

Tom Stephenson Looks Back

By C. FRANK STEELE, Lethbridge, Alberta

ALTHOUGH he's retired these many months and living in town, Tom Stephenson gets back into the range country every chance he gets. For his heart belongs to ranching and he feels at home out among the Stetson hatted boys.

The kids in the south country around Magrath used to look at Tom in the old days and in admiration say: "Tall in the saddle—a real cowman." They were right. Tom is both tall and he's a real cowman, one of the few stockmen of the old school. For he rode the range when a lot of the big cattle companies were in their heyday. For half a century he's been in the business seeing a lot of changes both in the States and in the South Alberta country.

Now Tom's taking things a little easier. He's living in Lethbridge in an apartment block owned by his rancher friend, "Bob" Patterson. And everything's swell at "Bob's" fine "Patterson Court" but Tom admits sometimes he feels mighty fenced-in and hankers for the wide, open spaces they tell about in the story books.

Mrs. Stephenson had a lot to do with getting her rancher husband in town where he could get away from the strenuous life on the ranch. Last summer they had a pleasant holiday at Banff and have their hearts set on another summer there. Tom likes the mountains as well as the open country for he was born in Utah and there are a lot of mountains down there.

Tom Stephenson, as noted, was born in Utah—Holden, Utah,—in 1879, the son of J. J. Stephenson, who came from Denmark, and Jane Bennett Stephenson, born in Wales. Holden is in Millard country near Fillmore, the first capital of the territory of Utah.

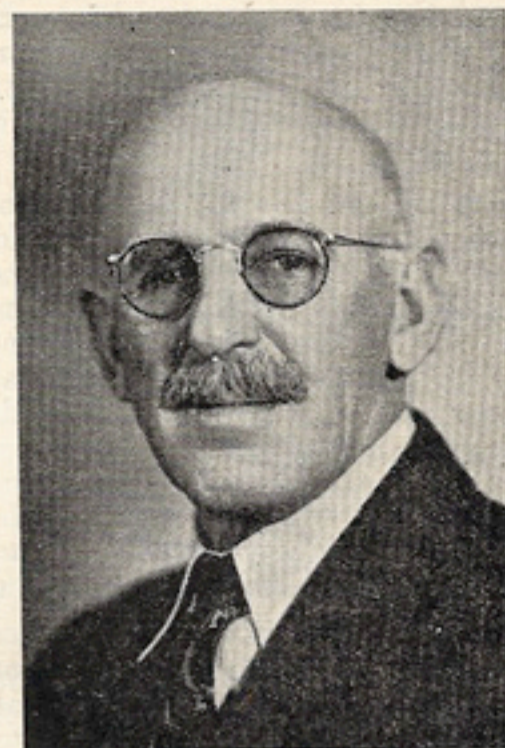
His father ran both Shorthorn and Hereford cattle and they ranged in the mountain valleys a lot. Young Tom got his first taste of ranching on the old place but he didn't stay put. The west was astir in those days and boys were restless; Tom headed for Nevada and got into the freighting game. He drove a jerk line outfit of 12 mules hitched to a string of wagons between Toano and Ely.

He was then 20 but held his job even though those mules presented a problem at times.

In 1901—it was March—Tom came up to Alberta, then opening up to settlement in a big way. He had worked for that pioneer Utahn, W. H. McIntyre, in Eureka and Tintic in Utah and it was sort of in the books that he should eventually go back to his employ. This he did, but he had a lot of experience in the new country before he became ranch superintendent for McIntyre the day before Christmas in 1911.

He drove stage between Spring Coulee and Cardston and worked as farm foreman at Raymond for the Knight Sugar Company, which incidentally, was organized by the late "Uncle" Jesse Knight and his sons Will and Ray at the turn of the century. Jesse Knight purchased 30,000 acres of land near Spring Coulee and the ranch was stocked with 4,000 head of yearling steers bearing the "K2" iron.

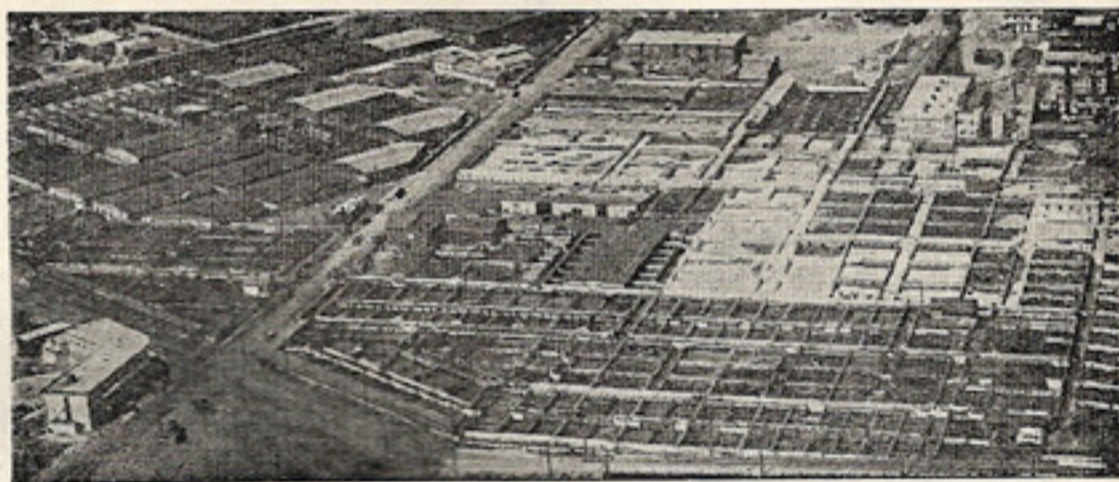
That job with the McIntyre ranch came as a "Christmas box" for the



TOM STEPHENSON

newcomer from the Utah-Nevada country. It was just what Tom wanted and he never was off the McIntyre active list until he retired and moved to Lethbridge after 34 years with the company.

W. H. McIntyre, Sr., founded the McIntyre ranch, south of Magrath on the Milk River in the '90's, the lush grass delighting him. He had come north to look over the Alberta country which was then enjoying a



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boom, and before he returned to Salt Lake he had acquired the nucleus of the ranch—70,000 acres. The spread has grown since then, there now being in the ranch holdings 170,000 acres of deeded land. Much of this land was purchased from the Knight Sugar company, the McIntyre interests acquiring first the -K2 ranch from the Knights and later the Kirkcaldy from the Sugar company.

Homesteaders

Back in 1911 the McIntyres were running 10,000 head of cattle on their holdings and the next year the McIntyre lease in the present Del Bonita country was thrown open to homestead starting one of the famous land rushes at the historic old Lethbridge land office where the Canadian Legion is now housed. Land hungry men in a motley file slept in the open and friends brought them food until they could get into the office to file on some of the cheap land.

That land rush Tom remembers vividly as he does the filling up of the lease country with farmers. This took a lot of the range for the cattle bearing the "IHL" iron of the McIntyre outfit. Additional land was acquired to make up the difference. "It's a great ranch," Tom said recently and there was pride in his voice. "It has everything," he said, "range, hay, fine buildings, first class cattle and plenty of water. There are more than 30 springs on the ranch and 800 acres of alfalfa watered by a private irrigation system."

Speaking reminiscently, Tom says, "We don't have the Chinooks we had in Southern Alberta in the early days and there have been a lot o



Cutting Timothy and Alsike clover at Fort St. James, B. C.

changes in the physical features of the country. Ross Lake, named for the late Walter Ross, pioneer cattleman and father of George Ross of Aden—is about the last of 20 to 30 good sized lakes in that area. The others have dried up". Tom remembers when pelicans made their home on Ross Lake, nesting on an island. They are gone these many years.

The season of 1919, the stockman recalls, was dry and was followed by a hard winter. Winter set in in October and feed was scarce. In fact, the McIntyre ranch moved in 1000 tons of alfalfa hay from Coaldale and 500 tons were brought in later. It was a costly business but most of the cattle were saved.

In 1914 they found the ranch overstocked and 1500 head of McIntyre cattle were moved across the line into Montana on the east end of the Blackfoot Indian reservation. There was good grass there.

Roundup of 1907

The biggest roundup Tom remembers was in the spring of 1907 following the hard winter of 1906-7. There were 11,500 head rounded up south of Brooks on the Bow. "I 'repped' for Ross, Sheets and Kenney. Walter Ross was then operating in the Wintering Hills country north of Cluny, one of the best ranching countries I have ever seen. The grass dragged the stirrups," said Tom.

"After the 1906-7 winter," he says, "there were more dead cattle in the country than live ones. Winter had set in in the middle of November, heavy snow fell and stayed and the mercury dropped to 40 below."

Tom recalls when Mr. McIntyre brought in from Utah a bunch of registered Galloways. They ranged in the West Pot Hole coulee and were as wild a bunch of cattle as

ever hit this country. They were sold out in 1919 and needless to say the difficult lot were never replaced.

W. H. McIntyre, Sr., died in 1926 and in his passing Tom Stephenson feels he lost a personal friend and the west one of its outstanding pioneer figures. W. H. "Bill" McIntyre, his son, stepped into his father's shoes, building up the ranch where his father left off. Mrs. W. H. McIntyre, Sr. passed away in September 1945, and had she lived until October second of that year she would have been 89 years of age. Mr. Stephenson's mother is still living in the old home at Holden. She is over 90.

Tom Stephenson says Alberta has been good to him and he's not going to California or any other place. "I like this country; it's home. There's no better country out of doors."

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