Cosley, Trapper and Guide Extraordinary

By JULIA NELSON, Mountain View, Alberta

(Concluding Installment)

JOE must have been unusually impressed with the man, even to the point of imitation, for Joe himself is well remembered with a rose-decorated buckskin hat like the one he said Kootenai wore, and an early picture records him wearing, also, a fringed sash and a muffler.

It is strange, too, that Joe, of whom his sister wrote as being "engaged to so many girls you wouldn't have fingers enough to count them" . . . should write of Kootenai Brown:

"He became very animated when recounting his love affairs. His Hannah, his Molly, his Nancy! . . . the intense love which always enveloped his heart for one, or more, led him into many courtships . . ."

Joe loved many women, too, not just one, as each of them thought. He was forever carving hearts on the trees, with an arrow through them, and his initials above or below. One of these tree carvings was found in a remote part of the Belly River lakes country with a date as early as 1897. It was an old Cosley custom. There are hearts and arrows with H. C. and J. C. and all the rest of the Cosley initials on the rocks and trees near Blind Rivers, Ontario, and there will be J. C's as long as the trees last, in deep and inaccessible places of the western forests, and along the mountain trails.

The Cosley romance that touched the fancy of most observers was the one he had with a girl in a Canadian village not far from the Montana border. For Joe it was a dream of love, to be expressed in rhapsodies. He wrote:

PROPOSAL

There is love and beauty sublime
In thy form of grace divine;
A haven of eternal rest
In thy companionship so blest.

Wilt thou listen now
To my sacred vow?
My life I would give to thee
If thou would'st give thine to me.

Ah lovely maiden, kind and true,
Through these lines I appeal to you;
Pause, Oh pause along the path of life
Thou queen of loveliness, and become
my wife.

Then thy love I'd fondly cherish,
Thy presence forever adore;
Neither should ever perish
But to blossom evermore.

As the climax to lavished gifts, he gave her a diamond ring, said to have cost $1,500.00, his entire season's 'catch' of furs. When she tired of the novelty of their association she returned it. Far back in the mountains he buried it in the heart of a tree, closing again invisibly the carved-out niche. Then he went to war, joining the 13th C.M.R., at Cardston, Alberta.

People have looked for the ring, and loved the drama of its being there for centuries to come . . . symbol of the unrewarded love of a strange and mysterious man. The dull truth of the matter is that after World War I Cosley dug out the ring and sold it, to buy new clothes and trapping equipment.

In the army, as elsewhere, Joe was outstanding. He was a sniper of keen ability, decorated for bravery and achievement. The Edmonton Bulletin, featured him some years later under a headline:

HARD RIDING INDIAN FIGHTER NOW TAKES LIFE EASY IN CITY.

"One of the toughest Indian fighters, and a World War veteran who sniped more Boches than probably any other man in the Canadian Division, Joseph Clarence Cosley now relaxes on his laurels . . . The Indians call him Pa-e-aush-ka (hair flying in the breeze). He was a trick shooter . . . "

One of his shooting tricks was the habit of occasionally 'creasing' his saddle horses to catch them. This is the questionable but very effective practice of shooting a .22 bullet through the thin upper ridge of a horse's neck. Temporarily stunned, the escaping mount could be caught and handled with ease.

When Joe came back from the war he went once more to his beloved hills. Quite unofficially now, he continued his

Sample of Joe Cosley's drawings.

guide work, and still more unofficially, his trapping.

His right to trap where, what, and when he pleased, was eventually challenged by both U.S. and Canadian forestry services. Joe left it up to them to prove their point, and went calmly ahead with his occupation.

Rangers on both sides stalked him constantly and unsuccessfully for years. The story is told of two who got up early one morning when tracking was good, and arrived at Joe's camp shortly after he had left for his trapline. They trailed him in the hope of catching him with out-of-season furs.

By nightfall, confused and exhausted they were trying to make their way home, through heavy brush and deep snow, when Joe came out along the ridge to meet them.

"Ah," he said softly, "I knew you would be tired. Come! See I have already made my special French stew. Please stop and eat." With elaborate courtesy he ushered them to the fire, served them a delicious hot supper, and smiled as he bade them goodnight.

His patience was later exhausted, however, when a ranger who had a district far north of Joe's range left his own work to play detective in the southern mountains. After being followed too long Joe walked up to his would be

captor one day in the forest and said quietly, "If I catch you on these trails again, I'll kill you." The neglected northern district was shortly afterwards patrolled.

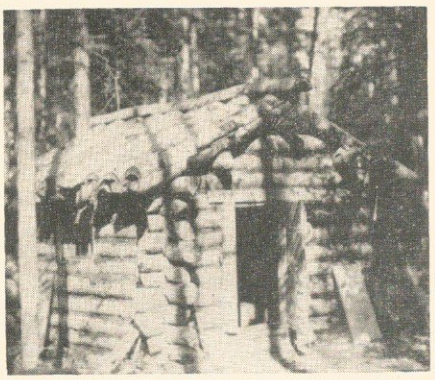
Proud and elusive though he was, Joe was forced at last to concede that even after a man explores and travels an area, though he blazes trails through and around it for thirty years, he must bow to the advance of law and order . . . and conservation.

His trapping operations in the boundary country were checked on May 4th, 1929. By then the north western corner of Montana was Glacier Park, and its northern ranger was one Joseph Heimes, who is still U.S. ranger in the same area. His own account of Joe's arrest is graphic and entertaining:

"On May 4th, 1929, as I was down along the river about two miles south of the boundary, with dynamite to blow out a beaver dam which was flooding the road, I came upon fresh footprints made about the day before, along the water's edge. I crossed to the west side and found more tracks and evidence of trapping beaver. I followed tracks and signs until I came to his camp, well hidden back away from the river. This was about 11 a.m. and I watched the camp for several hours from a hidden place in the trees. There was no sign of life, but, I thought, he may be taking a nap.

Getting tired of waiting, I went to the camp. It consisted of a good tarp thrown over a pole for a tent, and a pine bough bed with about five blankets. In front of the camp was a fire, still warm . . . " (Joe Cosley could make a campfire that would last, unattended, for two days) . . ." and the hind quarters of a beaver were hanging on a pole over the fire where it would catch the smoke. I looked around the camp and found several traps and three muskrat hides cached between the bed blankets.

Leaving everything as it was I hid myself about 40 yards from the camp, where I could watch. About three p.m. I decided that perhaps whoever it was had seen me and would not show up. It was a cold May day and I thought if I was to stay out all night I would do well to go back to the station for warmer clothes and something to eat."



Joe Cosley's last hours were spent in this Northland cabin.

Mr. Heimes at the same time telephoned for a Canadian ranger to come to his aid by 8:00 a.m. the following morning, and gave directions for reaching the camp. By the time he got back to Joe's camp . . . "It was 5:30 p.m. and I waited until about 8:45 p.m. when I heard a twig snap and saw a big fellow with a rifle on his shoulder coming down a small draw into camp. He leaned the rifle against a tree near the fire and stooped down to scratch up some dry grass for the blaze. I then came from my hiding place.

He heard me when I was about 20 yards from him and reached out for his rifle. I told him that I'd shoot him through the guts if he picked up that gun, though I wouldn't have, I guess. He then stood up and I told him who I was, and asked his name. He gave a fictitious name and though I had never seen Joe Cosley I had a hunch, so I said, "You look like Joe Cosley to me." Thinking then that I knew him he said, "Yes, I'm Cosley, but there's no ranger in this park going to take me in."

"There was nothing I could do then, but take him in, so I told him that I would take him in. Noticing that he had a good night's supply of wood on hand, and it was dark by this time, and we were 3½ miles from the station, one mile of it through dark forest without a trail, I decided to spend the night at the camp and keep a good fire going.

We talked most of the night about odds and ends, mostly about people we both knew. He wanted me to roll in with him, saying there was no need of us losing a night's sleep. But having no desire to wake up and find my prisoner gone, I told him I'd had plenty of sleep.

When daylight came he wouldn't travel, so I cut a good tough willow stick and told him I'd beat him all the way in if he wanted it that way. He offered me his watch, saying he would give me a hundred dollars for it later if I would only turn him loose. It certainly hurt his pride to have been caught. I finally got him started but he turned on me three times and tried to get away, and three times we wrestled it out, until I sat down on him.

At the end of his third try, and as I was sitting on him, I noticed my dog's ears go up, and looking through the trees I saw Tom Whitcraft and Canadian Warden Barnes approaching. I was sure glad to see them because at the rate I was going it would have taken me at least two more days to get Cosley to the station. We were only ½ mile from his camp. . .

"Cosley's trial was at Park headquarters at Belton on May 7th. He pleaded

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With the Junior Cattlemen

By GRANT MacEWAN

Question for Today: "What is the meaning of the chilled beef trade of which we hear something from time to time?"

Interest in chilled beef, as it applies in international trade, has recently been revived with the announcement that Argentina is attempting to return to the export of chilled beef for the United Kingdom. That country shipped much of its beef to Britain in the chilled form but was obliged to suspend chilling at the outset of World War II. Since that time practically all the beef shipments to United Kingdom have been "frozen".

The purpose of either freezing or chilling is to aid preservation by dropping temperatures to the point where bacterial organisms will be inactive or relatively so. In practice, frozen meat is held at about 15° or 16°F or lower. At such low temperatures meat could be kept almost indefinitely but when marketed through retail channels, it will be handicapped by the loss of "bloom" and the "drip" that follows thawing. Frozen beef always under-sold chilled beef or fresh beef by several pence per pound on the United Kingdom market.

For the long hauls from Argentina, Australia or New Zealand to United Kingdom, freezing has always offered the best security but those exporting nations have realized that if their techniques would permit the delivery of chilled beef in good condition, the return per pound would be definitely better. Chilling consists of reducing the temperature to a point slightly below freezing, perhaps 28° to 29½°F. At such temperatures some ice crystals might form but the meat generally is not frozen. The growth of micro-organisms is not completely halted but certainly retarded and where care is exercised in point of sanitation and the control of humidity, the exporting countries of the southern hemisphere have seen the method as offering distinct advantages. Chilled beef delivered in United Kingdom, in addition to possessing better appearance, stands to gain by ripening or aging which consists of holding well-fattened beef for a period of two or three weeks to increase its tenderness and general palatability.

It was discovered through research efforts that the introduction of carbon dioxide into the storage room atmosphere helped to retard bacterial growth and thus reduced the dangers associated with chilling. It is likely that this gas will again be used as chilled beef shipments to Britain are revived.

In Australia's last complete year of chilled shipments to United Kingdom, some 330,000 tons of chilled beef were exported. Britain is this year undertaking to buy 144,000 tons of Argentina beef of chiller quality, either chilled or frozen. The basic price for frozen beef in that Argentina-United Kingdom contract is £161 per ton while for chilled beef this same contract specifies £181 per ton.

JOE COSLEY

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guilty and was fined $100.00 and given a 90 day suspended sentence. He had his rifle, .22 and about a dozen traps and three muskrat hides taken from him. Two of his best friends paid $50.00 each on his fine, and he was turned loose. This was about 3 p.m., May 7th.

"At about 5:00 p.m. the park heard that Cosley had borrowed a pair of snowshoes and had a friend take him with a car as far as cars went at that time, to Avalanche Creek. From there Cosley put on the snowshoes and went up the McDonald valley and over Ahern Pass, back into Belly River to take out his camp and whatever beaver hides he had cached near his camp. The park called up Clarence Willey, ranger at the head of Lake McDonald, but Cosley had several hours start and knew the country so well that Willey never had a chance of catching up, let alone finding his way over Ahern Pass, the route that Cosley is supposed to have taken.

"The next morning Lou Hanson and I drove around by way of Cardston to the J. J. West ranch, and from there we walked up the river to the Cosley camp. He had been there and taken out his camp and left not a sign that we found. If we had gone up the valley and along Elizabeth Lake we could have probably seen his tracks where he had come down from Ahern Pass. This was the only way he could have come over into the Belly River country from the west side so quickly, as at that time there were no roads over the mountains." . . .

Poor Jingo, the packhorse, made one false move on Ahern Pass, when the narrow trail was all but dry. Joe Cosley snowshoed over it in early May, at the age of 59, in less than twenty - four hours! He bought a boat a few days later, took his beaver hides and went north down the river. He never returned.

Joe had 15 more years to live. He spent them in an area with which, somehow, he was not entirely unacquainted, hundreds of miles past the most northern cities of Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Sickness beset him often, in these later years. Through his contact with brothers and sisters in the east, one of his young nieces, a registered nurse, flew from Sault St. Marie to special duty at his bedside for several weeks at the Edmonton University Hospital.

Too tired for the trip from Edmonton to Isle La Crosse, he hired a plane, the last few seasons, to take him and his equipment to his trapping grounds.

It must have never occurred to him that he was old. He did get to the point, though, of thinking there might be a circumstance up there that he wouldn't be able to handle alone, for at 73, when he set out on what was to be his last trip, he said what he'd never said before:

"If I'm not back in May, send someone to look for me."

It wasn't a sad and regrettable ending. Anyone who ever knew Joe would tell you he wanted it that way.

Saskatchewan Herald, October 15, 1890

"R. Wyld has in use a newly imported gang plough, with which he turns over an average of six acres a day."