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*Refman for  
Johnson County Wyoming*

Buffalo Wyoming  
July 15, 1939.

Mr Russell Thorp  
Cheyenne Wyoming.

Dear Friend;

After some delay I have finally got the article ready to send to you. I waited awhile to get information, that I wanted correct. I then mailed it to Elmer for his O K, suggestions or corrections, which all took time. I could have had a more sencational article, but this was not my desire. If I am wrong in regard to Devine, and Son being slightly wounded, please draw a line through that part of it. You are probaly familliar with that part of it. I did however receive information that Devine and Son were slightly wounded. There are many things that I could have mentioned, but dont care to put them in print. Sometime I may be able to talk over many things, that I dont care to enclude in this article. I have tryed to confine myself to actual hapenings, as I remember them, without showing partiality. If I can be of service to you any time in the future, dont hesitate to call on me.

Your Friend,

*A. L. Brock*



## REMINISCENCES OF PIONEER EVENTS

Reminiscences of pioneer events are always matters to be approached with some caution, particularly when they relate to such matters as the trouble during and following the Johnson County Cattle War. I have been a resident of Wyoming since 1884 and have observed the transformation which has taken place in the live stock industry during that time. I was not extensively engaged in the cattle business until after those troublesome days were pretty well over. I was however, pretty well informed on all that transpired prior to, during and following this eventful epoch in the history of Johnson County. I am thoroughly convinced that there was plenty of wrong on both sides.

During those early days the big cow outfits did not feel very kindly toward the little settlers who took up their range and water holes regardless of whether they were honest men seeking a home for their families, or undesirable citizens who had been pushed out of other sections of the country. This antipathy toward small individual owners of course more or less united that element and while many of these new settlers were of the best type of people there were among them a number who no doubt ate some of the cattlemen's beef.

To accentuate this the Maverick law was passed. It was a common practice for the cow outfits to pay their riders five dollars per head for the branding of any so-called maverick. A pair of ears was accepted as a tally and represented a calf for which the employee was paid his five dollars. Inasmuch as some of these employees were urged to extend their operations outside the natural range of their employer it became a practice very close to, if not actually dishonest. Those employees who were receiving five dollars for branding a maverick worth

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fifteen or twenty dollars soon decided that it would be more profitable and perhaps little less ethical to lay their own brand on this class of live stock. They were thereupon classed as cattle thieves and were blackballed from working with the big outfits. When their cattle were shipped to market the proceeds were held and in some instances these men were deprived of funds which actually belonged to them, from the sale of stock which were not and never had been mavericks but were acquired by legitimate purchase.

I am informed of one cowboy who was working for an outfit and according to custom was not supposed, of course, to own any cattle. He told me he had about a thousand dollars he would like to invest in mavericks that were offered for sale and so informed his employer. The man he was working for, when told, agreed he would be glad to have him do that but nevertheless if he did he would be told to cut out his string of horses and leave the outfit and be listed, among those blackballed, from then on.

Coincident with the Maverick law came the Roundup law which was passed under the sponsorship of the big outfits. This prohibited the rounding up of cattle on open range between certain dates and further required that all roundups be conducted under a regularly appointed roundup foreman. The state was districted by the State Live Stock Board and operation in the rounding up of cattle was illegal unless done in compliance with the prescribed rules.

All of this naturally intensified the feeling and further divided the large cattlemen and the small cattlemen. Those adventuresome persons who had come up the cattle trail from the South and from other

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lands, many of whom were using names other than those which their parents used in their old homes, and who soon started in the maverick business, became the natural allies of the persecuted small settler whether he was honest or not or whether or not he was in the cattle business.

Many of the big cattle outfits or syndicates were owned by foreign investors who little understood local conditions and they made little effort to placate the feelings of the settlers in any manner. Some of the events which precipitated the climax of this feeling I will mention. James Averill and Ella Watson (Cattle Kate) were hanged by vigilantes. This occurrence took place on the Sweetwater in 1889. Tom Wagner was taken from his ranch near Newcastle, Wyoming, by vigilantes posing as officers, and hanged in June 1891. Orley Jones and John Tisdale were waylaid and shot in the back while traveling on a public highway in Johnson County in the fall of 1891. Ross Gilbertson and Nate Champion were attacked while in a cabin in Johnson County prior to the death of Tisdale and Jones. This cabin was situated near the present Bar C Ranch. I am informed this attack was made by a party of vigilantes under Joe Elliott. George Wellman, a U. S. Deputy Marshall and foreman of the Hoe outfit, was waylaid and killed between the old Douglas Powder River Crossing and Trabing on May 9, 1892. William Dean, an officer, while employed to secure information against the Hole in the Wall gang, was killed near Kaycee, Wyoming, April 13, 1897. The conditions which brought about Dean's activities were really an aftermath of the Cattle War of 1892. It

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was alleged that a gang of cattle thieves in the Hole in the Wall country were engaged in rustling cattle. R. M. Devine as foreman of the C Y outfit agreed to go into this country and round up these cattle and bring them out but was told to stay out or he would be killed. He did enter this country and conducted this roundup in July 1897. He had with him one old reliable cow hand sent as a rep from each of the big outfits in this section of Wyoming. Bob Devine and his outfit met Bob Taylor, Bob Smith and Al Smith, his brother-in-law, near the Hole in the Wall ranch. A fight took place in which Bob Smith was killed and Bob Taylor captured. Al Smith had his six shooter shot out of his hand but made his escape. Devine and one of his sons were wounded in the fight but not seriously. Taylor was taken to Casper, Wyoming, but was later released and was not tried. Devine's outfit in company with some officers again returned to Johnson County and finished the roundup. There was great excitement over the killing of Smith and when Devine returned it was reported among the citizens that Devine and his outfit intended to drive out all of the cattle without permitting the local residents to look through them for any that might be their property. Joe LaFors was one of the officers, and I think a live stock inspector, with Devine on both his first and second trips.

I was in Pennsylvania when Bob Smith was killed but was at home when the second roundup took place. Fearing bloodshed, which seemed entirely unnecessary to me, and as I was a member of the Legislature at that time and felt this added responsibility to the people here, I went down to see Bob Devine and Joe LaFors and was treated very court-

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eously. At that time I called on Devine the local settlers were camped a short distance away in a gulch waiting to see what was going to happen. I was told later that some of the hot heads, among the local settlers, not understanding the purpose of my mission, resented me going to Devine's outfit, but later on after learning and realizing my reason for doing so, were later my friends. Devine told me he wanted to gather his cattle and take them out and in the event of any disputed cattle he was willing to turn them over to Al Sproul, the Johnson County Sheriff, until legal ownership was established. Devine asked me if I had seen the cattle and I told him I had not. He then told me there was something he wanted to show me. While looking through the herd I discovered evidence of brands that had apparently been cut out and the edges had been sewed together with some kind of stitching material in order that they might heal quicker. After Devine and I got done looking through the herd, and they were ready for general working, arrangements were then made and as I remember it, two men from each of the outfits, Devine's outfit and the settlers' party, went into the herd and worked the cattle. I can truthfully say that the tension ran at a very high pitch at that time yet the working of the herd was done quietly and there was no trouble. There was one disputed cow but Sheriff Sproul of Johnson County refused to take charge of her, and as I remember, she was taken along with the Devine outfit by one of the live stock inspectors. The C Y outfit then moved on and finished their work in this part of the country with no further friction.

Following the working of the herd I had quite a talk with local settlers and I believe that my efforts were a large factor in prevent-

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ing serious trouble, not only then, but during the remainder of the time Devine's outfit was in the country.

I have not made mention of the more eventful days during the Johnson County Cattle War, and the killing of Nate Champion and Nick Ray on April 9, 1892, at the point where the Town of Kaycee is now located. Too much has already been written about this tragic event for me to spend time in rehearsing details of events which happened so long ago and many of which have slipped my mind.

The above matters are told as accurately as my memory permits, and I have tried to set forth those events in their true light without regard to partiality in their telling.

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A. L. Brock

Buffalo

Wyo.

(July 15, 1939)