

# ANTON KLINE

"I'VE BEEN A STRAIGHT COWBOY ALL MY LIFE."

BY GRACE MAY & BARBARA MAY

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Quarter circle K K was his  
cattle brand.



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Circle bar was his  
sheep brand.

Anton Kline on Deep Creek Ranch in his younger days.

"I was born in Flagstaff, Arizona, in the year 1898. While we were there my father ran livestock and a saloon before the Santa Fe Railroad went through. They freighted potatoes from Flagstaff to Phoenix through the Oak Creek Canyon or Caseur Mountain.

"In 1902, we moved to Africa where they was putting a water line in Aldwell North at that time, and they was working all the Blacks all on slave chain. All they wore was a breach cloth, and all they fed 'em was a little chunk of black bread. It was run by the English at that time, and they worked them fellas with black snakes. I remember that!

"After coming and staying one winter in Boulder, we moved to Steamboat in 1904. My dad ran the Capital Saloon over in \*Brooklyn from 1904-1911. Although he didn't really enjoy running the saloon, he did make money. And at that time there was five saloons there and at my dad's saloon there was no women allowed in that place," he said very seriously. "But the other saloons had women in them. But not in my dad's place. They couldn't come in that door, and the men had to be 21 to get in that place."

\* Brooklyn was the saloon and red light district across the railroad tracks from Steamboat Spgs.

When we (Grace and Barb) asked him to tell us some stories about the saloon he got a big smile and his face lit up. "I'll tell ya about one, when the railroad came in, there was a Swede held my dad up. Me and my brother would have to clean the saloon after school. We come home and were sweeping and cleaning the spittoons and stuff like that. This Swede came in and held him up. My dad said, 'The safe is open, help yourself.' He did and he went and got the money sack, and my dad said, 'The doors are open out back of the bar.' And he took all the money, put it in a sack, walked around, but the doors were swinging doors and my dad knew when he got to the swinging doors that man would have to turn. I don't know where he had this gun, or how he got it, but he shot that man, just blowed his hand all to pieces, walked over and grabbed the money and said 'Now get out of here!' That's no joke. It really scared me. I was standing at the end of the bar, just a kid yet, and my brother took off, he wouldn't stay. But I was too scared, I couldn't run 'cause I was too scared." As he concluded his thrilling story we all laughed along with him.

"They used to have that Strawberry Festival, ya know, that's before they had the 4th of July. That happened in July. We'd all round up and all the cowpokes in the county would come and my dad would give 'em, for the best ride, a barrel of beer. They just rolled the barrel of beer out. Back then they didn't have chutes or nothing and you rode a bronc 'till he stopped bucking, not no three seconds. I've seen thousands of head of horses come there, down by the depot. Back then that was all open. That was way before railroad time. They had some celebration, I'll tell ya. Lasted a week.

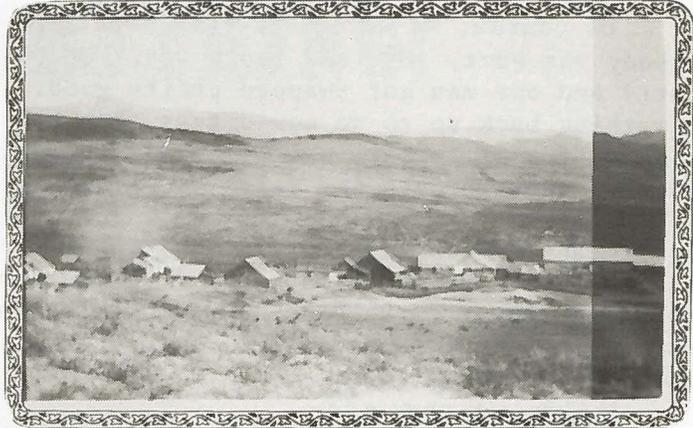
"Over in Brooklyn my father and Charlie Neiman, the old-time sheriff, they'd go over to the hill, over by the fairgrounds and shoot practice two and three times a week. And they sat up a card that way (he showed us with the palm of his hand facing us). They would shoot at the ace of spades, never tearing that card up. They could shoot every bullet right through that ace. Either one of them. They'd stand the card edgewise in a dirt bank and be able to split it. And they wouldn't bring that gun up to their face, that was all hip shooting."



Above- Anton in his middle age standing outside.

Left- Anton explaining about how his father and Charlie Neiman practiced shooting.

As he tells us this, he very proudly shows us his favorite possession, his father's gun. "This gun," he says, "was my father's gun in the Canadian Mounties. He was mustered out of there. The Canadian government mustered him out for 25 years." (Meaning, he served for 25 years in the Northwest before retiring.) When we asked him if there were notches in his .45, he claimed, "No, there's a lot of writing on the handle of the gun," but he would not cure our curiosity by showing the history of the gun. And his wife Margaret chimed in, "He wouldn't part with it."



Above- Deep Creek Ranch, Where Anton has  
ranchd all his life.

Left- Anton proudly showing off his fathers  
"45" used in the Canadian Mounties.

"While we were at Brooklyn, I killed my first deer right there at Steamboat on the sulphur cave. The first deer I killed was when I was nine years old. You know where that sulphur cave is right there, to the left of that cave was where I killed it. I couldn't do nothing about it so I went and told my father at the saloon, and he got it.

"Then we moved to Deep Creek in the spring of 1911. The first day of March," he recalls as we watch him light his pipe. "We stayed right there and I wound up with the ranch.

"My dad bought it before we moved from Boulder over to Steamboat. Then he took a desert claim of 320 acres, and I homesteaded, and my brother homesteaded. It's all one ranch now. My dad started homesteading in 1903. Soon the family got age on us to homestead. Some of us did, some of us didn't. I decided to in the year 1921. We made a pretty good ranch out of it."

Then his wife suddenly reminded him of his incident with the first sheep drive he went on, and Anton proceeded to tell us his story. "Well, I wouldn't have made it if it hadn't been for a young man named Haber Johnson. A man was going to kill him there at Blue Mountain but I stopped that. I pulled down on this fella, and I said, 'Drop your guns!' and he looked at me and his gun went down. I said to throw it on the ground, he did; I saved that boy's life. They had a big trial and it's recorded at the Craig courthouse. It was over sheep getting on the cattle land and this man didn't like it. He was hard-boiled, he thought he was, but he wasn't as hard as he thought. Yeah, that was the first herd of sheep that came into Routt County."

"How many sheep did you run?" we asked curiously.

"Usually two herds in the summertime. The first herd was the biggest. It was around 3,800. But cattle was before that. From 500-600 every summertime. Steers--just like a lot of them now. I'll tell ya about the last big herd of cattle that was run through the old beef trail that came out of Slater Park and California Park. That herd of cattle was stampeded, all 6,400 of them. And there was 400 head of them steers killed on Rimrock and Pilot Knob."

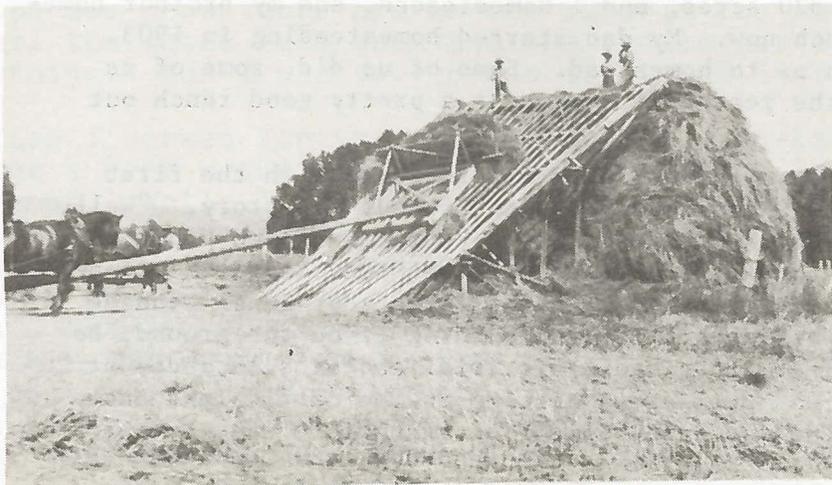
Of course, we were concerned about the situation and wondered if anybody was hurt. His sad reply was, "Oh yeah! There were lots of men (hurt) and one man got swapped pretty good. We was two weeks rounding that thing back up so we could take them back in. Before that most all that stuff went to Rawlins. I always run cattle or livestock of some kind all down through the years."

Because Anton had done so many things in his life, we asked him what he liked best and what did he like to consider himself as. He gave us a wonderful answer by telling us with a broad smile, "I've been a straight cowboy all my life. That's all I've done. I've rode a horse a million times and all my life."

He went on to tell of an experience in his youth, "One time in New Orleans, I come back to St. Louis and had money to get hold of Dad, but not enough to get back home on, so I wrote a letter to him and I got the letter back, you know what was on that letter? 'You know how ya got there, that's the way back.' He didn't send me nothin'. That's the best lesson I learned in my life, and I was never broke anymore."

"My mother (Clara) died of the flu epidemic in 1918 at the age of 43, so my father had to raise my four brothers, two sisters and me until he passed away with tick fever (transmitted by the bite of Rocky Mountain Spotted ticks)."

As the interview went on, we wondered how Anton and Margaret had met. They said they were married on the first day of May, 1933. Margaret then told us, "In 1919 my dad moved here and was manager of the Dawson Ranch (now Ferry Carpenter's ranch). I was only 12 years old then and Anton came to work for my daddy stacking hay in the summertime. That's where I first met him. He called me 'stool pigeon' because he ran around with my older sister."



Left- Dawson Ranch- A pole stacker, Beaver Slide, stacking loose hay up with a plunger.

Anton, laughing quite loudly, included, "No, we'd get out of sight and she'd go tell her mother. Stool Pigeon!" We all laughed at this situation and his wife finished her story. "They'd go to the garden and pull carrots and turnips and eat 'em all up. We were married later on in Steamboat. Then we came back and my sister met us in Mt. Harris in a wagon because there was snow up there and it was really deep. We spent the night on mom and daddy's place on Wolf Creek, and it was some trip, let me tell ya. That was our six-mile honeymoon out to our ranch. We lived there 'till '34 and then we sold our livestock."



Anton has a fabulous rock collection that he has been collecting for 60 years. It contains several arrowheads from many tribes, pottery, old Indian baskets, and many other artifacts. His collection not only has common objects but rare ones. Dinosaur gizzard stones, Meteorite, (one of 4 found), and many others. In the picture, Anton and Margaret holding some book ends made of oil shale.

Anton proceeded to tell us why he sold his livestock by saying in a very serious tone, "You can't feed \$50 worth of hay to a \$25 or \$32 cow. You can't do it. It's a hard situation. Take the very best cow you get is \$90. Now there you are, you got that cow to winter. You get \$90 for that calf and you got to pay \$50 a ton for hay and it takes two tons to winter that cow. You're out \$10 on the taxes and the interest on your money. You haven't made a dime and you've lost money. You can't make it, either, not on that conclusion."

This led to asking Anton what prices were like during his years of ranching. "They ran about \$20 a head. That's about the average of it, and then at the Depression it was worse. It was '29 when that happened, and I had to sell cattle for \$12 a head and then a lot of them for \$1 a head. Sheep would sell for \$2 a head and then when you'd kill 'em, nobody would want to take a piece of mutton. There was just one man on Deep Creek, I called everybody up. I killed 200 head, skinned 'em, and put the hides on the fence. That was it. Yes, it hit us pretty hard and you can bet it took us a long time to recover. To show you the difference, in '29 I had 1800

head of ewes and had 308 head of cattle, and it took me from then to '34 to come out from under it, and I didn't owe a whole lot of money either. I owed \$1,500 and it took me from 1929-1934 and I couldn't have done it without the sheep. The sheep got me out because I just had to give them cattle away. That hurts, ya know. Well, just like right now."

Mrs. Kline included, "We were going to leave and sell the ranch in '34, but we decided to keep it."

The Klins moved to Hayden in 1944 where Anton mined in Harrison Mine for 14 years. They are still living in Hayden today. Their daughter, Dolly, and her husband, Norman Frentress, ran the Deep Creek ranch for 17 years and now their son Tim Frentress and his wife occupy the ranch.

Before we had to leave their friendly hospitality and cozy home we asked Mr. Kline what he thought about life today,

"You've got to live up with the modern times. You can't go back. But I'll say this, I'm glad I lived when I did. I've seen right from the grass roots to the present time, and I worked with it, I was out with it. I didn't sit still and nobody should. If you can't keep up with the modern times you better get out. I'm glad I've lived as long as I have to see this develop. When it's all said and done, this is the richest part of country in the United States right here. The young people around don't realize that. But you just stop and think about it. This coal field in here is over 300 miles wide and it runs to Montana. In another week they'll have 2,000 more men in there. This week they're putting 800 men to work. Out of that 800 men how many people are represented? Say there's three to a family. You know where that company is going to go. That's 2,000-3,000 more people coming in. But this is going to be a labor town. The labor is going to land right here in Hayden. And the towns around here can't keep up with the influx of labor. What are they going to do with it? They got no place for 'em!



Left- Men working on the Moffat Tunnel.

Anton also worked on other roads and mining projects in the county.

"And it don't stop just here," Anton continued. "It goes clear to Grand Junction. That oil shale is going to go, they'll open all that up. They're putting that railroad in down the Mount Streeter, so you just put it all together, there is going to be lots of people in here. Steamboat don't want it, they'll fight it and so will Hayden and Craig. They don't want it to happen, but it's going to. And it's all going to be big money, awful big money. There's going to be millions and millions of dollars. But the next five years you won't know it. That's all right, you can't keep progress back. It just won't stay, it won't work that way."



Anton telling Grace and Barb about what he thinks of modern times.

Anton  
By Bill May

Ton's Dad came to Steamboat in the year nineteen O four,  
And put a saloon sign over his Brooklyn door.  
Then he moved to the ranch in nineteen eleven  
This ranch was on Deep Creek - the outskirts of heaven.

The range wars were almost over 'tween sheepmen and waddies,  
So Kline (Sr.) decided now was the time to raise woolies.  
He took Anton Jr. to Utah where they purchased a band,  
Which they started trailing homeward by the long drive over land.

Anton Sr. died on this trip, from the dread spotted tick fever.  
Leaving young Tony alone, with the sheep to deliver.  
It took months to get home, in all kinds of weather.  
After run-ins with the cow men and outlaws together.

Anton helped round up the last Texas steers,  
Of the big free range outfits in their dying years,  
To trail to Steamboat from the high summer grass,  
And put on Moffatt's railroad to go over the pass.

Anton loved nature, and grew up with the same  
Spending lots of time fishing and shooting big game,  
Marauding bears which bothered his sheep,  
Found "lead poison" by Anton came pretty cheap.  
Mining was another contribution he made  
Spending years of his life in the dark coal-mine cave.  
A quarter of a century mining "black gold"  
To develop Routt County to its highest goal.