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Article Summary: James Robert Jacobsen, a free range cowboy, died in 1885 at the age of 29 from a bullwhip injury. He left a memo book that provides some insight into his brief life and those of his companions along the Sidney-Deadwood trail and in the Pumpkin Creek Valley of present-day Banner County, Nebraska.

#### Cataloging Information:

Names: James Robert Jacobsen, Oscar A Jacobsen, Mollie F Hess, C W (Charley) Long, F B (Frank) Ferguson, T (Thad) Ferguson, Billy C Livingston, E S Newman, George Moore, E M Gardner, W W Wylie

Keywords: Pratt & Ferris; D T McCann; A S Van Tassel

Photographs / Images: full length portrait of James Robert (Bob) Jacobsen, cowboy; sample pages from Bob Jacobsen's memo book; Wildcat Hills area near Pumpkin Creek Valley; Items in Bob Jacobsen's leather wallet; Certificate presented to Bob Jacobsen as a boy by schoolteacher Mollie F Hess in Saline County, 1865; Map of Pumpkin Valley of Cheyenne County, Nebraska [Cheyenne County was later subdivided; most of the Pumpkin Creek Valley is now in Banner County]

**A WILD MUSTANG CAMPAIGN OF 1879  
IN PUMPKIN CREEK VALLEY:  
THE MEMORANDUM BOOK  
OF JAMES ROBERT JACOBSEN**

*Edited by John C. Jackson*

Among the sparse possessions of cowhand James Robert Jacobsen sent after his death in 1885 at Bozeman, Montana, to his father, Oscar A. Jacobsen, in Saline County, Nebraska, was a crudely tooled leather wallet about four by eight inches fastened with two buckles. It is unlikely it ever had contained much cash and probably held little then, but it did contain two small memorandum books.<sup>1</sup> Young Jacobsen followed his father's habit of keeping a daily record at home and pursued it briefly after reaching the cattle country. No great literary accomplishment, the family records traced the Jacobsens from Ohio to Illinois and to an eventual homestead on the Big Blue River in eastern Nebraska in the 1860's.

Like many a frontier father, when Oscar Jacobsen lost his son to the wild rover's life, he suffered some disappointment, one surmises, since they were a close-knit, sentimental clan. When he rode off, Bob carried mementos of his childhood in his saddle bags, a photo or two, a fancy little card Miss Mollie F. Hess, his school teacher, had presented to him for good behavior, and the account book his father had started and Bob had taken over. It contained a farm boy's record of earnings and expenditures. Shelling corn and selling cobs apparently had not measured up to a 15-year-old's concept of what life should be. As a country kid, he had seen the early herds trail through

the neighborhood and had admired the picturesque Texans who drove them. Their outfit, language and manner, and aura of careless independence and self-determination were as impressive to the adolescent then as their dramatization on TV is now.

The younger Jacobsen's jottings in his memo book are comparatively well written considering his lack of education. There are a few misspellings ("antalope" is one), *non sequiturs*, and illegible entries. A few times he comments on the hard life he has chosen or adds a philosophical note. Doodles occupy some pages, and there is an occasional reference to the sordid side of frontier life. The material he wrote in code must have been primarily to confound his companions or to amuse himself, for there is little coded material that his mother could not have read. In all, his brief journal of less than a year adds an interesting footnote to Plains history.

Bob Jacobsen drifted west toward Ogallala and the great free-range ranches developing in western Nebraska, Colorado, and Wyoming. On the anvil of the plains, baked, scoured, and blasted, he learned his trade. The dream of a romantic life as a wild rover was tempered by the realities of long hours of hard physical labor, primitive living conditions, and isolation. At the beginning of 1879 he was working along the Sidney-Deadwood trail as herdsman of oxen which pulled freight wagons between the Sidney railhead and the mining camps in the recently opened Black Hills. The trail ran nearly due north from Sidney about 200 to 250 miles, depending on the destination. No lonely road during the height of the rush, the trail saw a continual stream of packers, express riders, lurching Concord coaches, driven cattle herds, and freight outfits. The large concerns were Pratt & Ferris, D. T. McCann, or A. S. Van Tassel, but there were many small "shotgun" outfits also hauling loads when they could get them.

It was a 30- to 40-day trip to or from the Hills for the five-, six-, seven-, or even eight-yoke teams of crossbred, multi-colored oxen. The animals were a mixed breed, descendants of stock sold or abandoned along the emigrant road, interbred with rangy longhorns from the southern plains. Stolid in temperament, they were urged along by bullwhackers whose command of language and an 18-foot bullwhip could raise hair or hide. Since a bullwhacker had enough association with his animals during the

day and no self-respecting cowboy would compromise his dignity by driving a team, a night herder was required to range the animals to grass and rest.<sup>2</sup> Bob Jacobsen got such a job.

Jacobsen first hired on to work for a shotgun outfit at Red Willow Station, ten or fifteen miles north of Camp Clark Bridge over the North Platte River. Most wagons were returning south, empty or perhaps with lumber, and prospects for the summer didn't look good. The Black Hills camps were essentially complete, the boom was being taken over by large-scale mining operations, and the demand for goods had dropped off sharply. In this somewhat depressed economic situation Bob found work and began notations in his memo book:

"Red Willow, March 24th [1879]. Commenced work for Mr. Corbett at night herding freighters cattle for the sume of thirty dollars an month and 25 cents for every other night.

|                                 |                   |                           |      |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|------|
| Mar 24, Platte bottom . . . . . | 1.25              | Mar 29, Sidney . . . . .  | 1.00 |
| Mar 25, Pumpkin Creek . . . . . | 1.25              | Mar 30, Sidney . . . . .  | 1.25 |
| Mar 26, Greenwood . . . . .     | 1.00              | Mar 31, Sidney . . . . .  | 1.00 |
| Mar 27, S. Waterholes . . . . . | 1.00 <sup>3</sup> | Total for March . . . . . | 9.00 |
| Mar 28, Sidney . . . . .        | 1.25              |                           |      |

The record continues on the next page for the period of April 1-23. The following page has been torn from the book and with it the evidence of Bob's employment up to the next known date. During the twenty-three days he herded in the vicinity of Sidney, the freighters for whom he worked were experiencing a sharp decline in the hauling business to Deadwood, and a once-bustling Sidney was taking on a lethargic quality. Keeping the bull herd within the area was no great challenge and Bob apparently had the help of a fellow cowhand, C. W. (Charley) Long. With time on his hands, he devised a cypher to record day-to-day events, some of which he might not want his companions in the communal life of the camp to know about. His code was a combination of symbols and numbers that superficially resembled the Masonic pig-pen code that was rather well known. Bob's cypher was, however, his own invention—a simple substitution of symbols for letters. The natural recurrence of the word "horses" provides the key to unlocking his code.

On April 1 Bob Jacobsen wrote a notation of his debt to C. W. Long for \$5.00. Evidently he had not collected his wages as yet from Corbett, his employer. How the \$5.00 went is not recorded, but between that entry and the next on April 5 he scrawled the words, "Bad Luck, Good Luck, Failure,



*James Robert (Bob) Jacobsen, cowboy.*

Disappointment." He had spartan fare—bread and coffee—for his Easter dinner on April 13 at the Pole Creek bull camp. On April 20 he began a series of notations written in his code: "Weather stormy with thunder and lightning and soaking rain. No body in camp but myself. Thought I was going to see a fight but it was a fizzle." Other entries follow:

Monday, [April 21], weather cloudy and windy. Got pissed on by a skunk. Stink too bad to go to town to a house to stay. In camp undertook to run a half-breed steer [number omitted] miles and lost him in the dark.

Tuesday [April 22], laid in camp and worked at my bridle all night. Came in and went to bed.

Wednesday [April 23], got up in the morning and went after the devils. Came back and borrowed a fire to cook my breakfast and went to bed. Got up in the evening and went out on herd. Could not find the bulls. Bummed around town all night.

Thursday [April 24], left town in the morning. Gathered the bulls, took them to camp, ate breakfast and went to bed. Slept until breakfast. Hunted my colt in the afternoon, could not find her.

Friday [April 25], hunted my colt all day, could not find her.

Saturday; hunted colt in morning on foot. Went to town in the afternoon and ordered a brand made. Had no money to pay for it and came off to camp without it.

Sidney blacksmiths evidently weren't allowing credit to range drifters.

Friday [May 2], tinkered at bridle all day, went to town in the evening. Business houses all closed up. Came back to camp.

Saturday [May 3], mule gone, could not find her. Hunted all day for her.

Tuesday [May 6], went to town in the morning, got ten dollars, got a brand, and came back to camp and slept all afternoon.

Wednesday [May 7], hunted for my mule, could not find her.

Thursday [May 8], after balancing my accounts for April I find that my net proceeds amount to nineteen dollars and seventy-five cents. Went to town in the afternoon and saw a rope walker perform. Spent twenty-five cents.

For whatever reason that transpired between the next dates, Cowboy Bob Jacobsen decided on a new venture, which he announced in his journal with a certain flare of rhetoric:

On the 13th of May four stout hearted frontiersmen started from the town of Sidney with two good saddle horses and equipment for (?) months campaign against the numerous mustangs that roam over the plains to the south [north] west of that place. They arrived at their destination without accident and succeeded in capturing 8 head of wild horses.

The list of equipment they purchased appears on another page: \$8.00 for a tent, \$2.00 worth of potatoes and \$10.00 for other grub. Feed for their horses was recorded at \$6.00; hardware, unspecified, cost \$13.10. The total outlay was \$49.10,

and someone as an afterthought had thrown in a 40 cent axe handle. The sum of \$21.90 was later added and the expenses reached a total of \$71.30. Initial operations must have been time consuming for Bob had no spare time for writing in his memo book. On June 1 there appeared in the "horse-catching" account an entry listing hobbles costing \$1.25. On July 19, 32 shoes were reset for \$8.00 and links and rings purchased on July 21 for \$1.25. On August 20 a picket pin was acquired for 35 cents, hobbles for \$11.00, cartridges for \$5.00, and an order of "Rance" [?] for \$1.60—a total of \$28.45. The grand total outlay reached \$99.75. (Jacobsen's addition lacked accuracy!)

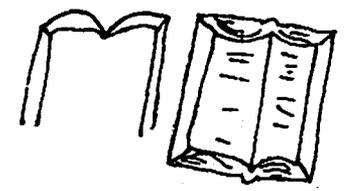
Judging from a list in another part of the memo book and by matching initials with names, the "four stout hearted frontiersmen" were himself, James Robert (Bob) Jacobsen; F. B. (Frank) Ferguson; probably Frank's brother T. (Thad) Ferguson; and Billy C. Livingston. They rode west from Sidney, on the north side of the Union Pacific mainline into that pie-shaped piece of western Nebraska between the North and South Platte Rivers. Their area of intended operation was the headwaters of those northward tending tributaries of Pumpkin Creek and perhaps as far west as Willow Creek. The Pumpkin Creek Valley was to their right and the Wildcat Range just beyond.

The initial venture evidently met some success, but there are no entries from its beginning until June 29 when Jacobsen noted that "the wind was not blowing strange to tell." Writing in his code he said, "Billy C. [Livingston] sold a wild stallion for \$200 to E. S. Newman, grocer in Sidney and a jew.<sup>4</sup> July [1st] was in Sidney and had a dull time. Rode a wild mare in the afternoon, went to town [Sidney] on Wed. afternoon."

Grocer Newman recouped part of his \$200 from the mustangers when they bought "Shugure [sugar], coffee, B. powder, flour, salt, tea, tobacco, and bacon" worth \$10.70. Soon after the Fourth of July, Bob rode back to the range. In fancy penmanship he wrote with flourishes, "wild horses, broncos, mustanges." He had also learned a new song during the Fourth of July festivities in Sidney and copied down (uncoded) as much of it as he could remember. The available ladies of Sidney apparently had left untarnished his rather romantic view of womanhood:

See that star breasted villian to yonder cot bound  
Where the sweet honeysuckle entwineth around

200 lbs. Flour 500  
 58<sup>3</sup> Bacon 530  
 \$1.00 Worth Sugar 1.00  
 2 Cons yeast powder 70  
 Daugherty Coffee 1.25  
 Sugar 1.00  
 \$ 17.25



1154 5X712AG 115 47EEAG  
 8X0C 3A66UA 1702X0 01  
 3HA 4A + 55)  
 24# ΔEΓΔΓ 7E JAUU 67H  
 7. J7H16 58 1400LA 522  
 8A70 57A6 05 3A66UA  
 144E +115 0554 + 1554+0  
 XA 47Δ0+11Δ  
 25B 350 7E JAD8MA 1747E  
 H5 4551. ΔEΓΔΓ JMAA  
 (71015 + 8+0 1615-11 05  
 954 144E 06 +H5 350  
 JH1 05 144E XH 0X4A  
 256 Δ7EEAG 26+11Δ  
 1X00LA 4+6A 6E + 15-11  
 140 1X0C0  
 26 26+11 H5 X 0554+  
 ΔCAH 1554 0A 67HA 067  
 2X12 + 14H5 L2. 1XJ  
 (16Δ01 0C7 350 051496  
 2654 ΔX7AU

Sample pages from Bob Jacobsen's memo book.

But fairer yes sweeter than flowers yet seen  
 Is the villegger's daughter, the pride of the green.  
 No more, never more will she gladden our lives  
 For her peace of mind wanders and happiness flies.  
 She pauses, sighs, trembles and still wants to roam.  
 The villege born beauty is seduced from her home.  
 In a post chaise and four she in London sits down.  
 She is robed [robbed] of her virtue, she's thrown on the town.  
 She has carriages and jewels and servants so gay.  
 All tell her she's kept and she bears her proud sway.

Jacobsen must have forgotten the rest of the poem at the moment. Some pages later in his memo book the following two lines appear without comment. They apparently are the finally remembered couplet ending the verse:

Through envy they beg her downfall to tell  
 The village born beauty here ranges a bell.

Apparently Billy C. Livingston had left for greener pastures with some of the \$200 dollars in his pocket because his name is no longer mentioned in the memo book. The three remaining frontiersmen stocked up at Platt and Ferris, outfitters, who sold them 200 pounds of flour, \$7.00; 52 pounds bacon, \$5.20; two pounds yeast powder, \$.80; one pound tea, \$1.00; and one pound tobacco, \$1.00.

The routine of the horse-catchers evidently required no literary comment through July 22, when Jacobsen was in town again getting more supplies, including two dozen cans of corn from Haas and Per, merchants. Riding back, he again began his coded entries:

[July 23] Work, dinner, no supper with Jerry's outfit, he gave me a dog.

[July] 24th, Saddled up Bessy. Run a bunch of cattle off. Went over to Jerry's camp and took a look at his mustangs.

25th, Got up between sunup and noon, saddled Bessie, moved camp and got back to camp in time for supper. Frank's battle mare had a colt last night.

26th, Frank and I took a spin down the range to find a band [of] horses. Thad got to camp from Sidney.

[No date] Run horses till broke wind, captured a mustang stud.

The boys of Willow Creek<sup>5</sup> evidently thought they had another \$200 dollar horse and headed for Sidney to make a sale:

[No date] Started for Sidney with a band of wild horses. Got blown sand between teeth. Got there and penned them. Got a quart and a half of oil from the dentist and went back on the range. [No date] Been hunting all day, Killed one antelope so that I am now eating.

[No date] In camp, had a row with little Frank about the horses. Cattle been in our waterhole, muddied it up so it was not fit to use to get dinner with.

[No date] Started off the range with the horses. Got to Jewett Buff ranch, horses run, stampeded, Thad and I followed them.

[No date] Got to camp in the morning, I ran the horses in the morning and Thad in the afternoon. Two cowboys from Allen's ranch took dinner with us.

[No date] Been hauling the horses around camp all day. Two played out. Thad found his quart. Rained last night, rain pretty near blowed \_\_\_\_\_.

[No date] Horses played out. Hunted antelope all afternoon, did not kill any, devilish tired I tell you what.

The method used in catching wild horses was simple—if a horseman was young enough to stand a lot of riding, and was patient. After locating a band of horses, the animals were "walked" down by steadily pursuing them and allowing them neither rest nor a chance to water. Men working in shifts kept pressure on nervous animals until they became groggy and dispirited. When reduced to a semblance of manageability, they could be driven in. Careful to avoid provoking an all-out runaway, the mustanger hazed the animals into a circular pattern that was never too far from his base. Where Jacobsen's animals were held when they were broken down is uncertain because he mentions no corral. They may have used a gully or box canyon, but more likely they just roped the worn-out animals and hobbled them. If they did any gentling, it likely was limited to halter breaking. Actual saddle breaking was left to some iron-spined specialist in Sidney or elsewhere. A few days starvation further reduced a pony's will to resist as it became a bit more accustomed to humans. Having no facility to feed the captured horses, the mustangers usually ran them in within a few days—thus the numerous trips to town. Unfortunately for the business, the temptations of Sidney evidently worked against the accumulation of capital.

August, Friday [1], in camp, Thad after horses second day. Saturday, horses lost, too foggy to find them, all in camp. Sunday, so foggy can't find saddle horses. My turn to chase wild horses. Monday, slept on a stone, willpel [?] could not find the horses in the morning and came back to camp.

Tuesday [August 4], Thad lost [them] and no more started.

[No date] Started a new find, run the H from the \_\_\_\_\_ to the \_\_\_\_\_ [words omitted]. Got to camp in the morning, Thad relieved me.

[No date] Frank out with the horses, I went in the afternoon and found him.

[No date] I started the horses from camp in the morning, stayed out all night, got back to camp in the morning, Thad relieved me. Frank on way going to Sidney.

[No date] Thad out with the horses, [word omitted] killed an antelope.

[No date] Three weeks from Sidney, horses caught Lee cattle camp, forty-five in camp today.

While in town the young cowboy witnessed the example of rough, immediate frontier justice.

[No date] All night with mule skimmers. Saturday, rode to Sidney and saw a man hung, to late for trial. Sunday, attended the lynchers trial on vohlas [voila?] and lorm-s [?]. Monday, g[ot] [suppl]ies, [sold] wild horses. Tuesday, started and Wednesday, got there.

In a clear script Bob then wrote, "No matter how well you do always strive to do better. They are the rich who can boast a good character and a good degree of health." The lesson of the hanging was not lost on the impressionable 22-year-old cowboy. He wrote in code, "It shall always be my will from this day on to never contract a bet with anyone."<sup>6</sup>

[August] 28th, Moved camp to a lake down the range. Went hunting Kalles [antelope] until . . . shot at four times then had to run it down to get it. 28th, Started down to range to find band of horses to run.

29th, Found them, run them until noon and lost them, came back to camp.

30th, Thad started out to run up a band and start it. Frank and I in camp. Thad got fill without finding any horses.

31st, I started a find, run them till sundown and Thad relieved me.

September [1st], 1879. Thad out after the band, been out all night, came in at noon, band lost. He found four branded ones branded with a T [rocking tee] and belong to a man over to Bushnell, a Dave Fohrbottom has name.<sup>7</sup>

2nd, Started out to hunt coulees [colts?] could not find it, came back to camp.

3rd, Thad started out to find a band, Frank and I had a visitor for dinner from Ringernones camp. Frank killed two antelope from the teepee.

4th, Thad got back about noon. I started, looked that afternoon, stopped with Jerry all night.

5th, Hunted all day, found nothing came back to camp.

6th, Thad started to band with the run mare, got a chance in the evening, I run them until in the night and lost them.

7th, Could not find them, came back to camp and Thad started to find another band.

8th, Thad out all night, came in at noon, I started out.

9th, I started a band at noon, followed all day.

10th, Came in at noon, Thad started run, wind blowed up and blowed like hell all night.

11th, Thad came in after noon, I run them till evening, got a change and run them till dark.

12th, I run them all day, came to camp in the evening and Thad started out after them.

13th, Thad came back in the morning, could not find them and we hunted all day for them.

14th, Hunted all day for the mustangs, could not find them.

15th, Was the same, found four more T branded.

16th, Started off the range for Sidney, got to Jewetts bull ranch.

17th, Came to Sidney, had a buggy ride with Nancy to the buggy ———.

18th, Wished.



*Above: Wildcat Hills area near Pumpkin Creek Valley. (Courtesy of Nebraska Game and Parks Commission). . . Below: Items in Bob Jacobsen's leather wallet.*



- 19th, Sported around. Wild horses got away in the evening.  
 20th, Run them all day to get them back, failed.  
 21st, Thad and I started out on the range to run them down.  
 22nd, Got out on the range.  
 23rd, Saddle horses gone, hunted them afoot all day, could not find them.  
 24th, Hunted all day for them, three of them came to camp in the evening.  
 25th, I looked for the 5 mustangs and Thad looked for the saddle horses.  
 26th, Both looked for saddle horse, had a share of the ague, in to Sidney.  
 27th, Thad looked for them, I was sick abed all day.  
 28th, Thad went to Sidney without success.  
 29th, He came back.  
 30th, Thad and I hunted all day and [did] not find them.  
 October 1879 1st, Thad started to Allens ranch to look for horses and back.  
 2nd, Got back about noon [from] the upper end of the range.  
 3rd, I got back.  
 4th, hunted up and started to ranch. Nancy back and we had a hell of a time.  
 Drove all the way to Sidney.  
 5th, Settling up and got ready to go to Deadwood.

On that spare note ended James Jacobsen's summer of running wild horses. There is no final tally of horses caught or calculations of the summer's earnings, or its division into shares. Perhaps an explanation is contained in the cryptic calculations he made sometime during the summer. On a random page he figured "17,865 antelope at .275 multiplied to 4,912,875, cash for antelope. 879,468,897, 621,948,268 wild horses multiplied by 33 . . . \$29,616,473,621,948,268 cash received for wild horses by James Jacobsen, poor fool."

Later on he wrote "time is golden" and a couple of pages later considered the purchase of Websters Business Manual, cloth-bound; or Websters Practical Letters, clothbound, which would cost 75 cents.

If there had been profit, it had all gone somewhere; the night life of Sidney might be the answer. The town boasted at the peak of the Black Hills trade<sup>8</sup> twenty-three saloons, which never closed. Soldiers from Ft. Sidney, miners, bullwhackers, green-horns, cowboys, mustangers, buffalo hunters, wolfers, and legitimate businessmen as well as bunko artists, gamblers, and con-men, not to mention outright outlaws, made up the motley population of Sidney; and there were the shop-worn women who had followed the railroad construction of the latter 1860's and were now back to stay. It was the usual colorful complement of a boom town, and a young man either was repelled or got into the spirit of things. Although Bob had a Nancy in Sidney, and a Kate in the Black Hills, he retained a delightful innocence in his



Certificate presented to Bob Jacobsen as a boy by schoolteacher Mollie F. Hess in Saline County, 1865.

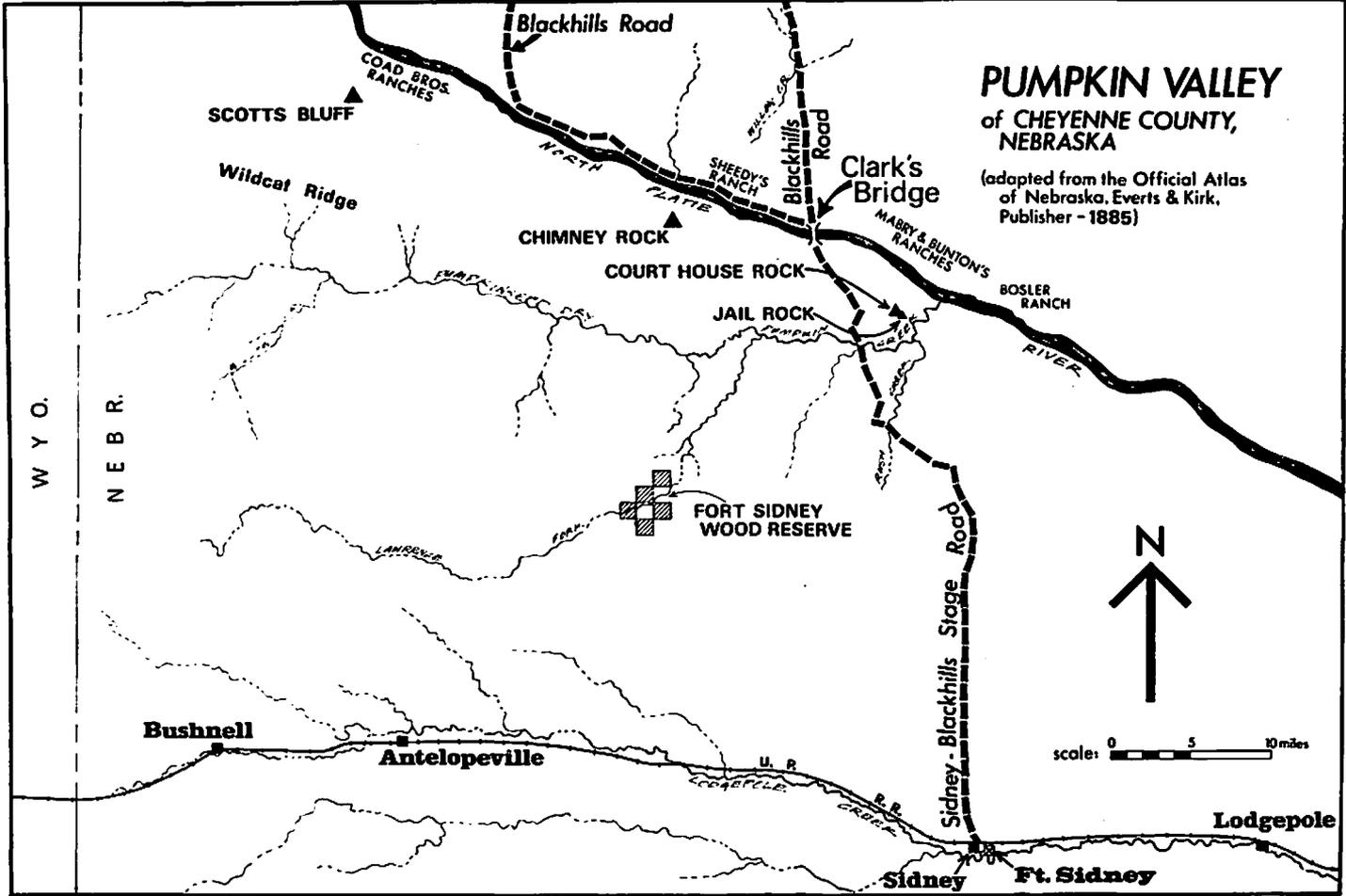
jottings. One time he took a moment to write "YY U R YY U B I C U R YY R U 4 ME," and another time wrote:

|      |      |     |      |      |    |     |      |     |      |      |         |
|------|------|-----|------|------|----|-----|------|-----|------|------|---------|
| Read | see  | →   | that | me   | →  | but | not  | →   | my   | got. |         |
| Down | will |     | I    | love |    | if  | have |     | love | for  |         |
| and  | you  |     | love | you  |    | for | love |     | for  | be   |         |
| see  | →    | and | you  | →    | if | me  | →    | you | you  | →    | I shall |

Either at the beginning or end of 1879 he was at "Cheyenne [River] 30 miles from Custer enroute for that place," and jotted this billet-doux in his memo book, "My dearest Kate may long life happiness and prosperity rest and abide with you now and forever is my prayer."

A disaster in the Black Hills somewhat revitalized the bull-freighting business out of Sidney in the fall of 1879. Deadwood suffered a bad fire, and destroyed goods needed to be replaced. Jacobsen began work November 3 for an outfit which started south from Deadwood on November 9: "[November] Tenth, camped at Bull Dog ranch. Eleventh at six miles above ranch. Twelfth at Spring Creek. Thirteenth at Battlecreek. Fourteenth at Buffalo (Horse) head camp. Fifteenth, Cheyenne River. Sixteenth, Horsehead. Seventeenth, French Andies. Eighteenth, laid over on Running Water [the Niobrara River in Nebraska]."

By December 1 he was back in Sidney but two days later



commenced work for George Moore and headed back up the trail toward Deadwood. Jacobsen mentioned the menu of his Christmas dinner, eaten presumably somewhere in Dakota: "Pork and beans, fried beef and canned corn, stewed peaches, baking powder bread, and coffee." It was shared by his old pal C. W. Long. On New Year's Day he was in bull camp, and a Mrs. Barton, traveling with the freighters, cooked apple dumplings for supper.

Bob Jacobsen's tally book ends there. Its pencil-written pages worn from handling, are almost illegible; there are blank pages which he never filled. The Chicago and North Western Railroad pushed track to Pierre, South Dakota, in October, 1880, and the freighting center shifted from Sidney to Pierre. After 1881 gold shipments were sent to river ports on the Missouri and grass began to grow over the Sidney-Deadwood Trail. But new ranges were opening up in western and northern Montana and Jacobsen moved there for employment.

A bullwhip—15 to 18 feet long, 2 inches in diameter at its thickest, 4-foot handle, a "popper" at its outer end—was indispensable to a bullwhacker. The 2 x 8" buckskin popper produced an explosive crack more convincing to oxen than the actual lash. Somewhere near Bozeman, Montana, in 1885, Jacobsen was struck in the eye by a popper and sustained an injury that caused his death at the age of 29.

E. M. Gardner, who ran a real estate-insurance business in Bozeman with former schoolteacher W. W. Wylie, handled the dead cowboy's estate, such as it was. He sent a trunk to Bob's<sup>9</sup> father which contained his personal things, including the wallet. Gardner reported that there were two notes outstanding. One was for two mules Bob had sold a man. The other, although reduced to \$125.00, was considered uncollectable. Gardner mentioned that he could get \$7.50 for Bob's chaps. That was Bob Jacobsen's net worth after ten years of cowboying. Gardner out of civility wrote the elder Jacobsen that the ranchers were a bit concerned about the weather: "There is a regular blizzard in progress while I write and I guess our winter has come to stay. There is a great uneasiness among our cattle growers on account of the short grass for the coming winter." Herds had increased until the range was crowded and overgrazed. That winter decimated some herds, and a cowboy named Russell up in the

Judith Basin drew an emaciated steer on a postcard labeled the "last of the 5,000." The disastrous winters of the latter 1880's marked the end of free-range cattle operations—and the era of the free-roaming cowboy.

### NOTES

1. The memo books, letters, and the effects of James Robert Jacobsen mentioned in this article are owned by his niece, Mrs. Irene Jackson, Hillsboro, Oregon.

2. For a good account of the life of the bullwhacker, see William E. Lass, *From the Missouri to the Great Salt Lake, An Account of Overland Freighting* (Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1972), 8-9, 17-24.

3. These were points along the Sidney-Black Hills Trail as the train moved toward Sidney.

4. Jacobsen has apparently confused E. S. Newman with Albert Newman. E. S. Newman was a rancher; Albert Newman, born in Hungary, was a Sidney grocer.

5. There is a short watercourse on 1885 maps north of the Platte on the Sidney Road, though it is almost certain this refers to the headwaters of the Pumpkinseed.

6. Violence was not infrequent during these years at Sidney. See A. T. Andreas, proprietor, *History of the State of Nebraska* (Chicago: Western Historical Co., 1882), 537. In the chapter on Cheyenne County, the incident Jacobsen witnessed is not mentioned, though the lynching of Charles Reed in May, 1879, merits a few lines. This Andreas sentence sums up the others: "It would be unnecessary to give an account of the lynchings, as these affairs are similar in detail."

7. Last switch on the Union Pacific before reaching Wyoming.

8. See Norbert R. Manken, "The Sidney-Black Hills Trail," *Nebraska History*, XXX (September, 1949), 203-225.

9. Bob's father, Oscar A. Jacobsen, was born near Dresden, Ohio, in 1839. Shortly after his marriage to Azuba Thompson in the early 1850's, he moved to LaSalle County, Illinois, where the couple's first four children, William, Sarah, James Robert, and Margaret, were born. About 1860 the family resettled in Saline County, Nebraska. Here four more children, Henry, Amy, John, and Ralph, were added to the family.

John Jacobsen, Oscar's fourth son and cowboy Bob's younger brother, married Hilda Bahr on January 11, 1899, and produced four children: Arthur, Ethyl, Mark, and Irene. Following her mother Hilda's death in 1904, Irene Jacobsen was raised in Oregon by an aunt, Sarah Jacobsen Fair. Irene's marriage to John Ray Jackson of North Plains, Oregon, produced one son, author John Charles Jackson, born in 1931.