thatcher supposed the cattle were sold and prepared to meet the man at the designated time and place. He went by the Harvey House, had a lunch made, and took it with him as the pasture was 20 miles from a place to eat. He thought they could have a picnic, perhaps get the down payment, and close the deal.

This man had Jim Selman with him, a man my father had met when he went north into Oklahoma looking for Waggoner strays in the 1890's. The man that presumably had bought the cattle hemmed and hawed. He said he wanted to look at them again and if they looked alright he would give so and so per head, which was \$2 per head under what he had agreed to pay on the phone after looking at the cattle twice. My father had shown them to him. This was quite a shock for Mr. Thatcher. He thought for a minute, then said "If you didn't buy them the other day over the phone like you said you would, you're sure as hell not going to buy them today at any price." Turning away, he walked off, got in his car, and drove away. Down the road, they stopped to eat the lunch. The cow buyer went on home without his lunch. Mr. Thatcher did not put up with such dealings.

One summer, Mr. Thatcher sold his dry fat cows to the Nochals Packing Company in Pueblo. We delivered two carloads each week. We would drive these cows to Texline on Saturday to be shipped Sunday. They arrived in Pueblo on Monday for slaughter. These cows were sold for \$100 per head, delivered. Most all cattle were sold by the head at this time. These were the same cows he had given \$20 per head for several years before.

This weekly trip to Texline provided action on a varying scale. Me and another boy, Hap Joiner (my classmate while I was a Freshman and a Sophomore at Boise City), were the traildrivers on these trips to Texline. We would go from the ranch on Friday to the

