



## The Newman Ranches: Pioneer Cattle Ranches of the West

(Article begins on page 2 below.)

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# THE NEWMAN RANCHES: PIONEER CATTLE RANCHES OF THE WEST

BY ROBERT H. BURNS

**E**ARLY explorers and later emigrants noticed the thick sod of grass in the western plains and they also noticed the good condition of the large herds of game such as buffalo, antelope and elk.

It is not surprising that when travel-worn oxen were turned loose to graze on these nutritious short grasses they soon recovered their strength and rapidly put on flesh. Many of these incidents have been reported by word of mouth, but the reference seen most often is that in a Government Document published in Washington in March, 1885, which dealt with the range and ranch traffic in the western states and territories.

Concerning the origin of the northwestern grazing there are different accounts. There has been a common supposition that the fact of thrift of the buffalo in former years, during the inclement season, suggested the feasibility of pasturing cattle on the wild range. But whatever

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might have been inferred from the habits of the buffalo, the first demonstration of the fattening effects of winter feeding in the north seems to have been an accidental discovery. In the winter of 1864-65, just twenty years ago, Mr. E. S. Newman, who was conducting a train of supplies overland to Camp Douglas was snowed up on the Laramie Plains. Arranging the train in habitable shape, he turned the oxen out to die in the neighboring waste places. But the fatigued cattle began to improve from the start and in March were gathered up in better condition than when they were set adrift to starve and feed the wolves. The discovery led to the purchase of stock cattle for fattening in the north, and the trade has steadily grown to its present proportions, accelerated greatly during the past fifteen years by the building of various roads to the North and West.<sup>1</sup>

This reference led the writer to believe that the range cattle industry might have started on the Laramie Plains as a sequel to the above mentioned incident, but until recently he has never been able to trace Mr. E. S. Newman and find out where he started his ranches. In the search for this information he located a similar instance of lost freight oxen being recovered, namely the experience of Thomas Alsop who had a similar experience with abandoned freight oxen in December, 1865 and who in partnership with Edward Creighton of Omaha and Charley Hutton of Laramie started a cattle ranch on the Big Laramie River in 1869 immediately following the completion of a final railroad grading contract in western Wyoming in the fall of 1868 and spring of 1869.

The second clue to the operations of Mr. Newman is found in a news item in the *Breeder's Gazette*, an outstanding live-stock periodical published in Chicago:

H. L. Newman, the wealthy St. Louis stock-raiser and banker, who, with his brother, E. S. Newman, was the first to discover that cattle would live and flourish the year around in the northern plains, is now the head of the firm of Newman Brothers and Farr, who own 86,000 head of cattle. The discovery referred to was made by a belated "bull team" on the Laramie Plains during the severe winter of 1864. The firm's ranges are now scattered from Montana to Texas. They have two in Wyoming, one of which is on the Powder River and the other on the Tongue River, reaching into Montana; one in Nebraska on the Niobrara, one in the Indian Territory extending down into the Texas Panhandle, and one upon

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Nimmo, *Range and Ranch Cattle Traffic*, House Executive Document 267, 48th Congress, 2nd Session, 1885, pp. 95-96.

the uplands in far western Texas. The Niobrara range covers an area of thirty by sixty-five miles. The Powder and Tongue ranges will alone support 30,000 head of cattle. In Indian Territory they are leasing 128,000 acres from the Indians, having been the first to agitate the leasing question when Carl Schurz was Secretary of the Interior. Their cattle are today worth \$2,500,000 while horses, acquired lands, fences, improvements and franchises easily bring the value up to \$3,000,000. This season they will market 14,000 beeves, from which they will clear after the season's expenses are paid, upwards of \$3,000,000 [sic]. The practical details of this gigantic business are managed by Mr. E. S. Newman, whose headquarters are on the Niobrara range. Mr. H. L. Newman rarely visits the ranges—some of them he has barely seen, but is engaged in managing his books at the St. Louis stockyards. In the course of a recent interview, he confidently expressed the opinion that there would be no break in the price of stocks in the next three or four years. The widespread desire to engage in the business, he said, had of course raised prices to some extent, but an ever-increasing and healthful demand would off-set this. Altogether, he saw no reason why the cattle business should not continue to yield as large profits as ever, and present the finest opportunities for the investment of capital.<sup>2</sup>

This news item showed definitely that Mr. E. S. Newman mentioned in the original article had followed up by engaging in the cattle business.

The writer then tried to locate the ranches mentioned, particularly those mentioned as located on the Powder and Tongue Rivers in Wyoming and the Niobrara in Nebraska. He also tried to find out if there was any record of the Newman family residing in St. Louis. The ranches in Wyoming could not be located.

The fifth edition of the Wyoming Stock Growers' Brand Book published in 1887 gives an entry concerning the Niobrara Cattle Company and mentions Mr. E. S. Newman as General Manager and T. B. Irwin as foreman of the Running Water range with post office address at Pine Ridge, Dakota and J. S. Irwin as foreman of the Powder River range with post office address at Miles City, Montana. The 1880, 1881, and 1882 editions of the Wyoming Stock Growers Brand Book also listed the Niobrara Cattle Company and in those years the headquarters was given as at Pine Ridge, Dakota. Mr. Roy

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<sup>2</sup> "How the Western Cattle Ranges Were Started," *Breeders' Gazette*, September 6, 1883, p. 297.

Ross of Gordon, Nebraska, son of Ed Ross of the Newman outfit informs the writer that the headquarters of the Newman ranch was on the Niobrara (Indian name for Running Water), but mail and telegrams came by Pine Ridge, Dakota.<sup>3</sup>

None of the old timers in northeastern Wyoming had heard of E. S. Newman and they were inclined to think that the ranches located on the Powder River and Tongue River were probably in Montana near Miles City. Later information obtained in the Sandhills region of Nebraska proved they were right. Mr. Sidney Irwin, the younger brother of T. B. and J. S. Irwin, is living in Valentine and the writer visited with him in May, 1952. He stated that he worked for his brother, J. S. Irwin, and accompanied the Newman cattle from the Niobrara to Montana in 1887 and definitely located the headquarters ranch in Montana as south of Miles City at the confluence of the Little Powder and Big Powder rivers some eight miles from the present city of Broadus, Montana. This information was confirmed by Mr. Lou Grill of Miles City who has checked such records as were available and talked with old timers there.<sup>4</sup>

The Missouri Historical Society of St. Louis furnished some information on the H. L. and E. S. Newman families who were listed in the St. Louis Directory from 1884 to 1888 as interested in the banking and ranching business. In fact H. L. and E. S. Newman were listed as President and Vice President of the Niobrara Cattle Company in 1885. In 1889 neither H. L. Newman nor E. S. Newman is listed.<sup>5</sup>

Later the writer located two surviving members of the E. S. and H. L. Newman families. Mrs. C. A. Newman of El Paso is a daughter-in-law of E. S. Newman who died in El Paso in 1913.<sup>6</sup> Mrs. Edith Newman Reynolds of Whittier, California, is the daughter of H. L. Newman and has furnished the writer with a diary of her father.<sup>7</sup> One entry is of particular interest:

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<sup>3</sup> Roy Ross, Gordon, Nebraska, to author, November 30, December 12, 1951.

<sup>4</sup> Lou Grill, Miles City, Montana, to author, March 5, 1952.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Kell to author, August 24, 1951.

<sup>6</sup> Mrs. C. A. Newman to author, January 10, 21, 1952.

<sup>7</sup> Mrs. Edith Newman Reynolds to author, June 15, 1952.



E. S. Newman, About 1910

In 1883 I bought half interest in a train belonging to D. W. Powers of 21 wagons which were loaded with general merchandise on our own account and sent to Salt Lake City, Utah. My brother, E. S., went with the train, the venture proved a very good one and the next time we sent a much larger number of wagons also loaded with our own goods. We associated with us in this venture John Kerr who was then with the banking firm of Scott, Kerr and Company of Leavenworth, Kansas. He divided his one-third interest with W. B. Farr who at that time was with Scott, Kerr and Company. Mr. Farr went to Salt Lake, sold the goods and train and opened a bank, Powers, Newman and Company, the first ever opened in Salt Lake City. We only continued that bank a short time and Powers and I sold to W. Scott, Kerr and Company and I continued in freighting until 1867, when I opened a bank in Leavenworth, Newman and Havens, which we continued until 1874 when I moved to St. Louis and opened the bank at the National Stock Yards, Illinois.

Mrs. Reynolds has also furnished the writer the obituary clipping for her father taken from an El Paso paper dated February 23, 1911. This clipping traces his life work. He was born near Lexington, Kentucky, lost his parents at 14 years of age and resided with relatives and was educated in local schools. In the early sixties he came to Leavenworth and began his active business career. Lucrative freighting contracts for territory to the west enabled him to start a banking venture. The Civil War caused serious handicap to the banking and freighting business in Leavenworth, but after the four years' turmoil, Mr. Newman promoted another bank, this time located in Salt Lake City. This venture proved a success, but as noted above he sold out and transferred his activities to St. Louis where he established the National Stock Yard bank, still in existence. After more success there he moved to Joplin, Missouri, in 1887 and established the Joplin National Bank. In 1893 he went to El Paso having been in poor health and soon started a banking business of H. L. Newman and Son which eventually became the American National Bank. His cattle ventures were extensive until 1886, when much was lost in Colorado, Nebraska and Montana. Then he transferred his holdings to Texas. In 1895 Mr. Newman sold his stock interests to Reynolds and Son of Kent, Texas.

The information in this obituary checks all of the information from other sources and indicates where H. L. Newman went when he left St. Louis in 1887 and was not listed in the 1888 Directory.

The writer had an interesting conference with Mrs. Edith Newman Reynolds at Whittier, California, on June 30, 1952. She mentioned that her father's (H. L. Newman) first job at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, was in the store owned by Mr. Russell of the firm of Russell, Majors and Waddell who were responsible for getting him interested in the range cattle business. This ties in nicely with information on the livestock industry of Colorado and Wyoming, which states:

In 1858, when a United States force under Col. Albert Sidney Johnson was ordered to Salt Lake City with troops to subdue the Mormons, a party of Government freighters, Messrs. Russell, Majors and Waddell, who had many times before crossed the vast sandy plains west of the Missouri River started with a long train from Fort Leavenworth in Kansas loaded with Government supplies and bound for Fort Douglas, at or near Salt Lake. It was rather late in the season when the journey began, and after many unexpected and unavoidable delays the caravan arrived at a point near where the small town of Bordeau, Wyoming now stands; and concluded that it would be impossible to reach the fort during the winter, in consequence of snow, they went into camp. In a brief time they began to run short of feed for their stock, and it was determined to drive the cattle on the Chugwater Creek, a small stream but a few miles away, and leave them to "rustle" for themselves, with little hope of ever seeing them again, as it was feared they would either die from starvation and their bones would be found in the spring, or the Indians would slaughter them for beef. The winter was unusually severe, but when spring came and the freighters went out on the Chugwater they were more than glad to find in the immediate vicinity of where they had left them, some three or four of their cattle in splendid condition. They began to search for more and in a few days found nearly every hoof they had turned out early in the winter, and all fat enough for beef.<sup>8</sup>

Two references furnished by the Nebraska State Historical Society definitely located the E. S. Newman ranching operations. In an article in *Nebraska History*, A. E. Sheldon states: "After the final removal of the Sioux Indians to the

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<sup>8</sup> Bureau of Animal Industry, *Report 1889-1890*, p. 437.



Rosebud and Pine Ridge reservations in Dakota in 1877-1878, ranchers could move their cattle into the former Sioux area north of the Sandhills. The first ranches were the Newman and Hunter ranches on the Niobrara. Government contracts to furnish fresh beef to the Indians on the Rosebud and Pine Ridge were obtained by both Newman and Hunter and provided for a time the chief outlet for the marketing of their cattle."<sup>9</sup>

James C. Dahlman in an article also published in *Nebraska History* wrote, "The Newman ranch in 1878 was located at the mouth of Antelope Creek on the Niobrara, twelve miles east of where the town of Gordon now stands. It was one of the large cow ranches handling from 10,000 to 15,000 head."<sup>10</sup>

The writer, in May, 1952, visited the site of the Newman ranch with Mr. Roy Ross of Gordon, son of Ed Ross, one of the foremen for the E. S. "Zeke" Newman outfit. The description given above was quite correct as one of the original buildings was still standing at the mouth of Antelope creek with the old hewn logs now covered with siding which was weathered and broken in places, exposing the old logs. The shape of the building is similar to that shown in the old picture.

On this same trip the writer talked with Mr. Sidney Irwin, a younger brother of J. S. "Billy" Irwin, foreman of the Powder River Range of the Niobrara Cattle Company. He definitely located the Powder River ranch as at the junction of the Little and Big Powder rivers some 120 miles south and west of Miles City.<sup>11</sup> This information was confirmed by Mr. Lou Grill of Miles City in correspondence with the writer.<sup>12</sup> He located the old brand advertisements of the Niobrara Cattle Company and these list two properties in Mon-

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<sup>9</sup> A. E. Sheldon, "The Sheridan County Region—Origin and Early History," *Nebraska History*, XVI (October-December, 1935), 245.

<sup>10</sup> James C. Dahlman, "Recollections of Cowboy Life in Western Nebraska," *Nebraska History*, X (October-December, 1927), 335. See also, "Dahlman's Life Spans Epochs of Old West," *Omaha Bee News*, May 26, 1929, and Fred Carey, *Mayor Jim: An Epic of the West* (Omaha, 1930), p. 175.

<sup>11</sup> Sidney Irwin, Valentine, Nebraska, interview, May 24, 1952.

<sup>12</sup> Grill to author, June 12, 1952.

tana, the Powder River and Mizpah, and to the north the Dry Creek and Sand Creek ranges.<sup>13</sup>

Sidney Irwin told the writer he had accompanied the first herd to go from the Running Water range in Nebraska to the Powder River range in Montana. The brand ads in the *Stock Growers Journal and Livestock Reporter* of Miles City indicate that the Niobrara Cattle Company was in business there in 1887 and 1888.<sup>14</sup>

The experiences of some top hands who worked for the Newman outfit in early days are recorded in two letters to the writer. Mr. Roy Ross of Gordon, Nebraska, writes:

Father (Ed T. Ross) started to work for Mr. Newman, E. S. or "Zeke" as he was known around here in the 90's, in the summer of 1882 and was on the pay roll continuously as long as Newmans ranched in Nebraska or Montana. When he went to work for the Newmans their range extended east about 40 miles or half way to the Mayberry Ranch which was located on Boiling Springs Flats on the river. This was known as the Boiling Springs Ranch. Newman went west about half way to Deer Creek where Hunter and Evans had a ranch. The Newmans had a large pasture some 8 x 6 miles north of the river and extending into the north sandhills. They used most of the hills north of the river, but were afraid of the Sandhills south of the river, for some reason or other. The old Kearney trail went from Pine Ridge to Kearney right through them and the Indians hunted in the sandhills a good deal as some buffalo always wintered there. The Newmans did not use some country south of the river known as Pole creek flats. This consisted of some 15,000 acres of low rolling hills and small to large vallies. Pole creek and several lakes furnished waters and today there are several nice ranches and a number of farms. Mr. Newman had established line camps at various points at the edge of the high hills and kept turning back the cattle towards the river. These were the younger or new cattle that had been brought up the trail. The three ranches named were established primarily to supply beef to the Indians at the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations which lay to the north, so the older or fatter cattle were run north of the river and in the big pasture so as to be handy for issue, which was every month during the summer and most of the winter or until late in the year.

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<sup>13</sup> Brand advertisements from *Stockgrowers Journal* (Miles City, Montana), October 11, 1884; July 16, 1887; July 28, 1888; *Yellowstone Journal* (Miles City, Montana), March 10, 1888. Clippings, sent by Lou Grill.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*



The Newman Ranch on the Niobrara, About 1886

I have heard Dad tell about making issues in November and also in March, but do not remember ever hearing him say anything about December, January and February. I have heard him tell about spending Christmas in Pine Ridge when he helped watch the horse herd on Craven Creek near Pine Ridge.

The Newmans issued most of their stuff at Pine Ridge but did make several issues at Rosebud. One was for the Boiling Springs, which had lost their gather in a stampede and would be late for the issue.

T. B. (Bennett) Irwin was ranch manager and Perry Parker was ranch boss. Johnny Burgess was range boss when Dad went to work. His first shipment (Dad's) was from Ogallala, Nebraska the fall of 1882. They took the beef herd up river to Box Butte Creek and then southeast by way of Crystal Lake. This route again went through the Sandhills and down Blue Creek to the North Platte. The 1884 beef shipment was made over the F. E. & M. V. Ry. I do not remember whether the shipment was made from Valentine or east of the river, but it was from that locality. . . .

Stonewall and Billie Irwin, brothers of Bennett, also worked for the Newmans during this time (1882-1884). I think that they worked mostly within the trail herds. One or both with Jim Dahlman brought a herd from Oregon about this time. [In 1880 according to *Omaha Daily Bee*, May 26, 1929.] About this time one of the Irwin boys and Jim proposed that the outfit work the south hills and Mr. Newman let them take a small bunch of boys and see what they could do. They came out with quite a herd of cattle most of them fat though it was early spring. Some of the cattle were slick five and six year olds. About 1883 Mr. Newman acquired a ranch in Montana and moved some cattle from here up there, and in 1885 moved the last of his cattle from Nebraska up to the Montana range. Dad was in charge of this herd.<sup>15</sup>

This information concerning Ed T. Ross, is elaborated in an article in the *Gordon Journal*.<sup>16</sup>

One of the early day trail drivers, Bob Miller of Burwell, Nebraska, wrote the following letter to the writer concerning his connection with the Newman outfit:

What I know about Mr. E. S. Newman. I went to work for E. S. Newman the spring of 1877. Mr. Newman had bought the Hays stock of stock cattle for \$7.75 per head straight through except the spring calves. These we killed each morning because they could not walk, so every morning we would ride up to a calf and put our

<sup>15</sup> Ross to author, November 30, 1951.

<sup>16</sup> "Ed T. Ross, Texas Cowboy," *Gordon (Nebraska) Journal*, September 18, 1941.

Winchester or Colts 45 to its head and fire away, and then run the mother with the herd and that night rope the mothers and side line them so they would not go back to where she hid the calf. That was a daily job. These cattle were listed for Wind River Montana, but Mr. Newman changed his mind when we got to Dodge City. Tom Mahan, who was our foreman to Dodge City turned the herd over to Ellis Chalk, my old school mate, and we drove the cattle over to Ellis, Kansas, where we held them to fatten them. That's the year the U. P. Express was robbed at Big Sprngs, Nebraska of 60,000 dollars in 20 dollar gold pieces and Potts and Collins being two of the robbers were killed having with them \$20,000 ( $\frac{1}{3}$  of the amount of the gold). I went back home to Texas. . . . Done the trail the next year, 1878, with the same foreman, T. J. Mahan, who drove a herd for Major J. S. Smith and Bob Savage, the former from Bates, Illinois and Mr. Savage of Corpus Christi. . . . I helped to gather a couple of trainloads of four year old beeves shipped from Julesburg to Chicago. When I came back I quit much to the discomfiture of Mr. Snyder, who said he intended to give me a permanent job, but I decided to go to where my old school mate was and that was Ellis Chalk who was working for E. S. Newman and Hunter the latter also of St. Louis, Missouri. Newman and Hunter had the contract of furnishing the Sioux Indians at Pine Ridge and Rosebud agencies with cattle, 250 head every 10 days at each agency, and what we called a dry issue—in December to last them through till we could gather cattle for the spring issue. And the Indians done their own delivery as long as they had any cattle. They generally run short and we had to supply more. After Newman and Hunter had filled their contract, they, of course, returned to their individual ranches. Mr. Newman was located on the Running Water, south of Gordon at the mouth of Antelope Creek. Mr. Newman who ran the N Bar Ranch drove his cattle west when the big ranches were run out of the sandhills by the settlers. I remained in the country and a short time afterwards went into business for myself. In 1910 I went to El Paso and who should I find but Mr. E. S. Newman and his brother Tom. I talked with Mr. Newman and as he had been all over the world, I asked him if he ever found any range that would equal the sandhills of Nebraska and he said no. I left El Paso and I have never seen him since. He was a fine man and all of his boys liked him.<sup>17</sup>

An item in the *Gordon Journal* gives an interesting account of these early day ranches.

The first ranch in the Gordon locality according to Benjamin Robins, Rushville, was the Newman ranch established in 1878 by E. S. and H. L. Newman. During

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<sup>17</sup> R. B. Miller to author, December 20, 1951.

the same year, the Hunter Ranch (The Present Buff Tinnin place) was established by Dave and Bib Hunter, and a man whom Mr. Robins remembered simply as Mr. Evans.

The home ranch of the Newman outfit was located at the mouth of Antelope Creek about twelve miles southeast of Gordon, but Mr. Newman had a small house sixty miles south of there. The range was approximately twenty miles east and west and seventy miles north and south. Billy Irwin, a Texas cowboy, was the first foreman of the ranch; his brother, Bennett Irwin, taking charge later. The first foreman of Hunter's ranch was Will Whittaker.

From 30,000 to 50,000 head of cattle were run on the ranges of each of these ranches, most of them being trailed up from Texas or from eastern Oregon. These cattle were marketed at Pine Ridge under Indian contract or were shipped to Chicago.

During the year three roundups were held, spring roundup, calf roundup and fall roundup. Representatives [Reps] from all outfits—even from great distances—were present in the interest of their companies. Cattle were not fed in the winter, but foraged over the range, and after a severe winter, a stockman could not reckon his loss until after the spring roundup.

The winters of 1879, 1880 and 1884, Mr. Robins recalls as especially cold and stormy resulting in heavy losses to cattlemen. When Mr. Newman closed his ranch here and moved his cattle to Montana, according to his books, he was short about 10,000 head. Mr. Robins who worked for Newman from 1880 to 1882 remembers as some of the men who were with that outfit. James C. Dahlman, Ed Ross, Johnny Burges, Archie Reardon, George Parker, Harry Ruttger, John Green, Bob Miller, Bill Ellis, Harry Landers, Andy Wheat and Stonewall Irwin. Tom Quigley, who was known on the Newman Ranch as Tom Allen, was brand inspector at Pine Ridge.<sup>18</sup>

This article was evidently taken from an earlier article published by Lillian Amende, a daughter of Benjamin Robins, whom the writer visited in May 1952 and who gave him a copy of this article.<sup>19</sup>

Mrs. C. M. Newman of El Paso, Texas, a daughter-in-law of Mr. E. S. Newman advised the writer that Mr. E. S. Newman died in El Paso on April 22, 1913 and that Tom Newman

<sup>18</sup> "Newman and Hunter Ranches Earliest in County History," *Gordon Journal*, September 18, 1941.

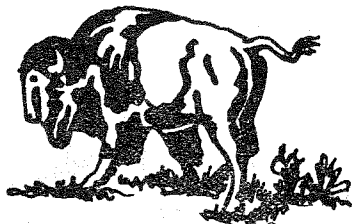
<sup>19</sup> Lillian Robins Amende, "Early Day History of Sheridan County, Nebraska": cf. *Sheridan County Star* (Rushville), February 20, 1936.

operated a ranch at Kent, Texas, which is now operated by his son Tom, Jr.<sup>20</sup>

The Newmans in common with many others had many interests in the early days of the west and they were among the pioneers who saw the value of the short grass country in producing fine quality of beef to supply the tables of people with first class grass-fat beef and a supply of feeder cattle to put on further flesh in the feed lots of the great Mississippi valley or so called corn belt.

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<sup>20</sup> Newman to author, January 10, 1952.





Remains of the Newman Ranch on the Niobrara, 1952



R. B. Miller  
1900



Henry Newman  
1900