



PRAIRIE WILDLIFE. There were quite a few prairie chickens in the Ranch pasture. One day Ralph and I were out riding and saw a flock of them doing the prairie chicken dance. They were going around in a circle with their wings spread out until they touched the ground. It was interesting to watch them. We had seen the worn grass circle before and wondered what had caused it.

Some small burrowing or ground owls took over two coyote dens in the pasture. We often saw them sitting on a mound like gophers, watching like sentries. If we got too close they would go down the hole fast. These owls are not common around here.

Winter riding was generally cold but I enjoyed riding in the summertime. It was usually quiet except for the sounds of nature. There were two big eagles that made their home in the hills. Once we saw one hanging by it's claws, head down from the top strand of a fence. We thought it was dead and rode close, but it dropped to the ground, started to run and took off. It looked like it had fallen off the post and just hung there, too hot to move.

One day five of us guys dug out a coyote den. We dug until we had enough of that work and decided one of us should go in after the pups. I was elected and with gloves

on and two guys holding me by my ankles, I went down head first into the den. I kept one arm up in front to protect my face, and groping around in the dark I caught five coyote pups. One by one I passed them back to one of the men. They were snapping and struggling but I never got bit. We put them in an old bin and fed them live gophers and old hens about ready to die. They would never eat while we were around. We tried to tame them but they were very wild and would bite right through our gloves. Ralph finally traded them off for a pair of chaps and gave the four of us in on it, four dollars each for our equity. It was about time we got rid of them, as it smelled like a zoo around there.

TIME OUT. I worked at the Ranch in the summer of 1930 and '31. In the winter of 1931 I went to Calgary and joined the old Y.M.C.A. which was on 9th Avenue, east of the present Calgary Tower. I spent a lot of time there in the boxing class. The instructor was Alex Wilson, a well-known former boxer. He entered me in the Provincial Amateur Boxing Championships to be held in Calgary in March. He thought I had a very good chance, but two or three weeks before they were to take place I came down with a terrible headache. The doctor advised me to quit boxing for a time at least. They wouldn't let me participate so I took in the fights as a spectator. There were three medals - gold, silver and bronze - one for each division. I was a lightweight of 136 pounds and wanted one of those medals pretty bad. I thought I could have given a good account of myself. The headaches stayed with me for weeks and I didn't box again until 1933.

The next spring I had just enough money left to buy a 1926 Ford Coupe. When I got home I found that the Ranch had been rented to some people by the name of Edwards. I didn't work there that year. I worked for Walter Steiner for two months, driving a tractor.

ARMY WORMS. Late in June of 1932 the country was invaded by army worms. They came in such numbers that you couldn't walk without stepping on some. It was like an army on the march and nothing could stop them. They were green worms less than an inch long and small enough to go through the mesh of a screen door. You couldn't seem to keep them out of the house. Everything green above ground in the garden was eaten as they traveled through. They were so bad that the trains had trouble moving, because the worms on the track made it so slippery that the engine couldn't get traction.

One afternoon in town for entertainment we drew a circle in the dirt, picked out a worm apiece and put them in the center. The first one over the line was the winner. The losers each paid the winning owner a nickel. One day I had a fast one that won three times in a row. That was too much for the losers and someone stepped on it. So ended my winning streak - and my worm!

STAMPEDING AGAIN. As soon as Jack got caught up with the work at home, we went stampeding. In my Ford Coupe we had a tent, a small gas stove, frying pan and enough other things to get by on. One stampede at Ferintosh I remember quite well and still laugh about. The manager had trouble other years with spectators sitting on the corral rails. This year he said he'd stop that and mixed fresh cow manure with oil and brushed it on the rails. When the sun did its' work it was a stinky, slippery mess. It didn't come off clothes and people's hides easily and many men and women had the smell of the barnyard for some time!

The Ponoka Stampede was a two day show and we pitched our tents at the grounds. It rained hard late in the afternoon. Some cowboys from High River that we knew asked if they could sleep and eat in our tent because of the rain. The three had been wild horse race champions for several years running. We didn't have enough food for all of us so they said they would bring some when they came back that night. Sure enough, they got food but it was chickens they had stolen from someone's chicken house. Times were tough but Jack and I stayed away from that kind of thing. We had a good time at the different stampedes, made some money, spent more and made lots of friends. I did quite well in the bareback riding that year.

Jack and I used to buy one 40 ounce bottle of Old Buck Rum and it would last us and our friends all week at the Calgary Stampede. I don't know what the alcohol content was, but I do know it was high. One day in particular brother Jack, cousin Archie Roberts, and I met Ralph Ayling and a friend at the grounds. We all drove down by the Elbow River for a drink of our rum. It was such a strong drink that Archie gagged on it. He was sitting in my car and dribbled rum down the outside of the door. It turned that part of the black car to a dirty grey and it stayed that way. I don't know what it did to our stomachs! Toward the end of the week, as the bottle got used, we would dilute the rum with river water and it would still be as strong as later Government controlled liquor.

A cowboys' ball was held every year in the Palliser Hotel and all contestants were given special invitations. It was the highlight of a very exciting week. We had fun and frolic then, as well as some fights and foot races down the halls. One time two cowboys rode their saddle horses up the stairs from the sidewalk right into the rotunda.

COWBOYS' BALL

*The Stampede was over, now to the dance hall
As the Palliser Hotel was holding a Ball,
Everyone was drinking beer, whiskey, or wine
And those wild cowboys were having a time.*

*Then to a barber for hair cut and shave
Each ready to spend any money he saved.
Next a hot bath and change to clean clothes
For none of them smelled quite like a rose.*

*Now to the dance a big crowd in the room
Where fiddle and banjo played a mean tune.
To a new girl they all took a shine
She danced with each one 'till Auld Lang Syne.*

*Many things happened there that long night
When two of the cowboys got into a fight,
The trouble was over that new girl in blue
Causing one bloody nose, a black eye or two.*

*She promised these two the same dance it seems
It was a waltz called Girl Of My Dreams.
A misunderstanding they found out too late
Both wanted the dance and neither would wait.*

*Such a small thing but they were too proud
To back down now, in front of the crowd,
Though she was wrong and took all the blame
The two had a fight with nothing to gain.*

*But riding for home they left anger behind
As two better friends you never would find.
Back at the ranch they knew that next fall
They both would be there for the Cowboys' Ball.*

