

2. MY FATHER -- Carl Judson, Sr. (1895 - 1977)

Having buried my father in the previous chapter, I probably should introduce him, particularly as the Phantom Canyon Ranch project owed a lot to him – both through my apprenticeship with him in life and his influence afterwards (after all, he was undoubtedly keeping an eye on me from the hill above the house).

He grew up mostly in Cody, Wyoming, before World War I, knew Buffalo Bill, was an expert shot with rifle and pistol, drove freight wagons in the Big-horn Basin as a teenager, graduated from the University of Iowa, homesteaded and ranched in Wyoming's Powder River Basin, served in two World Wars as an officer in the Army Reserve – all before I was born.

He was a quiet, even tempered man but tough and badger-like in his persistence; also, an absolute teetotaler – not even coffee or tea and almost no swear words.

Although he was a progressive thinker, his modesty precluded him from pressing his ideas on others. But, he had the courage of his convictions and didn't give a "tinker's damn" what anybody thought.

From the time I was little, he cultivated the flattering habit of including me in his outside-the-box thinking and planning, which he analyzed by running the attendant math in his head.

Almost everyone enjoyed his company. Old friends of mine who had the opportunity to work with him, still reminisce with fondness. He was a truly good man.¹

The Judson Ranch (in Wyoming) – My father was attending the University of Iowa in 1917 when the US entered World War I. Because he was in ROTC, he was called up as a Second Lieutenant. On a furlough before embarking for France, he took a train to Douglas, Wyoming where he filed on a 160-acre homestead

at the southern edge of the Powder River Basin just off the old Bozeman Trail. He convinced several family members and a spinster friend to file homesteads on adjoining land.

After the war, together with his younger sister, Ruth, and Nina Schafer, the aforementioned spinster, he began putting a ranch together.

A slow, dry, dusty financial death was the fate of almost all homesteaders in eastern Wyoming as crop and livestock prices dropped, precipitation declined and the region collapsed in the dual calamities of depression and dust bowl.

However, their partnership had an edge: Ruth taught school (and lived in) one-room schoolhouses at the old 88 Ranch and at a wide spot in the road, named "Bill", Nina became librarian at Casper high school and my father got paid by the Army Reserve for two weeks of summer camp each year, so there was a little extra cash money available and the women could help out on weekends in good weather.

Of particular relevance to the Phantom Canyon project were my father's stories of their continuous trials in attempting to rent or buy other homesteads as the owners failed or gave up in exhaustion. The name of the game was 'expand or die' and there was urgent jostling to control more land among those still trying to survive.² A particular prize was property that was actually adjacent to land already owned, but they would take whatever they could get. Over twenty-five years of grim hardship, the three partners' individual homesteads and tarpaper shacks evolved into a large ranch operation.

The resulting ranch was a ~19,000-acre patchwork scattered over five townships plus additional leased land around the area and in Platte County to the south.³ My father's stories made me appreciate contiguous land holdings. (Note: This is a clue.)

Their ranch was a combined cattle and sheep operation. Under good management, cattle and sheep

can utilize the same range to advantage because their forage preferences are somewhat different. Cash flow was evened out some with the diversity of marketing options and the sale of wool.

Livestock was marketed by trailing to the railheads at Orpha or Glenrock and loading on rail cars bound for Omaha or Sioux City. My father rode in the caboose. There would be one or two rest stops in the Nebraska Sandhills, where the stock was unloaded for water and feed. At their destination the stock would be consigned to a commission firm that would arrange sale to packers or farm feedlots in the corn belt.

After my father married an east coast girl, who would not have held up well living thirty miles by dirt track from a tiny cow town and even farther from a small one, the partnership was dissolved after World War II. Ruth and her husband bought a ranch near Guernsey, Wyoming. My father and mother settled in Fort Collins, where my sister, Becky, and I were born.

My father and Nina continued as partners, buying two farms in Colorado, one south of Wellington and the other near Fort Morgan.

In a future installment(s) I'll describe my 'apprenticeship' with my father and maybe some memories of Larimer County in the good old days.

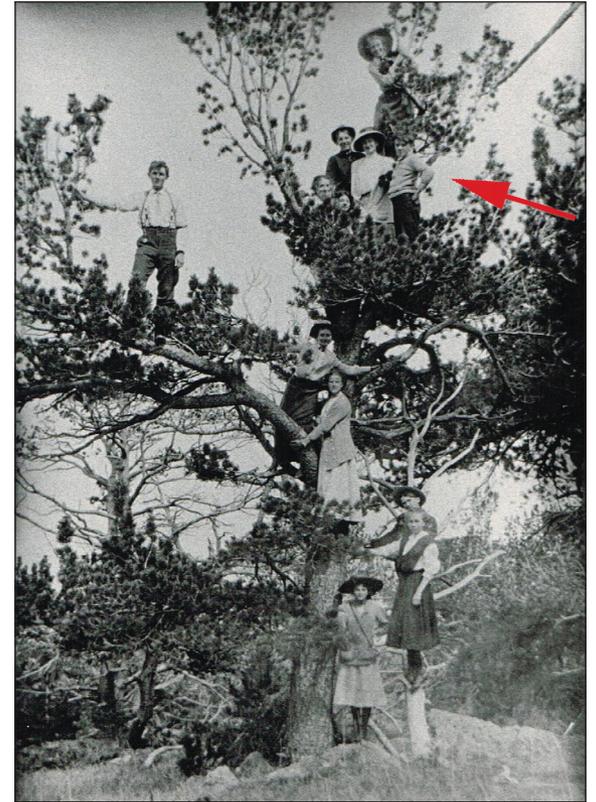
¹ I want to emphasize here that, while I learned a lot from my father, I don't claim to have inherited his admirable character attributes, rather the contrary: I tend not to play that well with others; I can be pretty pushy about my ideas; my MO is more Byzantine than straightforward; I am not a teetotaler and I swear routinely.

² Since there was little cash in circulation, the 'currency' that favored success with these transactions was a track record of neighborliness and good will over the preceding years.

³ Among these leases were a ranch at Guernsey that included some of the old Fort Laramie buildings (before it became a National Historic Site) and Forest permits on the west side of Laramie Peak.



Grandfather Judson & sons hunting, east rim of Yellowstone, 1910



Cody High School class photo, 1910



My father with a Hereford bull, 1930's



My father branding with Jack and Fay, 1920's



My mother and father at the Wyoming ranch, 1942