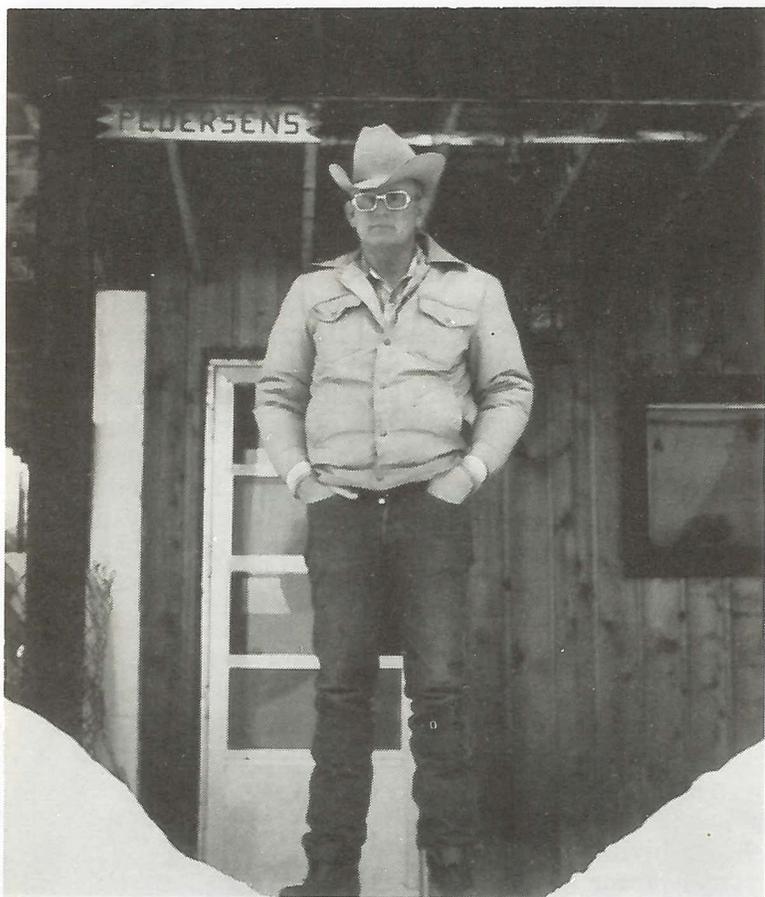


Ray Pedersen Brand Inspector

by Guy Stees, Debi Davidson, and Darolyn Robson



Branding has been a part of ranching for many years. The earliest recorded laws for branding in the United States were in Connecticut on Feb. 5, 1644. The earliest effort to record brands in Colorado was made in 1867 by the Colorado Stock Growers Association.

Last winter Guy Stees got interested in brand inspection. Since he already knew about the branding process, he decided to find out about the inspecting side of it. He called Ray Pedersen, local brand inspector, and Guy and I interviewed him. Guy graduated in 1978 so Darolyn and I completed the story.

Ray Pedersen was born in 1925 in Springer, New Mexico. From there his ranching family moved to a small town near Trinidad, Colorado called Model. Then they moved to Brush and from there to Hudson. Ray's school experience in Hudson was very unusual. "I went to school there for a time in Hudson and that was kind of a fun deal where we lived 'cause the house was in one school district and the rest of the out buildings were in another school district. I had to go half a year in one and the other half in the other one. We lived a mile from the one school so I rode a horse there. Well then the second semester I would ride the school bus and go to this other school and it was twenty-three miles away. That was the year that I was in the first or second grade." Then they moved to Keensburg and then back to Brush where they ranched. "After sixth grade we moved back to Brush and Dad went to farmin'. We farmed there for a year or two and then moved to a ranch south of Brush.

"You ought to rake up and brand them late calves."

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“Things were quite a little different when I grew up. We never owned a tractor and we worked the land with horses. We worked sixteen head of horses. At that time we were raising corn, alfalfa and a few sugar beets. All the haying and cultivating we did was with horses. Each of us would take a four horse team in the field 'cause it would take four to pull one of the cultivators and it took eight head of horses to pull one of the two row listers and of course we'd use horse equipment to hay with. We had to borrow money 'cause we had to have enough grain to feed the horses, until we got a crop. Everything else we needed we raised, 'cause we couldn't afford grub and groceries. Other things we grew in our own garden. It was quite a little different than you younger folks know about.



Pedersen

“We found that the outfit just wasn't big enough so we moved over here. I bought this place that I'm livin' at now in September of 1953, moved over here in February, and, of course, we've been here ever since.

“In 1964 I went to work in Yampa as a special. A special is when you work under a senior brand inspector. And at that time Chuck Maddock was like the supervisor or foreman. You'll have an area where there's not a lot of livestock then you'll have a special that works part time for part time wages. I worked that way until, I can't remember exactly, but I think it was about 1968 or '69. Then Clarence quit down here and I went to work in Steamboat. When we sold the ranch down below here I went to work full time and now I have a special workin' for me.”

Mr. Pederson then told us about his job as a brand inspector and how to inspect a brand. “It depends on how well a cow is branded. One of the regulations says that they have to be penned or confined. There are a lot of pens I don't think are suitable. Suppose you have worked one man's cattle before, and you have an idea of what his

brand looks like and what kind of a job he's done. If a man did a sorry job last year, he's damn sure done a sorry job again this year. The way I generally work them is, I just string 'em by, not too fast, so I can see them, when the last cow is through and I have counted them and know how many there are. Suppose you have five brands in that bunch, you can count off everyone of them or you can tally them. If you do that, they have to go by pretty slow to come up with an accurate amount even if you are really good. You can't have five brands and 300 head of cattle and get the right tally.

“You can really mess it up if they have brands on both sides. Then you have to work both sides which is a good idea anyway because Colorado doesn't demand any position for the brand. Suppose you have a cow go by and you're not exactly sure of what you saw. The best thing to do is stop that cow and turn her around to where you can look at both sides and she may have three brands on one side. What you have to determine is—does she have the right brand? If it's the same as the rest of them, it will probably be in the same place. But if it's a cow the guy bought someplace it's gonna make a difference. If the cows he raised on his place are branded on the shoulder, the cow he bought may be branded on the hind leg down low or up high. I worked for a guy that had a family where everybody had their own brands in the same bunch of cattle and it will drive you plumb stark, ravin' nuts cause you have to keep them all in your head.



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“My favorite way to work them is in an alley with a pen at the end and a guy working with you. If you see one you want to look at, he can stop it and turn it around, so you can look at it, or catch some that you need to catch to make sure everything is all right which is what you are being paid to do.

“Most of the large ranches with a lot of cattle brand with a one iron brand. Because of so many cattle it’s easier that way. When people use a branding iron too much it gets worn down real thin and sharp. It doesn’t leave much of a scar so it’s hard to see, especially when you put it on a calf. In the fall when the hair gets long, it’s almost impossible to see. What they need to do is get a wider piece of iron to make their branding irons. As far as size is concerned, I like a big brand. When I put a brand on, I like it so I can see it and you can too. One thing most people are afraid of is that it hurts the cattle, and it does. It hurts them if the iron is too cold ’cause you have to work it over longer. I also think you can have it too hot. If it’s too hot you not only burn the letter on, you burn the area around it. Then you have a sore that’s bad all summer. When you burn through the hide you have a sore and it gets full of maggots just like when you dehorn. Then you have to rope and doctor them. Every time you do this they lose weight and it causes a lot of strain on the critter. One feller will burn through the hair, the other will burn through the hide and you have a raw sore.



**They just string 'em by,
not too fast.**

Our cattle business has changed, our small ranch type operations we had a number of years ago have gone by the wayside. For years everyone up and down the road had a cow-calf operation. Now most of them have went to steers. The reason being labor. One man can irrigate the meadows and run a lot of steers, 500 to 600 head. Where if you are running a cow-calf outfit, your having to winter those cattle involves haying and a lot more expense than just running a bunch of steers. This had been the trade since all of these developers have bought all this land and it is available in the summer for pasture but not for winter. A lot of people that own cattle are not really cow people. At a lot of brandings they turn it into a celebration with a couple jugs and two or three cases of beer. All the people go out to help brand and you’ve got a sorry crew and sorrier branding. This is an important day ’cause you want that brand to be on there so that the cow or calf is gonna come home. A lot of times they’ll get the brand on backwards. I know a guy with a backwards CV Bar. First time I saw it the C was straight up with big V next to it and a bar underneath. That ain’t even his brand. The next year he put it on really big, but the letters were still wrong. I told the guy to write the brand on his hand so he could get it right.”

When asked about what he thought about electric branding irons, “Well I think they’re probably a good thing but there’s so many places that wouldn’t be close to electricity. Well it does work better because you get your letters situated and most of the brands are more than one letter and they’re close together because they have to be close to make them work right.”

How do you get a good brand? “I think if the right kind of combination of letters and the right kind of condition of the cattle, if they’re dry and it’s the right time of the year. There’s a lot of



“Of course it hurts them”

things involved to get a good brand. First thing you want them dry and you know it depends on the age of the animal because a lot of those old, old cows have grease on them and sand on that old tail. You could get the best iron you've got on them and it won't even go through their hide or you could take a yearlin' and it would be altogether different.



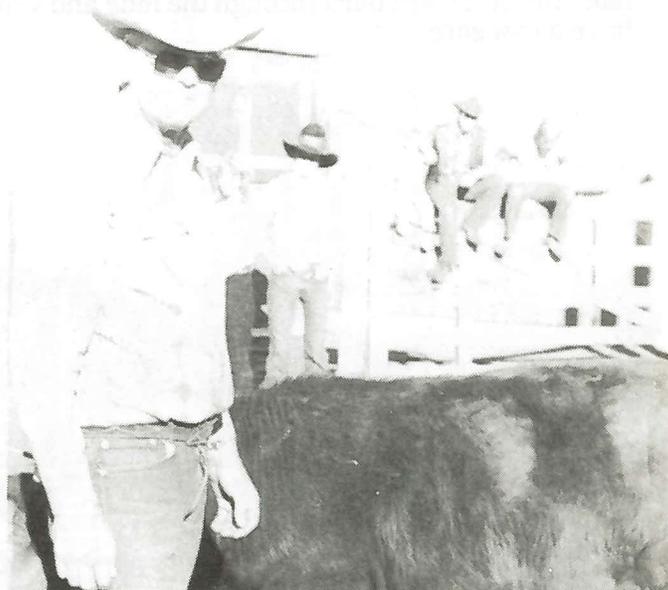
Some have to be clipped before inspection.

"One fella I worked for one time had a good big ranch and he bought this brand 'cause it was an easy brand to put on and he was brandin' his cattle. He had about 600 cattle and it was a backwards seven. It was put on his steers wrong and he asked me what he could do. Well, I don't think there is anyway to rub it out, I told him, so he went down to Denver and registered it the other way. What could happen is, say you get that letter on wrong and you've got these other combinations of letters with it, and that brand belongs to somebody else. Suppose this guy comes driving into the yard and says 'I want that there cow, it's got my brand', and it is his brand and he could claim it. I haven't run across anything like that, but we have had duplications.

"One fella brands with a V with two slashes. This is registered in Utah but he runs cattle in Colorado, and a lot of his cattle are sold in Ft. Collins. A number of times they've stopped the money in Ft. Collins because the brand is registered in Utah. The man that is stopping the cattle is just doing his job, seeing that the man's brands are on his cattle and they go where they are supposed to go."

Do all cattle have to be inspected? "The way the law is written, all stock must be inspected whether they're branded or not. One of the laws that has just been put into effect in the last few years is a 'no brand' calf inspection. At one time there was a bunch of high school kids, years ago, over here around Greeley. They would drive

around and pick up the baby calves out of the pastures along the roads. A lot of the ranchers calve in the pastures there. They would haul these calves down to the sale barn and sell them. It got to be a pretty big deal. They finally caught some of these kids doing this. Since then they have put in this 'no brand' calf inspection. What this law means is, that when I go to your place and inspect a bunch of cattle and there is any where from 5 to 100 of these calves that are not branded, then I charge you mileage and all kinds of things. What they're trying to do by this is stop ranchers from letting these calves go on unbranded. Anyone can claim an unbranded cow or calf and I can't prove it doesn't belong to them, but maybe the neighbor over there thinks this unbranded cow or calf belongs to him. What they're trying to do is penalize them so that they will brand these late calves that aren't normally branded. The brand must be on the calves long enough that they have begun to peel, otherwise the brand inspector will charge you mileage. Let's say you live over here in Breckenridge and I drive from Oak Creek and charge you 15 cents a mile both ways. That costs you a bunch. It would make you think you oughta rake up and brand them late calves."



It depends on how well a cow is branded

Is cattle rustling still a problem and how do you catch a rustler? "Red handed! To prove rustling or to prove guilt of some fellow, suppose you're going out here and you pick up a guy who's got his neighbor's cows, and you stop him at the sale barn. You say, 'Here you got 10 of your neighbor's cows, let's see some papers to prove that you've got them'. He can't prove that.

