

# Never a Dull Moment

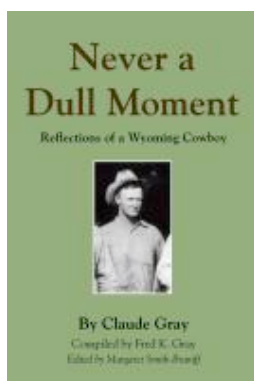
Reflections of a Wyoming Cowboy



By Claude Gray

Compiled by Fred K. Gray

*Edited by Margaret Smith-Braniff*



***NEVER A DULL MOMENT: Reflections of a Wyoming Cowboy** is a memory book of the 1900s. Claude Gray is a man of his day: unselfconscious, opinionated, and bigoted, yet at the same time, astonishingly accepting of other people's foibles. He turns out to be an authentic storyteller with wit, and many a well-turned phrase. His content ranges from memories about individual people to information about formative events and activities from early 1900 to the midpoint of the century.*

## **Never A Dull Moment**

### **Reflections of a Wyoming Cowboy**

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# Chapter 1

## CALIFORNIA TO PINEY CREEK, WYOMING

### **Beginnings**

My life began at the Diamond Range Ranch Headquarters near Cottonwood, California on Aug. 16, 1899, where my father Fred Powell Gray was employed as a cowboy, following the roundup wagon of the Diamond Range outfit. The ranch ranged from the West Coast to the top of the Sierras, and the owners bought cattle in eastern Oregon and Nevada. Their beef cattle were shipped out of Winnemucca, Nevada and Roseville, California.

I never learned much about Dad's parents except his mother, my grandmother, was born at Salt Creek, Thama County, California in 1833. Her maiden name was Kate Bryant. Dad was born, as near as I know, near Stockton, California, in the 1870s.

He had taken up a homestead inside the ranch and in the next year (1900) sold the homestead to the ranch owners and migrated to Wyoming, arriving at Sheridan by train sometime in the spring of that year. I was eight months old. He hired a livery rig to take us out to Granddad Harrington's ranch on lower Piney Creek. When we arrived at the ranch, Dad paid the livery man in gold and had to take paper money in change, which he refused until Granddad advised him the paper money was good. I guess it was the first he had seen.

My older brother Kenneth was born at the ranch at Cottonwood, California in 1897. My younger brother, Harold, was born at Granddad's ranch in 1901; the post office at the ranch was called Hamilton, Wyoming. The post office since has been abandoned so Harold will probably never be able to prove he was born.

My grandparents on my mother's side of the family were Silas Wright Harrington and Elizabeth Harrington. Granddad was Irish and Grandmother, Pennsylvania Dutch.

My granddad built a house sometime before 1900 on Shell Creek and lived there for a time. Later he moved to the Kazee ranch which Arthur Senff owned. Then he bought the little place below Al Long's, and that is where he lived until he retired and moved to Sheridan where he later passed away.

*Claude Gray*



**Back: Grandmother Harrington, Alice (Harrington) Gray  
Front: Claude, Harold, Kenneth. At Piney Creek. (Circa 1910)  
Fred K. Gray files**



**Fred P. Gray (Cross H Ranch, circa 1925). Fred K. Gray files**

Granddad did a little farming on his little ranch—enough to raise some food for the family. He also worked a coal bank on the east side of Piney where he sold coal to the neighbors to help keep the wolf from the door. He sold the coal for one dollar per wagonload with two horses to pull the wagon; for four-horse loads he charged two dollars, but if they got stuck pulling the hill out of the coal bank he would charge double.

One time a lot of coal fell off the bank onto Granddad's head and laid him out for some time. When he came to, he walked home across a flume—which he didn't remember crossing—and came in the house with blood all over himself from a split on top of his head. He sure gave my mother and grandmother a start when he walked in. The closest doctor was either Buffalo or Sheridan, so they decided Dad could sew up the split with a darning needle and some twine, which he did. And in a few days Granddad was back at the mine.

### **Farming**

My first memories on Granddad Harrington's little ranch in Wyoming were how he did his farming. Dad helped him farm for a year or so and the only farm implement they owned was a walking plow. After plowing the land, they built a drag out of bull-berry bushes and dragged the ground with horses, then seeded it by hand, and covered the seed with the same brush drag. After the grain was ripe, Granddad cut it with a scythe, having a cradle attached so it piled the cut grain in neat piles. By piling it, the stalks could be tied by hand with some of the straw. Then it was shocked to dry. After that what they used for feed, they stacked and fed as they needed. What they needed for flour, they would pile the grain on canvas and beat it out by hand, using clubs and stomping on it. To get the chaff out of the grain, they had to wait for a windy day to blow it out by pouring the grain from one tub to another.

One time there we were doing some haying for a neighbor. We were camped out, and Granddad had built a table to eat on. But he had no saw so he just broke off some old boards to use in the table. I was riding a stick horse around the table and fell against one of the jagged ends of one of the boards and ran it through my cheek into my mouth. Mother pulled the wood out, washed me up some, and put on some turpentine; and I went back to my stick horse. I don't think people needed doctors in those days like they do now.

### **Life on Piney Creek**

Dad got his first job in Wyoming working for Mr. Barkey near Lake De Smet while we were living with Granddad, and later he got a ditch contract making a ditch for Arthur Senff, which he never got any pay for. By the way, the ditch happened to go through the pile of buffalo bones on the Jake Greub ranch, which the historical people claim later to have discovered. [This is the Piney Creek buffalo jump.]

In 1903, the dam at the head of Piney Creek broke and really flooded the creek bottom. I don't believe anyone got drowned as everyone was notified by ranchers on horseback. The water could be heard for a long time before it got close. We moved up on a hill and carried everything we could up there; Dad set up a tent to put things in and also to sleep in. The water got to our place sometime during the night but did no damage since it just got up to our front porch. I remember waking the next morning and crawling out of the tent to see if the house was still where it had been. And it was.

### **Dancing and Recreating—and Associated Adventures.**

In my childhood days there were no automobiles, television or radios. The first automobile I saw coming down the road, I thought the horses surely must have been going like hell when they broke loose from the thing. In our neighborhood, there were two richer ranchers who could afford a phonograph, so sometimes our folks bundled us up in a sled, buggy or wagon and we went to the neighbors' to hear the phonograph. Otherwise, there were parties, sewing bees or once in a while a dance at some ranch house—which was about all of the entertainment there was. I didn't get to hear a radio until about the time my wife and I were married. I guess I was about twelve years old when I got to drive my first auto.

One night the folks had gone to a dance up the creek someplace during the winter and the creek was mostly frozen over. We were in a two seated spring wagon; on the way home my brother Kenneth and I were riding in the rear seat. While crossing the creek, the ice broke, letting the rear wheels drop into the creek channel. The seat toppled over backwards, dunking us both in the ice water. In later years, I've seen the time when after a dance a good dunking would have been just what I needed. But not then.

Another night we were going to Kearney to a dance and the weather had been real bad. The roads were blocked with snow so going down the hill between Shell Creek and Piney, Dad let Mother drive the team hitched to



the light buggy. Then he got to the rear of the buggy and held it on the road where it was icy and in danger of slewing off the road.

The Jake Greub family gave a party at their ranch on Piney and we, as well as everybody on Piney, were invited. Dad loaded us up on a hay rack and hooked up one bronc and a gentle horse and we went to the party. On the way there was a steep hill to go down and I guess the brakes were not working very well on the hayrack, so when the wagon got to pushing on the bronc, he kicked all the front frame off the hayrack. Boards and splinters were flying in every direction, but nobody got hit, and we made it to the party in good shape.

Dad and Mother furnished the music for the party—Dad playing violin and Mother the guitar. Everybody played games and danced till midnight; then we had a big midnight lunch and then danced till morning. We got home way after sunup.

The hayrack looked odd without a frame on the front of it.

R. D. (Dave Noyce) owned the old Kearney Hall which was dance hall, post office, and store. There were lots of dances and gatherings and a yearly Fourth of July celebration that everyone looked forward to. Everybody came for miles around bringing plenty to eat, and at noon they all put their eats together and had a real sociable dinner. Afternoon was spent with games, races, baseball, and fireworks. Fireworks was the only thing there to spend money for. I recall one time Dad had taken us there in a wagon and after unhitching and tying up the team, my brother Kenneth asked Dad for some money. Dad just pulled out his purse and gave it to Kenneth. We opened the purse and found forty five cents in it. Did we ever splurge buying fireworks.

The dances at the old hall were always started with the grand march led by Mr. Bill Affeldt and Mandy, his wife. Sometimes Mother and Dad played for the dances; sometimes they had other music. Sometimes Bill Affeldt would relieve the violinist, and when he did, you sure wanted to have a good dancing partner as he would play until you were played clear out dancing.

Along about this time Mr. Sid Sturgess (Sturgis) built a large dance hall—I think with the intentions of outdoing Mr. Noyce. The night Mr. Sturgess opened his dance hall, Mr. Noyce gave a free dance and lunch in the old hall. There was nobody at the new hall. And it wasn't long before

Mr. Noyce bought the new hall and moved his store and Post Office over there.

It was at this new hall that my mother taught us kids all the new dances: waltz, two-step, schottische, mazurka, polka and quadrille, also the five step and the half step. There was no such thing as a one step or any kind of ragtime dances at that time. Later on when the newer dances started to get popular, you got kicked off the floor if you tried to dance them. There was a glide, which some added to their waltzes, but you had to do it with your partner at your side not directly in front of you or, again, you would be politely told not to try it again.

### **Kid Stuff**

While living there on Piney, Granddad always kept a muzzle loading shotgun under his bed. He always said it was a protection against varmints and chicken hawks, but it wasn't too long after the cattle war, so the shotgun just might have been for some other kind of varmints—such as cattlemen. Well, my father and mother, my uncle and aunt, and my grandmother all went to a dance at Kearney one night and left Granddad home with the six of us kids. We got to playing hide and seek in the house as it was too cold out of doors. My brother Kenneth had got on top of the bed, which hid the shotgun, and pulled the covers over him back against the wall. My older cousin Arty Senff thought Kenneth was under the bed so he threw an old spool under the bed to bring Kenneth out. And it sure did bring him out—as the spool somehow set off the shotgun with a tremendous roar and sparks. Kenneth was off the bed before the sparks came back down. The shotgun blast blew a hole through the wall and hit a saddle lying outside. Granddad dropped his newspaper and came running to see how many were killed, and I have always thought he looked sort of disappointed that any of us were still alive. He dropped his pipe and his glasses on the way into the bedroom and didn't say much as he couldn't seem to get his breath. But he had plenty to say when our folks got back from the dance, and I don't remember that he ever took care of us kids again.

We kids and all the kids up and down the creek used to go across Piney from where we lived and hunt beads at the Indian graves situated on a high hill and underneath a hollowed out sand rock.(Kids would string them together.) I believe every kid on the creek had from one to three or four

[yards] of the beads they had found in that spot. I often wonder if there are still some beads there.

It was during these years living on Granddad's place that I started to learn to ride horseback. The folks had an old work mare that I could get on when she was wearing her harness by climbing up her front leg, getting hold of the hame tug, then the back band and so on up on her back. The only place I had any luck of riding her though was from the house to the barn. I would get off and lead her to the house then get back on and ride her to the barn. But the experience was great, so it wasn't long before I was riding.

### **Telephones**

It was about this time or before that they got together and erected a community telephone line down Piney. Each person had a certain ring so you could call anyone you wanted to talk to. A person called by operating a crank on the side of his phone.<sup>1</sup> The rings were one short, one long and another short, three longs, or two shorts and a long, etc. One real extra long ring meant for everyone to get on the line for some important thing or to invite everyone to a sewing bee or house party. It really wasn't necessary though to have the long ring because it got so that every time the phone rang, everyone on the line would listen in—*rubbering* as they called it. One time Granddad rang for Mr. David Noyce, who ran the Kearney Post office and store, and when he answered Granddad told him, "Gee, you're slow. Your neighbors all beat you to the telephone."

After some years the phone line got broken down in places and people were too busy to repair it. Some of the wire got mislaid, so they would find one end loose and fasten it to the top wire of the lane fence, and then go find the other loose end and fasten it also to the top wire of the fence. It got to where there were so many places tied to the fence, you could hardly hear anything on it. There was a saying that if you couldn't get the party you were ringing for, you would think another cow jumped the fence and broken the wire and the connection.

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<sup>1</sup>Note about party lines: A caller could hear a "click" when each neighbor picked up the phone; with each listener, the volume decreased until voices were barely audible and the speaker had to shout to be heard.

## **Moving to Shell Creek**

We next moved to Shell Creek. Dad rented the Dawson ranch and in 1905 I got my first year of school by walking a mile or two to the Kearney school. A Miss Buell was our teacher.

Dad raised grain and hay on that place and in the fall Mr. Bill Affeldt did our threshing with a horsepower thresher. I believe it took eight horses on the power part of it to do the job. There was no bundle cutter so a man had to stand by the feeder and cut the bundles with a knife. Also there was no blower for the straw coming out of the machine so a man had to be there with a pitchfork to throw the straw away from the rear of it. A man sat on a seat in the middle of the *windless*<sup>2</sup> to keep the eight horses going. They did at that time have a binder to cut the grain with.

In the years of 1904, '05, and '06, Dad and Granddad got some modern machinery, a mower to cut hay, a binder to cut and tie the bundles of grain, and also a rake to rake the hay. The first hay rake I remember seeing was made entirely out of wood. Talk about modern inventions.

## **School – The Kearney School**

The old Kearney school located near the C. J. Hepp ranch was a good sized school for those days. There were the Hepps, Geiers, Affeldts, Greubs, Senffs, Kilkennys and others which made up a good school. A Miss Buell was the teacher in 1905 when my brother Kenneth and I started there. I don't remember any bad kids attending the school; of course, some of them liked to have a little fun. For instance, Arty Senff brought some sheep ticks with him to school and put them on the other kids—which I don't think they really enjoyed. One day he was letting the kids take turns riding his horse around the school yard. When it came one of the Geier girls' turn, he loosened the cinch, and when she tried to mount, the saddle went under the horse's belly. Some of the boys, one afternoon when school was out, fastened a singletree across the door so the teacher had to crawl out of a window.

There was a family that lived near Kearney who had a son, John, that didn't get along at school very well. He was always in trouble with the teacher, so he was expelled from the Kearney school. They were a German

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<sup>2</sup>Windlass (correct spelling)—This is a hauling or lifting machine made up of a cylinder or drum and wound with rope and which is turned with a crank.



Threshing machine and tractor. This equipment is newer and more modern. It didn't require as many men to operate. The tractor was used to pull the threshing machine to the fields and provided power to the conveyor belt; the thresher had a blower to blow the straw off the grain. (Circa 1910) From files of Fred K. Gray



Threshing Machine and crew on Piney Creek. Circa 1908. According to Claude Gray, Bill Affeldt and Ransom Babcock were two of several machine owners that did contract threshing in the Piney Creek Valley. The large crew required was a cooperative effort composed of all farm owners who followed the thrasher from ranch to ranch till all harvesting was completed. The bundle wagons were used to haul the bundles of unthreshed grain to the machine, which separated the grain from the stalk. The stalk (or chaff) was then stacked. The men standing at the top right by the stack of straw would have tossed the straw into the pile from the conveyor belt that is between them. From files of Fred K. Gray

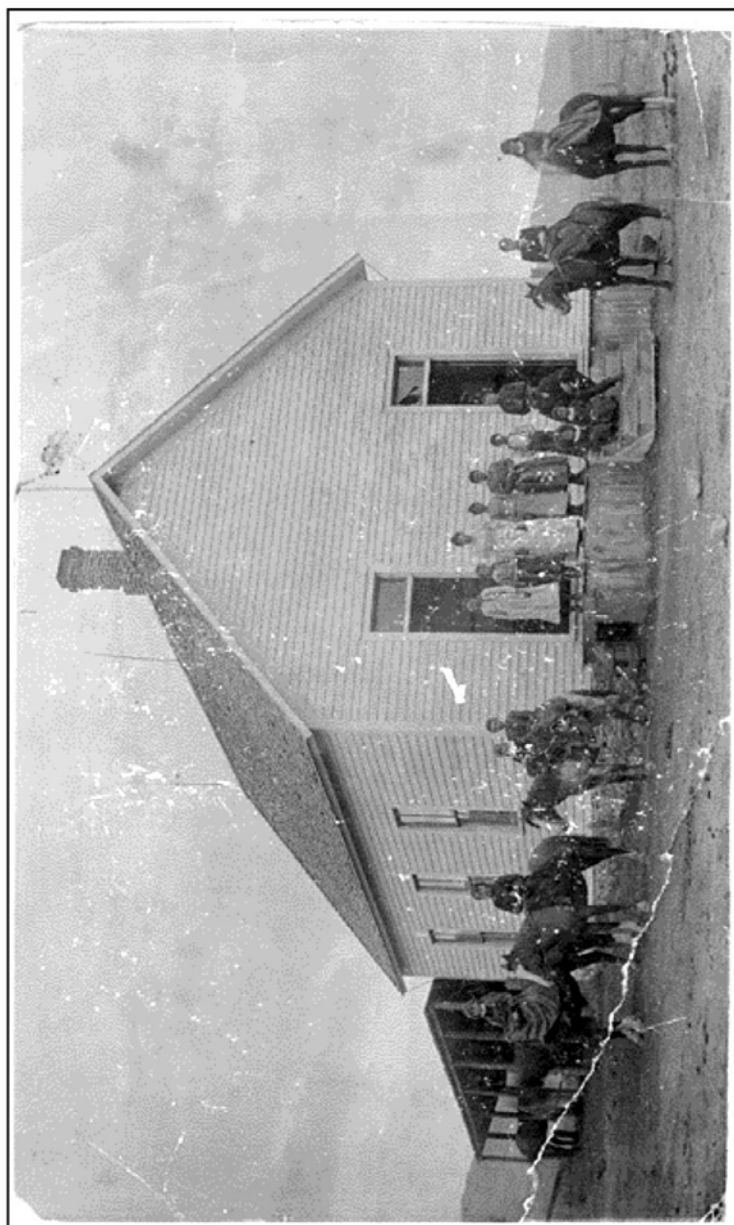
family. Granddad decided to have some fun with the ladies that lived near the Hamilton school, and with his broken Dutch lingo, he would ask each one of them if his son John could come and stay at their house and go to the Hamilton school. Of course, they wanted to be nice to him and they generally gave the excuse that they would have to wait until their husband came home to talk it over. After several calls to each one of them trying to get an answer, the ladies finally got wise and did they ever give Granddad the devil. It was the source of conversation up and down the creek for some time.

### **Family Responsibilities**

While Mr. Noyce was still at the old hall and before I was school age, my mother sent me on horseback from our place on Shell Creek with a note telling Dave what she had sent me for. He put the order in a flour sack and tied it on the back of my saddle and threw me on the horse and started me for home. I mean—he really threw me—as I nearly went clear over the horse. There were no gates on the way back home, so no reason for me to get off the horse as I couldn't have got back on.

Dad and Mother had to go to Sheridan while we were on Shell Creek and they took Harold with them and left Kenneth and me at home. Since they went in one day and back the next, we were only home alone one night and two days. We knew when to expect them back, so we had supper ready for them when they got home. I can imagine what a supper it was because we didn't know much about cooking. I remember we fried potatoes and eggs. They ate it and bragged about how good it was—though I'll bet they got something else to eat after we had gone to bed.

Piney Creek was flooding one year. In fact, it was nearly running over the bridge at Kearney. A string team with eight horses and two wagons traveling from Sheridan to Buffalo was wanting to cross the bridge, but the driver was afraid he had too much load for the bridge to carry. So he pulled his trail wagon, which was lighter, with a cable stretched across the bridge, and the bridge held all right. He then hitched his horses directly to the heavier wagon and started to cross. The bridge went out with the outfit on it and he lost everything but one horse—which happened to break his hamstring and was able to swim out. The driver's load was groceries so the farmers down the creek got a lot of free groceries. My uncle Art Senff got a twenty pound can of lard about four miles down the creek at his place.



The Kearney School. Alice Harrington Gray went to school at this school until she was about 13 or 14, when her parents left to go to California. The faces are indistinct but she is said to be in this picture. (Circa late 1880s) Courtesy of Johnson County Library.



### **Mother Carries the Mail**

The next year we moved back down Piney (I believe it was 1906) to the upper Blanche Williams' ranch just below the Hamilton Post Office. While living there the winter of 1906 and 1907, Mother got the job of carrying the daily mail by horseback from Kearney to Ulm along the railroad. We lived fifteen miles from the post office and fifteen miles the opposite way to the railroad station. Six days per week, she never missed a trip even in below zero weather. She would go from home to Kearney and back before noon, get our dinners, and go to Ulm and back in the afternoon. The round trip was in the neighborhood of forty to sixty miles per day. She had several horses but one she called Teddy was her choice and tough enough to stand the grind so she didn't have to ride any of the others very often.

Dad took care of the ranch and sheep and kept her horses shod with *neverslip* shoes so they could stand up on the icy trails. The next winter, after she quit carrying the mail, was a bad winter and the only way to go anyplace was on sled or horseback

I will try to name the people on the mail route at that time. First, from the old Kearney Hall was the George Geiers next to Christ (pronounced "Krist") Hepps, the Jake Greubs, Killkennys, Sid Sturgess near Lake Desmet, A. H. Senff (my uncle), Harry Senff, A. W. Long (who were known as Uncle and Auntie Long to everyone), Silas Harrington, the Culvers, the Collins, Hamilton P.O., Fred Grays, the upper Al William's place, the Hi Sturdevants, Blanche Williams, Al Williams, Dave and Abner Jackins and, below the Jackins, was the Todds. I think the mail route turned off before the Todd ranch and went to Ulm.

### **School on Piney Creek (the Hamilton School)**

In our one room school there were fifteen or twenty kids going there in all grades from first to eight with only one teacher. She came to school on horseback where she boarded on one of the ranches. We walked a mile or so down Piney to the Hamilton school, which still stands. The seats in that school were double seats so two kids sat together. It was sort of a problem for the teacher, a Miss Pointer, to keep the kids from whispering. Although Lester Sturdevant and Warren Jackins sat across the aisle from each other, they insisted in whispering to each other across the aisle. The teacher had told them several times to quit it, but they kept on. She finally grabbed a stick of wood out of the kindling box and tried to whip them with it. They



**Alice Harrington Gray - and Teddy, her favorite horse. (Circa 1906) From files of Fred K. Gray**

were pretty big boys and decided to not take a licking—so the fight was on. The boys didn't try to hurt the teacher but just were trying to keep her from hurting them. They took the stick away from her and then she would pull their noses and slap them and everything she could think of for punishment. They would sit down in a seat and she would try to shake them loose; up would come the seat until nearly all the seats were pulled loose from the floor. The rest of us kids just backed up against the wall and watched the show. Well, they finally got the fight settled, and we all got busy and fastened the seats back where they belonged and picked up the scattered papers and books.

The bigger kids got to molesting the smaller kids, so Miss Pointer decided at recess to keep the smaller kids in and let the bigger ones out, then call them in, and let the little kids go out for recess. There was one boy, Walter Sturdevant, who was middle sized; the teacher told him to stay and go with the little kids. Well, he thought he was big enough to go with the others. So he did. The teacher was going to let him get away with it until he, for spite, climbed up on the manure pile at the barn facing the school and made a show of himself where we all could see. And did the teacher go after him. His shoe laces were never tied and there was quite a lot of snow on the ground; so after Miss Pointer half dragged, pushed and carried him into the schoolhouse, he was more like a drowned rat with his wet socks and clothes. The teacher sat him up by the old wood heater and built up a good fire to dry him out. He stayed in and went out with the little kids after that.

The next year we moved on down the creek to one of the Al Williams' ranches, which was a lot closer to the school. Some family that lived up the creek had bought a pony for their kids to ride to school but he was kid-spoiled so they had a bad time trying to get to school. Sometimes they would get part way to school on the pony and he would turn around and take them back home. They soon gave it up using him and they sold him to my dad. He thought us boys could handle him. Well, the first morning my brother Kenneth and I got on him and tried to go to school, but we couldn't get him away from the barn. Until Dad got a long switch. Around and around Dad went. He chased us and the horse nearly to school, but after that we got along O.K.

That was a hard winter and the only way you could travel was with a sled or on horseback. The man Al Williams had hired quit but had no way

of getting into Sheridan. So he called on the phone and made arrangements to be at our place early in the morning to ride in the sled with Dad to Sheridan. Dad waited for some time in the morning. He finally decided that guy had changed his mind so he left with his sled. After an hour or so the guy showed up and was rather mad that he had been left, so he told Mother he would take a saddle horse and catch up with Dad. Mother told him he was not going to take any horse from there. He said, "Oh, yes, I am," and went to the barn and saddled up Mother's horse, Teddy. When he came leading the horse out of the barn, Mother was standing on the porch with the thirty-thirty rifle and told him, "You better put that horse back where you got him." The man promptly obeyed and left on foot. I have often thought it would have been more fun if Mother could have taken the chance and let the guy get on the horse as Teddy was strictly a one-woman horse. I think the horse would have taken care of the situation himself.

### **Critters**

The coyotes were so thick when we were on the Williams' place that you could look out and see from one to a dozen almost any time. I remember one getting into the sheep corral and getting a lamb. The herder was in the corral, running after the coyote to try to keep him from getting the lamb.

One time we were up on the sheep shed doing some repair. Across the creek was a hill and a coyote was sitting on the hill howling to his heart's content. Dad decided to try and shoot the coyote, so he got down and went to the house to get a rifle. When he was at the house, he was out of sight of the coyote. Just as Dad started across the creek on the ice, the coyote made up his mind to come closer to the house. The opposite creek bank was sort of a high bank with willows growing on it, and as Dad was getting through the willows, the coyote met him face to face. I really don't know who was the most surprised—Dad or the coyote. But by the time Dad got untangled from the willows, the coyote was quite a distance away and running like the devil so Dad missed him. It was an interesting show from where we were on the shed roof since we could see both the hunter and the hunted. It was amusing.

Dad had quite a bunch of buck sheep running loose on the ranch in the winter. The granary had some cracks in it where the barley was leaking out, and the bucks were eating too much of it. We kids had the job of keeping

them away from the granary. We would set Dad's sheep dog Toots on them. It worked for a while, but the bucks soon learned that the sheep dog wouldn't hurt them; so when the dog went after them, they would pay no attention at all. We had a small rat terrier, and finally he got to helping us with the bucks. He would run out after them, run underneath them, get a mouth full of wool and hang on, and drag. It wasn't long before all we had to do was call the dog and the bucks would leave.

We had two horses that time that were unusual because they were choicie (choosy) about who used them. One of them was Teddy, which as I have said before, was a one woman horse. Dad was an expert horse trainer and had trained Teddy for Mother, but after Mother had got to using him, he just didn't take to Dad riding him. He wouldn't buck but just do everything wrong that he could. Dad rode him and made him do his bidding, but the horse didn't enjoy doing right with Dad on him as he did when Mother rode him. And he was just too mean for us kids to think of riding him. The other one was a grey work mare. We didn't ride her—only with the harness on to and from the field. She seemed to enjoy all three of us boys riding her at once, but when Dad had to ride her from the field she would really act up with him.

### **Freight Teams & Wagons**

In those years there were a lot of freight strings, or string teams, as some called them. There were from two horses and one wagon to twenty-four horses and three wagons. Now, as far as I remember, there were only three teams in a freight outfit that had names: of course, the team in the extreme lead were the *leaders*, or sometimes called the *pointers*<sup>3</sup>; next, were the *swing teams*<sup>4</sup> which were in front of the wheelers; then, the *wheelers*<sup>5</sup>, which were hitched to the wagon tongue. Some of them were driven with two lines and some with one line, which was called a *jerk line*<sup>6</sup>. The *wheel team* wore a harness with a *breeching*<sup>7</sup> which, with the use of a pole strap going between their front legs, attached to the neck yoke; it helped to hold

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<sup>3</sup>Pointers—the team at the front that steered the wagon on long turns.

<sup>4</sup>Swing teams—the team that allowed a wagon to make a sharp turn that the pointers could not manage.

<sup>5</sup>Wheelers—team named such because it was closest to the wheels of the wagons; the “team skinner” rode one of the wheelers.

<sup>6</sup>Jerk line—line used by the team skinner to direct the pointers.

<sup>7</sup>Breeching—a strap that passes behind the horse's or mule's haunches.

the wagons from going back downhill. The horse worked on the right hand side was called the far horse or the *off horse* while the one on the left was the *near* horse. The skinner had a saddle on the *near* horse where he rode and operated the string of horses. He had a rope attached to the brake of the lead wagon which he operated from his position on the wheel horse. When the skinner came to a hill too steep for the brake on the lead wagon to hold, he would stop on top of the hill and walk back and set the brakes on the trail wagons before starting down the hill. The rest of the horses, from the wheelers to and including the leaders, wore only a collar, *hames*<sup>8</sup>, back and belly bands, and *tugs*<sup>9</sup>. The leaders wore bridles. The left hand leader was the one trained to the jerk line and “gee” and “haw.”

To train a lead horse to a jerk line, the line was fastened to the left side of the bit on the near, or left, lead horse and then run through the hame rings on the following horse's back to the left hand wheel horse, or *near* horse—as it was called, which the skinner rode with a saddle. Then there was a short rope or strap fastened to the right ring of the said lead horse's bit going back to the left-hand breast strap ring. A steady pull on the jerk line would turn the leader to the left. To turn him to the right, a jerk on the jerk line would cause the horse to throw up his head, tightening the short rope or strap, which would turn him to the right. The main object of the jerk line was to teach the horse *gee* (right) and *haw* (left); so when the driver would *pull* on the jerk line, he would yell “haw” and when he *jerked* on it he would yell “gee.” Before very long, the horse would respond to “gee” and “haw” without the use of the jerk line. It was surprising how soon a good, smart horse would pull out far enough on a corner or bend in the road so that the wagon always stayed in the road. The off horse, or the right hand leader, was fastened from his bridle bit with what was called a *jockey stick*<sup>10</sup> to the near horse's breast strap ring, so when the skinner turned the left leader, the right leader had to go the same way.

When one of the horses in any one of the two-horse teams worked too far ahead of his mate, there was a strap known as a *buckstrap*. This was fastened from the fast horse's *check rein*<sup>11</sup> back to the slow horse's *singletree*<sup>12</sup> in order to hold the fast horse even with the slow one.

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<sup>8</sup>Hames—curved pieces of harness that fit over the neck of the draft animal.

<sup>9</sup>Tugs—part of the harness used to pull the load.

<sup>10</sup>Jockey stick—This piece “pushed him to the right or pulled him to the left.”

<sup>11</sup>Check rein—a rein that “checked” or slowed the animal.



**Hitch Freight Wagon. These teams are pulling three freight wagons as well as a sheep wagon. (Date Unknown). (Courtesy of Jim Gatchell Museum)**



**Detail of left side of photo above**



**Detail of right side of top photo**

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<sup>12</sup> Singletree—the horizontal bar to which the traces are attached and that is also attached to the wagon.

The short chains on the ends of the tugs were known as butt chains. A *polestrap* was the heavy strap passing between the wheel horses' front legs back to the quarter straps which were fastened to the breeching (leather straps at the butt of the horse), thus, the wheel horses could hold the wagons back going downhill.

The leaders and all the other teams, except the wheelers, wore harnesses without a breeching. The eveners for all the horses, except the wheelers, were called *spreadbars* or *spreaders*. The wheel horses' tugs were hitched to a *doubletree*<sup>13</sup> on the tongue of the lead wagon. The rest of the horses were hitched to spreaders, which were fastened to the lead chain to pull the wagons.

The swing team was the team hitched directly to the end of the wagon tongue. They were usually not tied in by their heads, giving them freedom so as they could jump the chain either way in order to pull the wagon out around curves and corners where it was impossible for the leaders to get out far enough to keep the wagons from cutting a corner too short.

Sometimes when the trains got into rough country, they would find a crook in the road so short as to not be able to get around it; so then they would have to uncouple the trail wagons and take them around separately.

Some freighters dragged a wooden block with a short chain just behind the rear wheels of the wagons so it would keep the wagons from coasting back downhill while they rested their horses.

When using two or three wagons, there was a brake on each wagon, but the skinner could not operate the brakes on the rear wagons from his saddle on the left wheel horse. As a result, when coming to a hill, he would have to stop and walk back to the rear wagons, and set the brakes. Then mounting back on his wheel horse, he would apply the front wagon brake after starting on down the hill. If the hill was not too steep, he could, of course, hold the wagons with the lead wagon brake. He had to be sure, because if the wagons got to rolling too fast, it really caused a mix-up.

One time a freighter with quite a long team and three wagons was coming down Tank Hill, which is just south of Rothwell Mansion<sup>14</sup> in Buffalo. He thought the front wagon brake was enough to hold the whole outfit. He didn't bother to stop and apply the rear wagon brakes; the wagons

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<sup>13</sup>Doubletree—a crossbar on the wagon to which two singletrees would be attached, one on either side; to be used with a team of horses.

<sup>14</sup>The big brick mansion is still present in 2012 on South Main Street.



got to rolling too fast and ran over some of the lead chains. The result was the horses turned short into Main Street and upset the wagons—all tangled up in horses, lead bars and chains. It took the skinner quite some time to untangle the mess.

If a hill was exceptionally steep, a driver used a *rough lock*, which was a chain on each of the wagons. He could tie it to the rear wheels and make the wheels slide down the hills (creating a drag on the wheels). Sometimes when coming down the mountains, they would cut a big pine tree and drag it top first behind the wagons to hold them back. There was also a wooden block they dragged behind the rear wheels so as to hold the wagons from going back downhill while the horses were resting. Going uphill, they had to stop often to rest the horses.

Some of the better-to-do freighters had a two-wheeled sheep wagon coupled in back of their rear wagon where they could cook and eat in comfort. They had a name for this thing: It was called a *cooster*. Most of the old freighters, though, just rolled their bed on the ground or under a wagon if it was raining. Some of them had a *lazyboard*, which stuck out on the left side of the lead wagon between the front and rear wheels. They walked beside their wagon a lot, and the lazyboard was handy to ride on when they didn't need to be on their horse.

Some freighters had a set of bells on the leaders' hames. There were five bells in a frame fastened high over the hames. I think the bells originated in the timber country so the freighters could hear each other coming so as to stop in a wide enough place to get past each other. The only chance they had of backing up a freight string was to hitch some of their horses on the rear end and pull it back.

I have read where someone said that the skinner rode the right hand wheel horse, but that is not so. One of the reasons was you always mounted a horse on the left side; another reason was the skinner's being on the left horse, his lines were on his right.

I'm sure if Baldy Faye, Slippery Jim, Clifford Clark or any of those old time skimmers would hear that someone said they mounted a horse on the right side and rode the right wheel horse, they would kick what was left of the slats out of the tops of their coffins.

When a green, or untrained, bronc was put in a freight string, the skimmers just harnessed him, hitched his tugs to the singletree, and tied him with a strong rope from his halter to the singletree ahead of him. He either had to go along as he should or just lay down and drag. Usually, after a few



**Buffalo Water Tower located on the south end of Main Street. This was erected on the hill just south of where the brick mansion constructed by the Rothwells is now. (Circa 1890s) Photo courtesy of the Johnson County Library.**

jumps over the lead chain and getting some hide torn off his legs, he would go along like he should.

When they stopped at night, the drivers didn't unhitch; they just took the harness off the horses and left the harness hooked up to the double tree and spread bars and then turned them out to graze.<sup>15</sup> Next morning they put the nose bags on the horses with the feed in the bags and harnessed the horses in their places while they were eating. When the horses were finished eating their oats, the driver would take off the feed bags and put on the bridles, and they were all ready to go. Usually the leaders were the only ones to wear bridles. If the weather was wet, the drivers usually put the horse collars somewhere in the dry, as a wet collar pad would cause a horse to get a sore neck.

### **Wagon Parts**

I will try and name some of the parts of the wagon as I remember them. Beginning at the front of the wagon there was the *neckyoke*, which was fastened to the wheel horses' collar with a breast strap to hold up the *tongue* and to guide the wagon, also to hold it back. The tongue was fastened to the front *hounds*<sup>16</sup> with what was called the *queen rod*. The axles were made of wood with an iron covering on each one, called a *skein*. The wooden wheels had a metal box in them to fit over the skein for the wheels to turn on. The *bolsters* (front and rear) sat on the axles for the wagon box to ride in. The front bolster was swiveled in the middle to allow the wagon to turn. This bolster was held in place by a *king pin*, which also went through the end of the *reach* to pull the rear wheels.

The brake was a wooden beam suspended in front of the rear wheels so as the brake lever pulled it in contact with the rear wheels to slow the wagon down on down grades. The wooden-spoked wheels had a wooden *felloe* on the end of the spokes with an iron tire around the outside for the wheels to run on.

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<sup>15</sup>Writer's explanation: there was a pair of double trees on the tongue of the lead wagon which the wheelers were hitched to and the rest of the horses were hitched to spread bars, or *spreaders*, which were fastened to the lead chain to pull the wagons.

<sup>16</sup>Hounds—a fixed part of the running gear of the wagon, found both at the front and rear of the wagon. They provided stability like the chassis of a car. The forked portion of the tongue of a wagon attached to the front set of hounds so that the wagon wheels could follow the horses.



**Notice how Mrs. Hesse sits on the tongue of the wagon. (Courtesy Hesse family. (Date unknown.)**



**Many families lived nearly year round in sheep wagons. (Courtesy Jim Gatchell Museum. Date unknown.)**



**(TOP & BOTTOM)** Storage space and utility—these were the hallmarks of sheep wagons. —Restored sheep wagon belonging to Falxa family. From files of Fred K. Gray – 2013 – Joe Larralde, restorer.



A *stay chain* was a piece of chain hooked to each end of the wheelers' doubletree back to the front axle of the wagon, so when the going got too tough, if one horse out-pulled the other, he could help that much more to get out of a tough place. A *butt chain* was a short piece of chain used to add on the length of the tugs to keep the singletree from hitting the horses' rear legs. The pin that was put through the hammer strap into the tongue to hold the wheel horses' doubletree was called a *wagon hammer*. Why it was called this, I don't know. A freight wagon had a wrench on the end to be used in taking off the wheels to grease them, so I never could understand why it wasn't called a wagon wrench, instead of wagon hammer.

### Sheep Wagons

Maybe it would be interesting to know what a sheep wagon was like. It was built on a regular wagon. The wagon box was ten feet long and about three feet wide and two feet deep. They put *overjets*<sup>17</sup> on the wagon box, and across the rear end of the box was a bed to sleep two persons. The table was made to slide under the bed in grooves so it was out of the way except when needed to eat on. There was a four lid wood stove with oven in the front end. A small cupboard was built on the overjet next to the stove and there was room for some wood between the stove and the front end boards. The top cover was canvas lined with woolen blankets stretched over wagon bows and ribs. On each side of the wagon box underneath the overjets were storage boxes with lids that could open up. With the lids down, this was where you sat on each side of the table. Also there were storage drawers that slid under each end of the bed on top of the overjets. In cold weather, the sheep wagon was fairly comfortable for two people as the little stove really heated it up. Summer time—it got a bit warm in there when you had to cook a meal.

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<sup>17</sup>Overjets—part of the sheepwagon that extended over the tops of the wagon wheels; bench storage areas were created inside.

## PINEY CREEK “CHARACTERS” & THEIR STORIES

### **Juvy**

There was an old fellow in that community that was a *grub-line rider*.<sup>18</sup> He was too old to work and had nothing for support and drove an old grey mare hitched to a single buggy. He would drive into your place, unhitch his old mare, put her in your barn, and feed her; then he'd go to the house and wait for a meal. One day Dad and all of us had been away from home helping the neighbors, and on coming home we found he had moved in. Dad noticed his grain stacks were torn up and they were inside of a fence. He asked Juvy what had happened but Juvy didn't know. The next day we were going back to the same place, leaving Juvy to take care of himself at our house. We left in the wagon and we were out of sight of the house for a bit, but the road later came back where we could see the grain stacks. Lo and behold! Juvy was just putting his old mare in the grain stack yard. Dad, of course, turned the team around and we went back home. On arriving, Dad and Juvy had a very heated conversation. When we returned home that evening, Juvy was gone.

We didn't see him again until years later after we had moved to Sheridan. He had been put in the poorhouse (county welfare), which was across the street from where we lived. (That's the nearest we ever got to the poorhouse.) He had told the people who looked after him that if anything ever happened to him that my mother would take care of him. Then he took some poison. They came after Mother to look after his remains, which she did as best as she could.

### **Hi Sturdevant**

Just a note about Mr. Hi Sturdevant who lived a ways down the creek. When in town he usually liked to visit the saloons, so when he got home, he was sometimes quite happy. On one such occasion, Grandmother and Mother and I were coming up from down the creek in a sled and met him in his buggy coming from Sheridan. Of course, Mother stopped the team to pass the time of day with him and he told us he had gone to Sheridan to see a doctor because of something wrong with his stomach. He said the doctor

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<sup>18</sup>Grub-line rider—commonly known as a “drifter” practiced by broke and unemployed cowboys, frequently in the winter time, drifting from one ranch to another for food and housing.

had told him to be sure and get a half pint of whiskey and drink it. He said, “You know what? I drove out of Sheridan and forgot it.”



**Wildcat Sam, with tame coyote/wolf. (Courtesy Gatchell Museum. Date Unknown.)**

### **Wild Cat Sam**

It was while we lived on the Al Williams' place on Piney that we got well acquainted with Wild Cat Sam (Sam Abernathy). He was a trapper by trade and the biggest liar in the whole world. It is said he got his name when he had a trapper cabin in the Big Horns. He had a leg of meat for his visitors to cut steaks off. Everyone

thought it was venison—it turned out to be a wildcat.

There were lots of beaver on the Williams ranch and Sam made Dad a good deal to trap them for half of the pelts. Well, Sam got his half but when a beaver came along that was to be Dad's, he just wouldn't get in a trap. Sam would tell Dad he did not catch any beaver, but us kids spent a lot of time on the creek skating and saw them in his traps.

After Sam got too old to trap, he spent his time sitting around Buffalo telling his big stories to anyone that would listen. One of his stories was when one day he was out with his old slow-shooting muzzle loader. A deer walked up at a certain point. He fired at the animal and missed. Later another deer walked up in the same place, and he fired at *him* and the deer ran away unhurt. The deer kept coming up in the same place until he had fired at ten of them. They all ran off unhurt. He sat there for a time wondering what was the matter, when an elk stepped up in the same place and fell dead. Then the second elk did the same as the first and so on until ten elk had stepped up in the same spot and fell dead. The bullets he had fired at the deer had just started getting there.

### **Clyde Lawyer**

I think it was in the year of 1906 that I first remember knowing Clyde Lawyer. He was a professional horse breaker. If you had a horse for him to



break, he would come to your place and take his saddle off the horse he would be riding and saddle up the bronc and leave. Sometimes he wouldn't be going in the direction he wanted to, but at least he would be going. He would ride your horse until he got to some other ranch where he would leave your horse and take off on another bronc belonging to the ranch where he had left your horse. It might be months later when he would get the horses all back where they belonged, but when he did they would be gentle and trained.

He charged five dollars for each horse he broke. He didn't break work horses just saddle horses. Oh, yes, he always seemed to manage to arrive at meal time and to get to a place where there were extra beds.

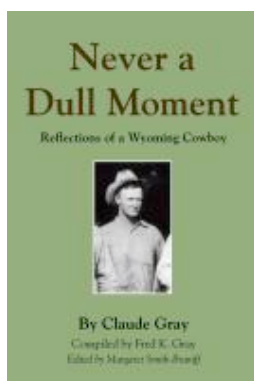
In later years he lived in Buffalo and did nothing but buy and sell and break horses. He got to where he sold them so fast that he didn't get them very well broken. Nearly every horse he sold would buck you off unless you were a very good rider. Also, at that time, there was some mysterious night riding going on. The 28 Ranch lost a horse, and somehow Clyde knew where to go to get him back. Of course, *he* did not do *all* the riding at night that was being done around Buffalo at that time.

### **Jake Greub**

Speaking of the Jake Greub family, Mr. Greub was supposed to have shot himself. It was sort of an odd way the shooting happened. Mr. Greub got out of bed during the night and went to the chicken house where they found him dead. It was said he hooked the trigger of the rifle on a nail in the chicken roost to pull the trigger. That might work for one shot but sort of unusual for the second one.

I was a small boy when it happened. I went to the funeral and there were definitely two bullet holes in Jake's head. I have always thought that a man would have to really hate himself that could shoot himself twice in the head. The story is that he was so bad in debt but had quite a large life insurance that he did it so the family could get the insurance. My dad always said that Art Senff was either the cause of Jake being in debt or else that he did the shooting.

There were eight children in the family and they all lived on the old place until they were nearly all gone. The three boys in the family kept the outfit going until they passed away. Mrs. Lizzy Greub, Jake's wife, could swear like a lumber jack and she usually did.



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