

# 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.

