

CHAPTER VI

PORTRAIT OF A BUSY MAN - WILLIAM (BILL) KITTREDGE

As was noted in the beginning of this brochure on the start, development and progress of the cattle industry in Oregon, neither time nor space was available to cover the subject in detail and in doing the assignment to the best of his limited ability for the organization sponsoring it, the wheel is now nearing the end of this particular "cattle trail". With one possible exception, from here on to the end, it will deal with people and events this side of 1890.

From its beginning, the area of Southeastern Oregon has been the greatest of the breeding grounds for the Oregon cattle industry. The Counties of Lake, Klamath, Halhuer and Harney with land areas equal to, or greater than southeastern states seem to have been naturally created and adapted to cattle grazing and it is only natural therefor that they should lead the state in the production of cattle and other livestock.

Of the earlier pioneers of the industry in that section, the names of French, Hanley, Hutton, Shirk, Devine, Neal and Smyth, stand out as milestones along the way of its progress. Farther west and at a later date in Lake and Klamath Counties, the name of Kittredge takes its place along with these earlier stockmen.

Bill Kittredge was, throughout all the eighty-one years of his life, a busy individual. Through that long span of years he knew a great many hardships, and of all of them, probably the greatest for him to endure was inactivity. He was a "builder", not in the sense that he was hell-bent to "store up treasures for himself on earth", but because he couldn't help it. It was a restlessness causing him to apply a constant and lifetime effort in making an acre of grass grow where only a tuft had been growing before. This characteristic of the man has been described more vividly and graphically by his widow, Mrs. Maude Kittredge in one brief sentence than the writer could describe it in a chapter.

WILLIAM "BILL" KITTREDGE

Born June 27, 1876, at Fort Simco, Washington and died in Klamath Falls, Oregon May 19, 1958 at the age of 81, Pioneer Cattlemen.

In 1892, he came to Lake County, Oregon, settled at Silver Lake. For a few years he worked as a buckaroo running cattle and in 1899, started business on his own with 12 head of Black Angus Cattle.

In 1914, he bought his first land at Summer Lake and in 1916 started acquiring land on the Klamath Marsh in Klamath County.

He married Maude A. Long of Corvallis on September 24, 1899 and had three children: Oscar Kittredge, Marie Nicol (deceased 1931) and Viola Gouldin. The son, Oscar Kittredge, Daughter Viola Gouldin and Son-in-law, William Gouldin (deceased 1956), became associated with him in the cattle business about 1931.

His three Grandsons, Jack Nicol, now managing the MC Ranch, William A. Kittredge and Patrick Kittredge also became associated with the business before Mr. Kittredge's death and have helped continue the business founded by their Grandfather.

In 1936, Mr. Kittredge and his family acquired the MC Ranch in Lake County, Oregon and in 1944, acquired a Winter pasture ranch near Corning, California. These holdings, together with the original Summer Lake and Klamath Marsh properties are now operated by the family corporation - Warner Valley Stock Company.

Mr. Kittredge was widely known for his continuing interest in agriculture, reclamation conservation and improved livestock breeding methods.

He served for many years on the Executive Committee of the American National Cattlemen's Association; was Director of the Tri-State Livestock Association for several terms; was one of the original organizers of the Klamath Production Credit Association, serving as President from 1934 until he resigned in 1955. Also served as President of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association from 1950 to 1951.

WILLIAM (BILL) KITTREDGE

In 1899, William Kittredge started a small herd of cattle with his Father, and in conjunction with his Brother, Walter Kittredge, started a partnership buying out the Franklin estate. He kept the ranch until 1907, then sold it and moved back to Corvallis where they bought four or five ranches and a livery stable.

In 1910, with a partner, he rented a ranch on Cherry Creek by John Day between Antelope and Mitchel, Oregon. In 1911, William Kittredge then sold to his partner, got on a horse and went to Silver Lake where he rented the Hayes Brothers cattle ranch. He then took over the ranch on June 11, 1911, and with an inheritance, bought 200 head of cattle from Ira Bradley.

In 1912, he rented the Ball Ranch in Klamath Marsh on the Klamath Indian Reservation and in 1912, rented the Swede Ranch in Silver Lake. He was there two years and in 1914 bought the River Ranch in Summer Lake, which he kept until the State of Oregon condemned it for a bird refuse.

In 1916, he bought his first land in Klamath Marsh and continued buying until 1960.

In 1918, he bought out Gene Childers in Klamath Marsh; in 1927, bought out Kay Losley in Klamath Marsh, then bought George Mayfield's place in Klamath Marsh.

In 1928, he rented the Sod House Ranch on the lower end of the Blitzen River, which was the lower front of Pete French's estate.

In 1929, he bought Carl Dalton's estate in Tule Lake, and in 1936, bought the M C Ranch at Adel, Oregon and sold it in 1968.

From 1911 to 1968, when he owned it, the Hayes Ranch cattle herd grew from 300 head of cattle to 18,037.

WILLIAM (BILL) KITTREDGE

William Kittredge who built a great cattle empire in Oregon on his integrity, his ability to visualize success where others predicted defeat, and on his business acumen, was born of rugged ancestry, the son of a Methodist Minister and educator, Franklin Kittredge, and a Mother who helped his success from the frontier.

His holdings have been listed as the largest individual operation of its kind West of the Rocky Mountains. His ritual for success has been passed on to the second and third generations in his family.

William Kittredge during his entire lifetime was a "doer", and a builder.

His Wife Maude, who survives him, perhaps gave best insight into his character when she said, "All my life with him, if there was a choice between pleasure, comfort and land - we bought land."

Mr. Kittredge was born in Yakima County in Washington State, on June 7, 1876.

His Father had mined gold in California after sailing around the Horn, had returned to Michigan, his birthplace, and had returned to Oregon by covered wagon to own land, now part of downtown Portland. His Mother, Mary Powell Kittredge, had also reached Oregon in a covered wagon.

It was this impetus of ancestry that launched William (Bill) Kittredge's career.

He knew the cattle business from the grass up...he knew the feel of saddle leather as soon as he could walk..he knew the dusty trails of the desert and the clear, cold air of the mountains. He began his climb to success with 12 head of cattle, bought with buckaroo paychecks. He took part in one of the longest overland livestock treks of the early days of the Westriding herd with 345 head of horses and mules from Silver Lake in Lake County, Oregon, to Gibbon, Nebraska. He was 103 days on the trail.

Mrs. Kittredge states, (rather Whiscally) that to the best of her rememberance, between the time they went to Benton County and the time they returned to Southeastern Oregon, they lived on no less than four ranches, including one near Antelope, Oregon, and that they also operated a livery stable in Corvallis for awhile, and one gathers from Mrs. Kittredge's quiet humor that she is still somewhat surprised that they didn't live in it while they were at it. She further states that none of these ventures proved satisfactory and there was always the call back to the lake country.

In 1911, they came again to Silver Lake and here at last the man found an outlet for his driving energy. First buying the cattle and renting the ranch of Hayes Brothers, then renting land on Klamath Marsh the following year. In 1916, he started construction of a dam in Williamson River to irrigate dry pumice land which had hitherto been considered of little worth. The project was immediately and highly successful. Next, there was construction of drainage ditches on the marsh lands resulting in splended hay and pasture lands where before had been dry pasture or bogs and swamps.

In 1913, he had bought out brother Walter Kittredge and a little later still another ranch at Summer Lake. In 1916, along with his first purchase of land on Klamath Marsh, he built the first stock scales in that area.

The next twenty years were spent in operating and improving of these properties and then in 1936, there was more building to be done. He bought the old Warner Valley Cattle Ranch retracing the earlier trail of Pete French and John Devine. He then purchased winter pasture land near Corning, California not far from Jacinto from where old Dr. Glenn had sent young French northward for his rendezvous with destiny.

One would think that a man within two years of the allotted three-score-and -ten would have called a halt. Perhaps he did, but if so, he just naturally refused to obey the order.

"All my life", says Mrs. Kittredge, "if there was a choice between pleasure, comfort, or land...we bought land."

Whether he subscribed to, or for that matter, ever heard of the Scott's economic philosopher, Adam Smith's theory of land and labor, the writer doesn't know, nor does it make any difference. The economist's contention was in effect, that all wealth was in the land when its products, acted upon by human hands and human minds were changed into goods useable by human beings. Kittredge may never have heard of the theory, but he practiced it throughout a long life.

Bill Kittredge was a descendant of early western pioneers. His Father, Franklin Kittredge, was an early day Methodist Missionary/Farmer, and his Mother, Mary Powell, whose people settled in Powell Valley, now the heart of East Portland and for whom the area was named. The older Kittredge later settled at Monroe in Denton County among the pioneer families of the Starr's; Belknap's; Herron's; Barclay's; Coylee and the writer's own people, the Bowen's and Kelly's.

When young Kittredge was approaching early manhood his parents, looking for wider ranges, decided to take their entire "outfit across the Cascade Mountains and down into Southeastern Oregon." This was done in the face of terrific difficulties involving placing ski or sled runners under the wagons to get through the deep snow in places.

The family established the original Kittredge ranch near Silver Lake and here young Bill grew up following about the only occupation open to young men in that section at the time, that of landowners and ranchers.

In a drive of more than three hundred horses and mules he went from Silver Lake to Gibbon, Nebraska - a trip that took 103 days.

In 1899, upon the death of his father, he and his Brother Walter bought the original Kittredge ranch and livestock which they continued to operate until 1907, when the ranch was sold and he returned to Benton County once more. It appears that the restlessness had not yet found opportunity satisfaction.

The Adel property (Warner Stock Company) was another challenge. There were more drainage canals to be built and more irrigation systems to be installed. All these things were done and soon, once again in the words of Mrs. Kittredge: "Grain fields, alfalfa meadows and pasture grass were where at one time nothing but cat tails could grow."

Three years late, at seventy one, he bought a feed lot at Malin and ten years after that he started construction on a pellet and feed mill and another feed lot.

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The life history of a "busy man", starting as a relatively poor young man though to refer to Bill Kittredge as ever being a poor man would be a grave mistake; for he had within him a wealth such is given to few individuals. He had, with the aid and support of his family, built what has been rated as the largest cattle holdings west of the Rocky Mountains...and the record was clean.

If it were left to the writer to award laurel wreaths to the greatest of Oregon's cattlemen, the one of an early date and the other after 1890, the award for character, intelligence and ability would go to William (Bill) and to William (Bill) Kittredge.

In the earlier years of the cattle industry in Oregon, as has been noted before on these pages, market for surplus beef cattle was a live market. Purchasers of Oregon cattle had to depend on getting them to their destination "on-the-hoof".

Mr. Kittredge was married September 23, 1899, to Maude A. Long. The couple had three children.

He expanded his land holdings to include ranches in Klamath, Lake and Harney Counties in Oregon near Corning, California, after purchase of his first land at Summer Lake in 1914, land which he owned at the time of his death, May 19, 1958.

He was widely known for his personal philanthropies, his continuing interest in agriculture, reclamation, land and wildlife conservation and improved livestock breeding methods. The vast M.C. Ranch at Adel in Lake County, headquarters for the Warner Valley Stock Company, and the Klamath Marsh Ranch, are examples of his understanding of land reclamation. His compatible association with wildlife groups is public knowledge.

Mr. Kittredge served for many years on the executive board of the American Cattlemen's Association; was a director of the Tri-State Livestock Association for several terms; was one of the original organizers of the Klamath Production Credit Association covering lake and Klamath Counties in Oregon, Siskiyou and Modoc Counties in Northern California. He served as its president from 1934 until he resigned in 1955. He was a member of the Klamath County Chamber of Commerce, numerous state and county agricultural bodies, and he attended the first Methodist Church. The family home in later years was in Klamath Falls.

Surviving members of his family are Mrs. Kittredge, a Son, Oscar, Daughter, Mrs. Viola Gouldin, and several grandchildren and great-grand children.

Bill Kittredge was, throughout all the 81 years of his life, a busy individual. Through that long span of life he knew a great many hardships. He was a "builder", not in the sense of storing up treasures, but because he wanted to make things better. This, with the aid of his family, he did and he went on to build one of the largest and best cattle plants in the West.