

# Another Hard Winter Story

By CECIL H. STOCKDALE, Maple Creek, Sask.

**I**N August, 1906, a trainload of cattle was shipped at Maple Creek, Sask., to Liverpool, England; these cattle were the property of Smith and Mussett, who in the previous year had come up from Wichita, Kansas, and established a ranch on the north side of the South Saskatchewan River, just north of Pelly, Sask.

George Connor, who branded a goose egg brand, also had cattle in this bunch, and his cattle were long-horned Texas cattle. John Overocker (nicknamed Whitey) was the foreman for Mussett and Smith, while Jack Daley (Goose Egg Jack) was foreman of the Connor spread. It was on the south side of the Saskatchewan River, about one mile west of the ferry.

After the shipping was done and the usual celebrations ended, I went out with Whitey to make a hand as there were about 3,500 cattle still on the ranch which had to be dipped that fall as mange was prevalent at that time. Other riders were George Freer, John Dudley and Ike Mussett, a nephew of the old man.

Nothing unusual happened that fall and 800 tons of hay were put up about ten miles north of the ranch by Harry Houston, and it was all good blue joint hay as the country there was covered by shallow sloughs, which dried up suffi-

ciently to permit taking off the hay.

Later on in the fall we gathered all the cattle and took them fifteen miles west from the summer camp, which was twenty miles north of the river, to a dipping vat which had been built and established by the Massingill Bros. (Harvey and Graham). There the Mussett outfit dipped 3,500 cattle, a large proportion being yearlings and two-year-olds shipped in from Manitoba in the spring. Overocker himself had about 300 cattle in the bunch and the dipping took considerable time, as it was a double cage affair and had to be pulled up and lowered by a team of horses.

While we were dipping, we had to go out and fight prairie fires on a couple of occasions, and during the late fall nearly all the range north of the river, from the Red Deer forks to below where Miry Creek joins the Saskatchewan on the south side, was just black.

Winter, as I remember it, started on about November 20th and continued without much of a letup until well into March, 1907. Snow got to be over four feet deep and badly crusted and if records were kept, I consider that January 1907 was the coldest month ever seen in that district, and the crew couldn't haul the hay as it blew a blizzard every day and they couldn't reach the stacks. They

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used a four-horse team, which would not face the wind on numerous occasions.

As stated before, we dipped by actual count 3,500 head of cattle in the fall and Mussett and Overocker sold the remainder of the cattle in the spring to the Massingill's and the tally was only 266 head, and a lot of these were gathered in a deep coulee about 15 miles east of the ranch.

During January and February cattle piled up on top of one another in the brush along the river to keep warm and in the mornings they couldn't move, as their legs were frozen solid. We put a lot of them out of their misery by clubbing them with an axe.

Mr. Mussett was wintering in the Southern States and we didn't have any mail or communication with the outside world from late in November until about the first week of March, when an old-

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### HARD WINTER (Continued from Page 58)

timer from Maple Creek, named Percy Johnson, arrived at the ranch with Mr. Mussett and the mail.

They had come through by way of the Big Sand Hills with one horse and a home-made toboggan, using snowshoes themselves.

After staying at the ranch about a week to rest himself and his horse, which was a Clyde stallion, Percy Johnson said he was heading south to Maple Creek, as the weather had settled and the outlook was good.

I said to Whitey Overocker that we couldn't let him go alone and I would go with him as I had been riding the river range to the west of the ranch and they had nearly run out of cattle, so there was no more work to do.

Johnson and I and a young fellow named "Chick" left the river on March 8th with the toboggan, Percy's stallion and my saddle horse, and we used the snowshoes. We made the Gap Ridge the first night, about 15 miles from the river, and as there were no houses there at that time we scraped a hole in the snow and either slept or stayed there until daylight; they said afterwards that it was 20 below zero that night.

The second day we headed into the Sand Hills to McCutcheon's ranch (now owned by Sam Anderson of Sceptre, Sask.) and stayed there that night.

The third day we started through the Sand Hills with the intention of making Dad Minor's (father of John and Harry), but the snow was four feet deep and not crusted and we couldn't travel, so we headed out again and made for Coffee Pot, where a half-breed family lived. We got there late at night.

The fourth and fifth days we had to stay at Coffee Pot with our friends as a

blizzard was blowing and you couldn't see anything.

The sixth day we made a stop for lunch at the south side of what was known then as Minor's Lake and made Wes Sharpe's place (the Charlie Millie ranch) that night.

The seventh day was uneventful as we made a short trip to Bill Sharpe's (now Martin Bros.) and stayed there for the night.

The eighth day we hit Big Stick Lake on the north side and travelled down the centre or thereabouts and finally hit the old V (Conrad & Price) hay trail about dark, and it sure was a pleasure to see Pete Ferguson and Amos Spence that night at the ranch as we knew that our trip was about over.

The next morning it was chinooking at the V, so I rode my horse into Maple Creek and arrived on March 16th. Water was running everywhere, but still there was four feet of snow 20 miles north and it didn't go off until well on into April.

During the nine-day trip we had the stallion hitched to the toboggan and my saddle horse followed, but their legs got so sore and raw from the crust that one of us had to break trail with the snowshoes all the time and progress was rather slow at times.

## Statistical Summary

	1949	1950
xBeef Cattle to U.S. ....	9,672	40,847
axDairy Cattle to U.S. ....	5,851	7,024
†Sheep & Lambs to U.S. ....	109	21,797
†Cattle to Stockyards ....	96,172	110,327
†Cattle direct to Plants ....	49,084	51,749
†Inspected Cattle Slaughter ..	130,733	134,221
x Jan. 1 to Feb. 8. ....	† Jan. 1 to Feb. 4.	

a Includes registered cattle.

Average prices of good steers up to 1,000 lbs. and good cows week ended February 4th:

Steers per cwt.	1950	1949	Av. yr. 1939	Cows per cwt.	1950	1949	Av. yr. 1939
Toronto .....	\$21.31	\$19.31	\$6.77	Toronto .....	\$16.14	\$15.24	\$4.86
Winnipeg .....	21.00	19.25	6.18	Winnipeg .....	15.15	14.90	4.57
Calgary .....	22.05	18.15	6.03	Calgary .....	15.72	14.60	4.07
Edmonton .....	22.05	17.50	5.72	Edmonton .....	15.55	14.00	4.05

	1949	1950
Inspected Calf Slaughter .....	29,068	36,867
Inspected Hog Slaughter .....	381,022	422,858
Inspected Sheep Slaughter .....	35,420	30,913
Feeders to Country .....	4,044	3,352

Exports of dressed beef to U.S. Jan. 1st to Feb. 9, 1950, was 6,134,417 pounds, equivalent to approximately 12,268 head of cattle.

Canada's Royal Winter Fair at Toronto for 1950 will be from November 14th to 22nd. General Manager C. S. McKee has also announced that the Fair's annual meeting will be March 29th at the Royal York Hotel, Toronto.

This page is set aside in each issue as a Ranchers' Directory in which Canada's leading producers of fine quality beef cattle may record their names and addresses, their brands, ranges and breed of cattle raised. The space (1/2 column inch) is available for \$24.00 per year (minimum of 12 insertions accepted), with the publication absorbing the cost of art work and the making of the brand design. Each additional brand recorded will be charged \$2.00 per annum. The Ranchers' Directory will serve a dual purpose: first, to publicize the ranch operation, and second, to provide a ready reference for those coming into possession of stray animals.