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THE NATIONAL GAME AT CODY



Did a legendary Sandhills baseball game between the Spade and Diamond Bar ranches really take place in 1890? It turns out that a hilarious 1916 account of the game was based on real people and real events...with some improvements.

Anselmo baseball team, 1892.
NSHS RG2608:756

BY JOHN CURTIS JENKINS

With introduction and afterword

BY JOHN E. CARTER



Introduction: Getting Serious About Humor

Just why do we have humor? Do we really need it? It can be something of a nuisance, after all. This is a very serious world, filled with murder and mayhem, and most other forms of life on our shared planet seem to survive just dandy without the occasional belly laugh. Wouldn't it be more businesslike just to deal with life seriously?

Curiously, our ability to laugh is one thing all peoples of the world share. Across language, culture, geography, and time all human beings love to laugh. Is it possible that our sense of humor, like the thumb, is one of our biological advantages?

But the thumb helps us pick things up, and if we are to believe the anthropologists, this allowed us

to invent work and thus to become the race of driven psychotics that we are today. The giggle, however, does not help us drive a nail or stir a pot or calculate a trajectory. So just what do we do with humor?

Humor, first and foremost, helps us reconcile ourselves with a world that is not altogether friendly. You may have noticed that cycles of jokes blossom in times of disaster. I heard a particularly dark and really funny joke about the space shuttle *Challenger* the very next morning after it exploded. The joke had all of the sensitivity of a hand grenade, but when I heard it, I howled. I quickly phoned my friend Roger Welsch, a humor gourmet, and told him the joke. He, in turn, called Charles Kuralt in New York City and told it to him. Kuralt had already heard it. By the very next day after the catastrophe this joke had traveled from some unknown point of origin to both me in Nebraska and Charles Kuralt in New York.

Remarkably, while this story stays fresh in my mind, I cannot remember that joke for the life of me. Perhaps it vanished as my need, and the nation's need, faded. We say we "laugh in the face of danger," and indeed we do. It is one of the best ways of coping with those things that terrify us.

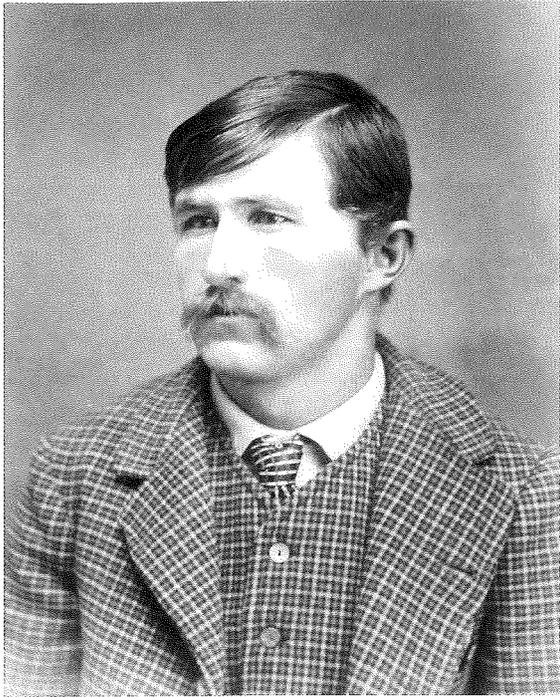
Secondly, humor lets us say the things that cannot otherwise be spoken. When scandal surrounded President Clinton after his indiscretion with Monica Lewinsky emerged, jokes were abundant. High-toned preachers who condemned from the pulpit did not carry half the moral weight of one good joke. In fact, the moralistic, better-than-thou protectors of public sensibilities were themselves spitted and roasted with laughter. The fool tells the monarch things that the wisest counselors dare not whisper.

Finally, we use humor to define ourselves. This story is one of the funniest thing I have ever read. It was written by a Nebraska journalist living in Neligh, whose use of humor is surgical. His narrative does have some basis in real life, but the events are not what is important. He paints real life, three dimensional characters into ludicrous situations, and in so doing reveals their own distinct humanity. There are neither heroes nor villains, only tricksters. It is quintessential Plains humor; laconic and self-effacing in the manner of Will Rogers. No anthropologist could so clearly identify Nebraska's cowboy culture.

In the end laughter is its own reward. And if you don't find a good laugh in what follows, you might want to check your pulse because I think you just might be dead.

Cattle rustling was a serious matter, but it inspired humorous stories. In 1904 photographer Solomon Butcher staged these photos of "Farmer 'Corn Tassel' whose cows always raised twin calves." In case the viewer missed the joke, Butcher also labeled the photos, "Stealing calves from a nearby ranch." NSHS RG2608: 2590 SFN13381, SFN13382





Robert "Arkansaw Bob" Gillaspie was a respected man in Cherry County. Twenty-two years after his 1906 death, friends and family erected a large granite monument to the cowboy in the Valentine cemetery. Cherry County Historical Society

The National Game at Cody

BY JOHN CURTIS JENKINS

His real name was Robert Gillaspie, but when he rode into Cody the first time and hitched his cayuse in front of the "White Elephant" and sauntering in and placing his elbows on the bar, called all the boys up, he introduced himself as "Arkansaw Bob" and that was considered sufficient. In fact, to go trailing on the back track and inquiring into one's antecedents in those days would have been dangerous, for it was liable to lead to unpleasant personalities, a thing that most of the citizens tried to avoid.

Arkansaw—as he was thereafter known—was a genuine Westerner, a real cow man, one of those kind of men one would mark down as a gentleman on first sight. He was quiet and unassuming in disposition, courteous when in the presence of ladies and not of that type of cow men who pull a gun and proceed to puncture holes in everything that chances to move across the landscape. Those kind of cow men live only on the screens of the movies and in the distorted imagination of story writers who wouldn't know a real cow man from a wooden Indian.

Arkansaw Bob was a type of perfect manhood. He was somewhat tall, square shouldered, smooth shaven and rather light complected, bordering on the fair, and was pronounced by all the ladies of the community as decidedly good-looking, and a stranger looking him over for the first time would say that he was built for a purpose, and that purpose presumably, was business.

The "Diamond Bar Ranch" was in need of a foreman and Arkansaw was appointed to the position. There were two good reasons for this appointment, one was that he was square, as square as a die. His word was as good as any man's note and he was never known to deal from the bottom of the deck or draw his gun without first giving his opponent a warning look, but when Arkansaw's eyes took on the gleam of two electric headlights and his hand dropped to his holster, the boys all knew that he had something on his mind that he was about to unload.

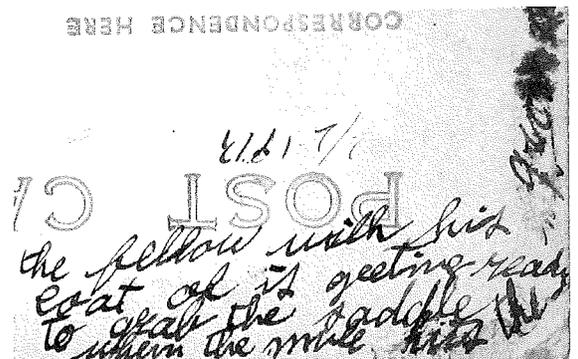
Another reason for his appointment was that he was acquainted with a certain class of citizens whose eyesight had become so impaired by looking long and often at red-hot branding irons that they were unable to observe that the steer had previously passed through the ordeal of being branded by a different iron. He accused a couple of men of having placed their brand so close to that of the Diamond Bar that it was liable to hurt the sale of the hides.

Men sometimes become rash in an unguarded moment, these two men did and called Arkansaw a liar, which was the most suicidal thing two men could do, and the Coroner's jury brought in a verdict that, "The deceased came to their death from over-exercising with a branding-iron and a too reckless use of the English language," which closed the incident, except that when the Diamond Bar made a shipment of cattle to South Omaha that fall these steers were included in the shipment and Arkansaw accompanied them.

Bennett Irwin was a Texan, he not only looked it but he admitted it to himself, and when he drifted into Cody the boys looked him over and decided to accept him into full membership without the formality of the "Highland Fling," which was their custom with "Tender-feet."

Bennett was rather stocky built, a solid, well formed man who had passed something like forty summers, and when he walked he put his feet down on the ground like he intended to get somewhere. There was an air of precision and decision about him that impressed one with the thought that he was not the product of Chance, but rather the

A postcard showing a mule reminiscent of the horse "Licker Bill" in the story. The sender of the postcard seems to have inside knowledge of the photo's events, or at least offers an interpretation: The upside-down writing says, "the fellow with his coat of (sic) is geeting (sic) ready to grab the saddle when the mule hits the ground." Private collection; being donated to the NSHS



result of a combination of circumstances and experiences that tend to burn the "yellow" out of a man and make of him the real article.

Like Arkansaw Bob, he was square, his word was as good as gold and when he talked it was in that quiet, positive way that compelled respect and credence for his remarks and every puncher on the ranch would make affidavit to the truthfulness of what he said, and that was the reason for his appointment to the position of foreman of the Spade ranch.

Bennett stood high in the estimation of the community, not only that he was so lucky, so lucky in fact that old Dame Luck seemed to always hover over his banner where ever planted, and Arkansaw claimed that he could call for four cards and pick up four aces when every other man around the table stayed on threes or better. Bennett always

attributed his good luck to science but Arkansaw said if the element of bull luck was eliminated there would be nothing to it.

At every roping contest, matched horse race, or bronco-busting contest framed up between the Spade and Diamond Bar outfits, luck seemed to always be on the side of the Spade boys, and as a result, about all the loose change, together with saddles and bridles, blankets and other like paraphernalia had gradually drifted into the Spade Camp and things were getting desperate with the Diamond Bar bunch. The climax came when the Spade boys offered to wager \$ 1,000.00 that they could produce a horse that no man between the Snake and White rivers could ride for five minutes and not touch the ground, excepting of course, Norman Honey, one of the Spade boys.

The Diamond Bar boys over-drew their wages,

accepted the challenge and put up the money. Jess West was selected to perform the feat and bring the Spade scalp home in triumph. The day set for the contest was ideal and every cow puncher for miles around was on hand early to see the show. The betting started off about even, for West was considered some rider, but when the Spade bunch turned old "Licker Bill" loose in the corral for West to rope and ride, the odds turned in favor of Licker Bill.

Licker Bill was an old "Out-law" that had defied every buster from the Missouri river to the Rocky Mountains. He started in when a colt to dump everything that attempted to ride him and had made good and had improved with age, and when he shot out into the corral like a sky-rocket, with his head up and the froth dropping from his mouth and nostrils, it was hard to tell whether he was built along the lines of the Dinosaur of the Stone Age or a modern freight engine with an oil burner attachment.

Jess West was game, he had never shown the white feather in his life and had hovered around the border long enough to have gained an enviable reputation as a buster, and had repeatedly said that the horse was yet to be born that he could not rope and ride, but when he glanced through the fence and his eye took in the outlines of old Licker Bill, there was a noticeable tremor in his voice as he said to Arkansaw, "Looks like an old family cow pony, wonder where they picked up that old skate."

It was plain to be seen that Arkansaw was worried. He recognized Licker Bill the moment he shot into the corral, and the recognition didn't help matters, for he knew his reputation from the time he was a colt, and walking over to where Jess was coiling his rope, he said, "Say Jess, do you recognize that old cyclone? I thought he was dead years ago."

"Sure I do," replied Jess. "I'd know his hide if I met it in a pair of boots on Milk Street, Boston, that's old Licker Bill, and I'm going to ride him or you can tell Mrs. West to order flowers for the late lamented Jess," and he picked up his rope and saddle and started for the corral.

Jess was allowed two men to assist him in roping and saddling the horse, which feat was soon accomplished, and when Jess lit in the saddle business was on and the referee started the stop watch going. For a moment Licker Bill stood as quiet as a lamb, but his mind was not idle by considerable, then the boys shouted, "Horn him, Jess, horn him" and Jess drove the spurs into him and the explosion took place. He gave one snort and the earth shot out from under them like a wad from a pop-gun and up they went and down they came only to

Jas. E. Pepper W. H. McBrayor Canadian Club

THE "WHITE ELEPHANT"

* * SALOON * *

Carries all the Standard brands of Whiskies, domestic
and Imported Wines, and Gordon's Dry Gin.

Fine Liquors for Family Use. Choice Cigars
I. C. STOTTS, Cody, Neb.

Oakland Hunters Rye Blue Grass

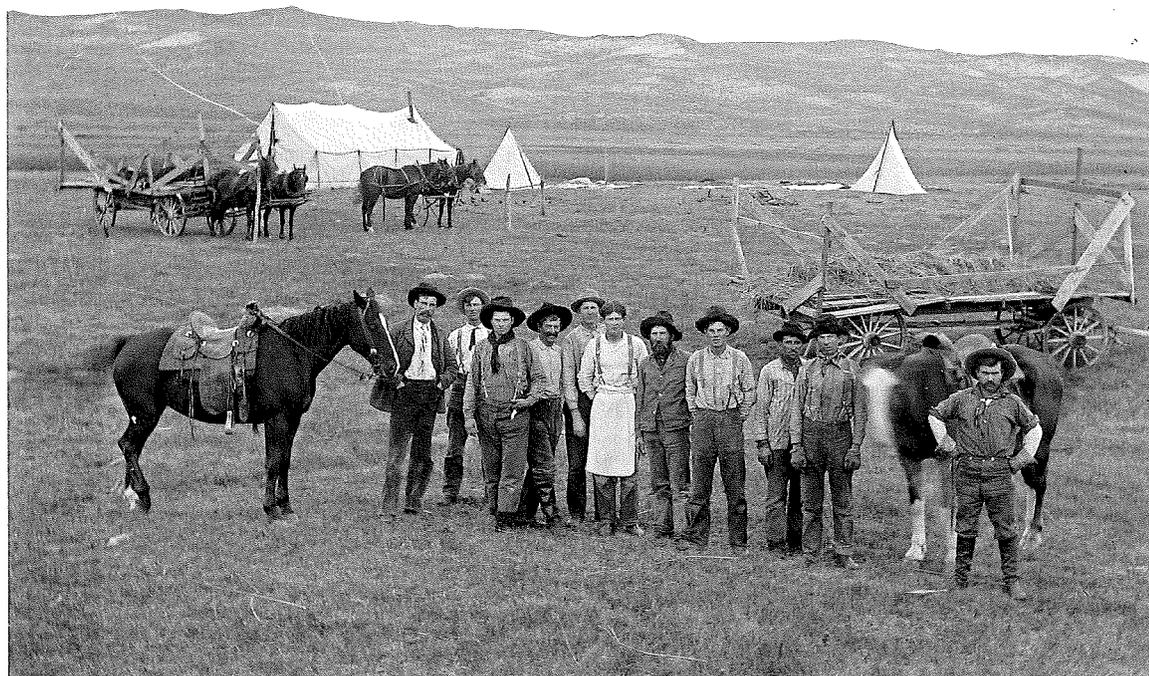
go up and down again, and all the while Jess sat in the saddle as lightly as a feather. Licker Bill finally concluded that sky-rocket stunts and hitching-post jolts were custard pie for Jess, so he changed his tactics. He stopped for a moment and seemed to be collecting his thoughts, trying to figure just what move to make next but Jess knew that to be a real sport it was his business to get as much action out of the horse as possible, so he again gave him the spurs. Then all the furies of a hundred tornadoes were turned loose and Licker Bill went around the corral like a streak of greased lightning, jumping first to one side and then the other, but it was no use, Jess rode him like a hero and it began to look like victory for the Diamond Bar boys, but all of a sudden, he started for the highest point of the fence with the evident intention of trying to jump it, then stopped dead still and jumped first to the right and then to the left and did it so quickly that Arkansaw said he went both ways at once, and Jess landed on his back in the sand just seven seconds before the time was up.

"Beautiful piece of work," remarked Bennett as he stuffed a wad of green backs in his pocket. "I have seen some riders in my time, but you boys have something to be proud of in that kid."

Again luck was on the side of the Spade bunch, but the Diamond Bar boys were good losers and they took defeat like men, but while on the way home that evening Arkansaw remarked that something had to be done, and when Arkansaw made a remark of that kind the boys waited for him to move, knowing full well that he would in due time.

The White Elephant Saloon, prominent in this story, placed this ad in the *Cody Cowboy* in September 1905.

Cowboy camp in Cherry County, circa 1900.
NSHS RG2608:716



It so happened that Bennett and Arkansaw met in Cody not long after and after clearing the alkali out of their throats with an antiseptic solution prepared by a gentleman in white at the "White Elephant," they sauntered over to make the acquaintance of the proprietor of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," a new thirst quenching emporium lately established to meet the growing needs of the community.

In the course of the conversation, on the way over Bennett remarked that another anniversary of the nation's independence would soon be upon them and nothing being done to properly commemorate the occasion.

"You are correct," replied Arkansaw, "and do you know that this town is gradually slipping into a decline that means decay and death? Well it is and it has become so tame around here that a tenderfoot can walk up and down these streets as free from molestation as a white man, and if that isn't sounding the death knell of this burg, then I'm no guesser."

"I've been thinking," remarked Arkansaw, "but where can we find the teams?" "Well," said Bennett, and here he hesitated, he always hesitated when he had anything of importance on mind—he never opened a jack-pot or raised a bet without a certain amount of hesitation, then he continued, "I know where we can get one team all right, the

Spade bunch play some ball, in fact we lay claim to the championship of Cherry county."

Bennett was foxy, he knew that this last remark would get a rise out of Arkansaw, knew it as well as he knew Arkansaw would back a queen full against a prospective bobtail", and it did, for he stopped dead still in his tracks; looked Bennett square in the eye and said, "For about how much?"

Here Bennett hesitated again, then he replied, "Well, if the players are to be confined to employees of the two ranches, so far as the Spade bunch is concerned the limit will be," and again he hesitated for a moment, then glancing upward he pointed to a chicken-hawk circling high overhead. Arkansaw understood and with a nod he led the way into Uncle Tom's Cabin.

Two men of the makeup of Arkansaw Bob and Bennett Irwin never parley long over details and it wasn't longer than three drinks with the new proprietor until the whole matter was settled. The game was to be between the employees of the Spade and Diamond Bar ranches and was to be played on the grounds at Cody, July 4th, at 2:30 for a purse of \$2,000.00 a side, the winner to take the purse and the losers to pay the expense of the umpire. Garry Beckwith of Gordon was selected as

"A "bobtail" is a non-standard poker hand, like the use of wild cards. A bobtail straight is four cards in sequential order, a bobtail flush is four cards in the same suite. A big bobtail is a four card straight flush.

the umpire and Deacon Barnes was agreed upon as stake-holder. A committee of three, consisting of Stub Bradbury, Mike Lichty, and Billy Anderson were chosen to make all the arrangements and do the publicity work and Clare Cole and Ans Newberry picked as official scorers.

At this stage of the proceedings, Deacon Barnes walked in at the back door and going up to the bar, shook hands with the new proprietor and said, "Good morning, sir, I am pleased to meet you and to welcome you to our city. My name is Barnes White or Deacon Barnes as I am familiarly called, and I wish to assure you that my call is purely upon spiritual matters."

The new proprietor shook hands with him cordially and replied, "I'm pleased to meet you, Deacon, it is always a pleasure to me to make the acquaintance of the prominent citizens," and at the word "prominent" the Deacon straightened up.

Bennett turned around and said, "Howdy Deacon. We are glad you called, for Arkansaw and I have just completed an arrangement whereby you have been appointed to the very important position of stake-holder in a little business transaction, ten per cent of which, with Arkansaw's permission, will be diverted into the Home Mission Fund."

And thus it was that the great national game was arranged for; which game was destined to go down in history as the greatest event ever staged in the short grass country.

Before leaving town Arkansaw collected every baseball and bat there was to be had for love or money. He didn't want to be unfair with Bennett but did this simply as a matter of good business prudence, and when Bennett became aware of this fact, instead of returning to the ranch, he took the night train for Omaha to engage a couple of "hands" to assist him on the ranch until after July 4th, believing as he said, in "Safety First."

If the Western League managers had found out that Jack Simpson, pitcher, and Jimmy Rainford, center, had hired out to do work on a ranch when they took a three week's vacation, the chances are that their contracts would have been annulled, but they slipped one over and pulled down \$200.00 per.

Arkansaw's knowledge of the national game was in the embryo stage, as evidenced by his remarks at the supper table that night when he asked how many men it took to play a game of ball.

"Why eighteen," replied Steadman, one of the fence riders, "Nine on a side of course." "What are they called?" continued Arkansaw.

"Pitchers, catcher, first basemen, second basemen, third basemen, short stop, right, center, and

left fielder, why?"

"Oh! Nothing much," replied Arkansaw, "except that we've been challenged." "Challenged to what," inquired George Shadbolt, and every puncher dropped his knife and fork and stared at Arkansaw.

"Challenged to play a game of ball on the Fourth at Cody for \$2,000.00 a side."

"Who challenged us?" inquired George Coleman.

"The Spade Bunch," said Arkansaw.

"And are we going to accept?" asked Bob Fadis.

"I guess so; I put up \$200.00 forfeit money today," replied Arkansaw. That settled it, when Arkansaw's word or money was up, the whole Diamond Bar ranch got behind him like a stone wall.

Bob Faddis sat with his mouth and eyes wide open while this conversation was going on. Was Arkansaw crazy or had he been drinking? The idea of trying to play ball when there wasn't a man in the whole outfit except George Coleman that would know first base from the home plate, but he was game, and leaning over toward Arkansaw, he said, "We're with you, old man, to the last ditch and if we can't clean that bunch of maverick rustlers, then we'll turn this ranch back to the government."

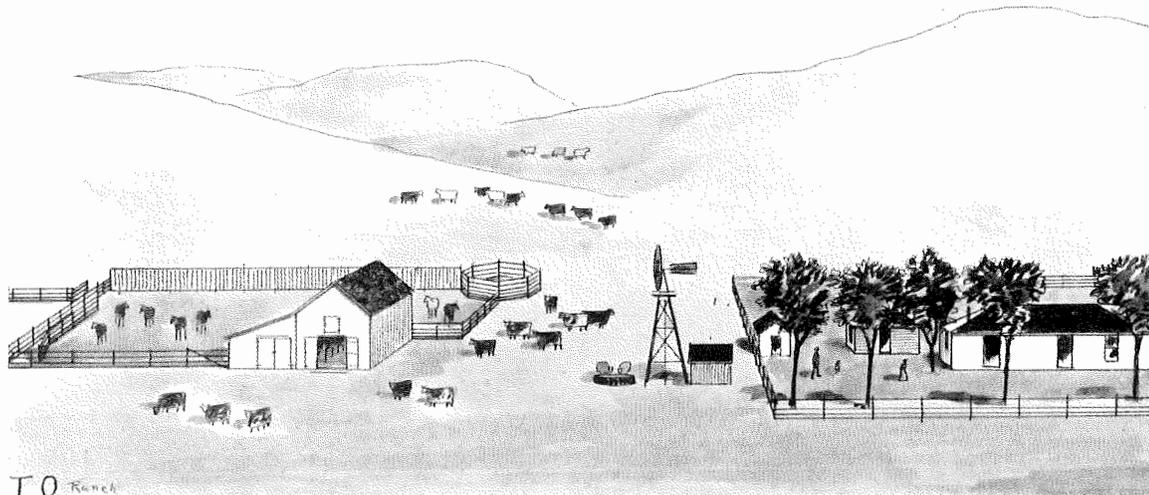
"We've got to clean them," said Arkansaw, "But what worries me now is that we are short one man—Steadman says it takes nine and we only got eight. We'll have to rustle another man somewhere."

And so they discussed the matter, all through the supper hour. Coleman was appointed captain for the reason that he had some previous experience in the game and he took the position of short stop; Gunderson was assigned to first base, Faddis to second, Shadbolt to third, Al Metzger to right field, Steadman to center, and Arkansaw to left, but this left the positions of pitcher and catcher open and no one willing to qualify for these positions.

"What's the matter with Limburger for catcher?" inquired Coleman. He can stop the balls, even if he can't catch 'em."

"Limburger" was the cook, he had been cut out of a bunch of kitchen mechanics in a cafe in Denver by C. J. Anderson, owner of the ranch and sent out to do the cooking for the boys. Limburger was fat, not only was he fat, but he was short, short of stature, short of legs and short of neck, and his little round head was bald except for a small tuft of hair on top that looked like a bunch of buffalo grass after a hard frost, and his short pudgy nose looked like it had been set on one side of his head and his face poured around it.

Limburger claimed his real name was "Hans Sprechelmeister" and it probably was—he looked



it, but the boys didn't lay it up against him for he was a good cook. He was Dutch*, that much was a cinch, and when he would sit out on the wash bench after supper and open up with one of his Yodel songs, every coyote in three townships would break for the Snake river.

So Limburger was slated to do the catching, although he demurred very strongly, but the real problem was to get a pitcher, for Coleman claimed that much of the success depended upon this particular man.

Supper being now over, the boys lighted their pipes and proceeded to thresh out the situation. They discussed the probable line up of the Spade bunch and who would pitch and who catch and finally persuaded themselves to believe that there would be nothing to the game after the Diamond Bar boys got well warmed up, but all the while they would come back to the proposition of a pitcher. They discussed various prospects in the neighborhood but none of them seemed available, when all of a sudden there appeared in the doorway a long, slim apparition that stood 6 foot 3 flat-footed when stooped over and longer when he straightened up. His arms hung down by his sides like flail handles and he had a yellowish brown mustache that resembled scorched hair on a Gordon setter.

Arkansaw spying him shouted, "Come in, stranger," and Limburger turning around with a skillet in his hand and seeing him stoop down to enter the door, exclaimed, "Mine Got in Himmel, vos is?"

"A yust stop hur and see if A can get me yob. A been sheep herder for Yim Yohnson and Yim has sell hees ranch and A loose my yob pretty tam quick." At the words "sheep herder" every puncher reached for his gun, but Arkansaw held up his hand and quieted things down and told the stranger to

* i.e., German (Deutsche)

be seated at the table and Limburger to set him out some supper.

Swen was cross-eyed, so cross-eyed that when Limburger tried to hand him some butter, he passed it first on his right, then on his left and finally went around and passed it over his shoulder, saying something in Dutch that sounded very much like profanity, and when Swen said, "A tank A took some more of dos coffee, Limburger remarked as he went to the stove for the coffee pot, "Well, why de hale dond you look at me und not der window oud?"

**"If that ball ever hits that Dutchman,
there will be sauerkraut and
weinerwurst scattered all over
that cow barn."**

It was plain to be seen that Swen had not made a very flattering impression on the boys, for sheep herders in those days were considered by cattle men to be a little off color and Limburger especially resented the intrusion but Arkansaw had his mind on that game of ball and finally he turned to Coleman and said, "Looks like a ball pitcher to me." "What!" exclaimed Coleman, "That angleworm** pitch ball, you are crazy, no one ever heard of a sheep herder pitching anything but grub" and from that time on Swen was dubbed the "Angleworm."

It was a showdown, it looked like Swen or nothing, so Arkansaw engaged him and the next morning when Swen asked what he was to do, Arkansaw took a milk pail full of baseballs and

** A variant name for an earthworm.

took Swen out to the cow shed and stepping off the proper distance for the pitcher's box, turned and pointed to a hole he had cut in the side of the shed a little bigger than a baseball and said, "Swen, do you see that hole in that shed?" "Well, your job will be to take these balls and see how many you can throw through that hole between now and dinner time and for every one you put through there you will get 25 cents and you are to keep your score on this tablet."

Had Arkansaw known the reputation of that Swede for throwing things he would never have made him that proposition for the facts were that he had trailed sheep and had put in the most of his time throwing rocks at gophers and prairie dogs and had become so proficient in the work that as Swen put it himself, "A yust hit em in de eye ever time."

When Arkansaw came for dinner* and figured up Swen's score he found that he had a credit of \$325.75. And that was not all he found—he found six dead hens, two calves with broken legs, and a dead yearling mule colt on the inside of the shed.

After dinner, the boys gathered out by the shed to watch Angleworm perform. He would take that pail full of balls and put one after another through that hole at a rate of speed no man could calculate, and Arkansaw, after watching the performance for awhile, called Limburger out to watch him.

Bob Faddis called Arkansaw to one side and said, "See here, Arkansaw, of course I know that you are English, but I'm from French stock and neither of us would lay awake nights to love a Dutchman, but I'll be durned if I like to see Limburger murdered in cold blood by a Swede just over a game of baseball, for if that ball ever hits that Dutchman, there will be sauerkraut and weinerwurst scattered all over that cow barn."

"Don't worry about that," said Arkansaw, "We can't afford to lose a catcher just to save a cook and I don't know of anyone on the ranch that would cost less money to bury than it would that Dutchman and we've got to have somebody to catch that catapult [*sic*]"

So Limburger was called out and told to back up against the shed and try his hand at catching. It was evident that the job didn't impress Limburger very favorably but he knew it would never do to go back on the boys in a pinch like that.

Angleworm selected a ball and wound himself up for action. Arkansaw noted the pallor spread over Limburger's face and relented a little but

* In ranch and farm country, the three meals of the day are breakfast, dinner, and supper. Lunch is a snack you have midway between breakfast and dinner, and dinner and supper.

told Angleworm to toss 'em easy, but "toss 'em easy" was a phrase not included in that Swede's vocabulary and he got a sight on the top button of Limburger's trousers and let'er go, and that poor Dutchman staggered back against the shed and went down in a heap with not a breath of air left in him.

After the boys got him up and got some air pumped into him so he could talk, he turned loose on that Swede in English but that language was wholly inadequate; then he resorted to his Dutch and the language he used was something awful, and that night he put salt in Angleworm's coffee and stuck toothpicks in his biscuit.

As soon as supper was over, Coleman went out to the barn and presently returned with a two bushel grain sack. He ripped open Angleworm's mattress that he used for a bed while on the sheep range, took out the wool and began stuffing it into the sack.

"What's that for," inquired Al Metzger. "Chest protector," answered Coleman. "I'm going to strap it on Limburger."

"Is that allowable under the rules?" asked Arkansaw.

"Sure thing," replied Coleman, "They all use em, except they are not all built after these plans and specifications, exactly."

Arkansaw watched proceedings until the sack was stuffed as full of wool as it would hold, then he went out to the tool-house and got a pot of black paint and brush and painted a round spot in the center of the sack about the size of a baseball, then turning to Angleworm and pointing to the spot, asked him if he thought he could hit it.

"You bet you my life A can, if dos crazy Switzen-sniffle of a Dutchman can stand still A yust hit em every time."

Limburger grabbed a skillet of hot grease and started for Angleworm, but the boys intervened and finally got him quieted down, but not until he had employed every adjective known to the German Empire.

The next morning the battery was called out for the first rehearsal. The boys strapped the chest protector on Limburger and stood him up against the shed. Angleworm began to swing his arms around to loosen up his muscles, then remarked, "By yimminy, A feel just like a young spring lamb dos morning," when Faddis called him to one side and said, "See here, Angleworm, you are a cow man now and among gentlemen and if I was you I'd forget that sheep stuff—it won't get you nowhere with these boys."



"Arkansaw Bob" Gillaspie, in *Compendium of History, Reminiscence, and Biography of Western Nebraska*, which identifies him as one of the "best known and best loved of the residents of Cherry County."

Arkansaw Bob and his men appear on a postcard photographed by Solomon Butcher. Private collection; being donated to the NSHS.



Limburger knew that his only hope was to stand perfectly still; that if he swerved a hair's breadth to one side or the other, the Diamond Bar would be shy a cook and the breweries a valuable asset, so when Angleworm began to uncoil preparatory to delivering the ball, he breathed a short prayer in Dutch, closed his eyes and muttered "m-m-m-m."

Then the ball shot out from that long left arm like a hissing torpedo and imbedded itself in Limburger's chest protector squarely on the black spot painted by Arkansaw. When Limburger felt the impact of the ball he opened his eyes to see if the mourners had all assembled, then felt of himself to make sure he was alive and then began to grin.

Arkansaw saw that the scheme was a success and he gave orders to the battery to continue the rehearsal until time to get dinner and saddled his horse and went to Cody to see if he could get up some side money.

When Al returned from riding the fence that evening he had some startling news to unfold. He had stopped at the Spade ranch and had dinner and he said there were a couple of strange hands working there.

"What do they look like?" inquired Faddis. "Tender-hoofs," replied Al, "And...tender at that, they had on chaps and spurs all right but they looked about as comfortable in them as Calamity Jane would in one of Eva Tangway's stage gowns."

"What were they doing?" asked Arkansaw.

* Eva Tanguay, 1879-1947, (here the name is misspelled) was a noted American singer known for her extravagant costumes.

"Whittlin shavins fur the cook to build fires with, that's all I seen em do, guess that's their job," replied Al.

"Professionals, b'gosh!" said Coleman. "Here is where we kick."

"Nothing of the kind," said Arkansaw. "I just got up \$500 side money today and this game's going through, you just wait until that game is called and we put our Swede submarine and Dutch navy into action and then watch for the bubbles on the surface, we've got em skinned right now."

Arkansaw knew that if Bennett had two new men and had given them the job of whittling shavings for the cook that they were on the Spade payroll and that Bennett was going to be square, so he entered Angleworm's name on his list of employees and gave him the job of drying dish-rags for Limburger between rehearsals.

Perhaps no finer day was ever witnessed in the short grass country than dawned on the little town of Cody, July 4th. The sky was clear and the wind came out of the northwest and was cool and refreshing, just the kind of a western day that easterners rave about.

The committee on arrangements had been busy for several days appraising the surrounding country that the bars would be down in Cody on July 4th and that the city marshal had gone east to visit his wife's people, using big, red letters to call attention to the match game of ball between the Spade and the Diamond Bar ranches and emphasizing the fact that the game would be for "BLOOD."

Bill Hook was mayor, and as such officer, it occurred to Bill that he would be expected to deliver over the keys to the city in a very neat and appropriate speech he had been laboring on for some days. He expected to be a candidate for County Supervisor that fall and he thought this would be a good opportunity to launch his boom. He attempted to collect the multitude together on a vacant lot where he had prepared a platform for the purpose, but the punchers seemed to have an unquenchable thirst so he gave it up until they should be gathered at the ball diamond for the principal event of the day.

Promptly at 2 o'clock the fire bell rang, which was the signal for all business houses to close and the populace to repair to the ball ground. Bennett and Arkansaw were on hand early with their teams and as soon as the people had assembled Bill mounted a dray and lifting his hand, commanded silence. "Ladies and gentlemen," he said. "It gives me great pleasure as mayor of this city to extend to you this key," and looking around in the wagon for the key he found that the drayman had forgotten to bring it, so he got no further with his speech, for everybody yelled, "Play ball!"

Bets were freely offered on the Spade bunch and were being as freely taken by the backers of the Diamond Bar. C. J. Anderson, owner of the Diamond Bar instructed Arkansaw to advance the boys any amount of money they wanted and to call every bet offered regardless. Excitement began to run high and Deacon Barnes asked permission to make a few remarks in behalf of the Home Mission Fund but was hooted down.

It had been agreed between Bennett and Arkansaw that each player should be required to wear his chaps and spurs. Here is where Arkansaw pulled one over on Bennett, for when Jack Simpson and Jimmy Rainford, pitcher and catcher for the Spade boys, came out on the field in their chaps and spurs the populace simply went off their feet yelling, "Look at the tender-hoofs."

"Those two men of yours pretty good ranch help?" asked Arkansaw, grinning at Bennett. "Well, rather," said Bennett. "Of course they are not exactly halter broke yet but they are showing considerable speed for colts. How is that new man of yours coming?"

"Fine," answered Arkansaw, "a little slow on foot but a good actor at the table," and here the crowd broke loose again with, "Play ball."

On the toss of the coin, Bennett chose heads and it came up tails, so Arkansaw decided to take the "outs." The umpire walked out in the diamond



Cherry County, 1899.
NSHS RG2608:3300

and called the game and the players took their places, but when Angleworm marched out to the pitcher's box, there was a hush came over the crowd for he had never been seen in Cody before. Who could it be?

"Simpson to bat," called the scorer, and Simpson waddled up to home plate trying his best to appear a regular puncher. "Play ball," called the umpire as he handed the ball to Angleworm.

When a Western League player stands in the batter's box and faces a cross-eyed, left-handed Swede pitcher that stands 6 feet 9 when straightened up for action, he has something weighty on his mind: Simpson did, and he glanced around to where Rainford was sitting as much to say, "Well, what the ##### is that?" but just then Angleworm began to unwind and his arms went around like a Dutch windmill out of gear in a high wind. He reared back on his left leg, swung his right leg out horizontally with his body and seemed to sight over the toe of his boot at the black spot on Limburger's chest protector, then the left arm shot forward and the ball went like a bull hornet directly over the plate and buried itself in the bag of wool exactly on the spot painted for that purpose. Simpson dodged, and he did it so quickly that he fell over backwards which brought a laugh from the Diamond Bar rooters.

"Strike one!" shouted the umpire, and Simpson squared himself again, but he made no effort to strike the ball neither the second or the third time, and when he walked back to the bench Rainford

"When a Western League player stands in the batter's box and faces a cross-eyed, left-handed Swede pitcher that stands 6 feet 9 when straightened up for action, he has something weighty on his mind."



Cowboys near Kennedy Post Office, Cherry County, 1900. NSHS RG2608:2168

asked him why he didn't paste it. "Hit that ball? Not on your life, I wouldn't connect with that ball for \$500.00 per month and bar expenses for the rest of my natural life."

At this point in the game the Spade boys registered an objection to Limburger's manner of catching, claiming that a catcher was supposed to catch the ball and not let it bury itself into a bag of wool and then clap his hands over the hole and catch it on the rebound. The matter was referred to the umpire for decision and he decided in favor of Limburger, claiming that the principle of "Safety First" took precedent over any rules a baseball committee could frame.

Rainford was then called to the bat, but when the shavings whittler saw Anglemorm begin to swing his arms and got a look at his eyes, the cold chills ran up and down his spine and he shook like he had a stroke of palsy. He made a faint effort to hit the first ball and then let the next two pass without effort and was called out by the umpire. "Why didn't you lam it?" asked Simpson. "Lam it? Do you suppose I wanted to contract paralysis in both of my arms and my family needing my support for awhile yet." The next man up went the way of the Spade battery and the side was retired amid much howling from the Diamond Bar rooters. Then Simpson went to the box and Anglemorm to bat.

Simpson attempted to go through a few League motions before he delivered the ball, presumably to show the boys that he could do something besides wear chaps, but when he brought his leg around in a graceful curve and then undertook to bring it back on the delivery, his spur caught in his chaps and before he could recover himself he pitched

headlong forward, skinning his nose on a cactus root. This set the Diamond Bar bunch going again and Bennett looked much worried.

Then Simpson got down to business and his curves were new wrinkles to the Diamond Bar boys and the side was retired without even touching the ball. The second, third and fourth innings were repetitions of the first, neither side had got a man on first base and it began to look like a regular League game, but in the fifth one of the Spade boys connected with the ball and was sorry for it all the balance of the day—the bat went into slivers and the ball rolled out to Anglemorm who grabbed it up and drove it to first base, but that gentleman had seen Anglemorm throw before and when he made the motion to throw, he dropped to the ground and the ball sailed out over the landscape and the runner came home before it was recovered.

Then the Spade rooters tore up the sod. They organized and staged a Sioux war dance with Bennett as leader, impersonating "Young-Man-Afraid-of-his-Horse" while the Diamond Bar outfit held a consultation to determine what was best to do.

At the close of the first half of the ninth inning the score stood one to nothing in favor of the Spade boys and Arkansaw was called to bat, but before taking his position he called Coleman to one side and said, "Say what's the rules of this game, if a man gets hit with a ball, does that give him a base?" "Surething," said Coleman. "All right then, watch me. Steadman is the next man up after me, you go and post him."

Arkansaw's mind had been busy for the last few innings and he was confident that none of his men could bat those curves of Simpson's and it just dawned on him how they might get a base. He had watched Simpson until he could tell which way would be an "out" and which an "in" and the first ball he pitched suited his purpose. It was an in curve and Arkansaw pretended to reach out for it just as it curved in and he let it graze him and doubled over like he had got an awful wallop in the stomach. "Take your base!" called the umpire, and Arkansaw trotted down to first. Steadman hadn't the nerve to let the ball hit him as per Coleman's instructions, so he fanned as usual. Anglemorm was next up and the sight of Arkansaw on first base seemed to fire him with a determination to smash every bat on the ground. He spat on his hands, got a good grip on the bat, jumped up and down and pounded the home plate with his club and dared Simpson to "Sticker over." Simpson complied with a sharp in curve and the ball fanned Anglemorm's

mustache as he made a drive at it, and missing the ball he fell sprawling across home plate. This set the Spade boys going again and Simpson sat down in the pitcher's box and laughed.

Whenever you laugh at a Swede, you can get ready to fight, that's the history of the race, and Angeworm began to show his nationality.

Anderson called him to one side and said, "See here, Swen, if you hit that ball where the pitcher can't get his hands on it, there is a life job for you on the Diamond Bar, and besides that I've got two hundred bucks for you in my vest pocket, Savvy?"

Angeworm's eyes rolled like he was going to have a fit and his bushy hair stood up on end as he replied, "Say, boss, you yust watch me, A yust knock dos dom ball clear in South Dakode," and he took his place at the bat. Simpson figured that he would be expecting another curve so he dished him a sharp out, but that is where he made the mistake of his life, for as soon as he wound up to make the delivery, Angeworm jumped about three feet in the air, swung his bat out at arms length, took a stride forward and met that ball square on the nose as it came sailing around the curve. It was the only hit in the game but it was a peach. The ball shot up into the air for about three hundred yards and then took a bee-line for Butte, Montana, and the oldest inhabitants of that place will still declare to this day that the ball is still sailing off through space.

Angeworm was so bewildered to think he hit the ball that he stood stock still until everybody hollered "Run," then it dawned upon him that that was part of the game, so struck out in the direction in which he was headed, which happened to be toward third base, until he was finally rounded up by Faddis and Coleman and headed in the right direction, then he passed Arkansaw before he reached third base, and as he hit the home plate, and everybody still yelling "run," he went around again and would have made a third trip if Limburger hadn't have roped him when he came around the second time.

The siege of Verdun would have been a quiet Sunday evening in Dowagie, Michigan in comparison to the noise the Diamond Bar bunch made when they turned their arsenal loose. Limburger put his arms around Angeworm and laid his head on his breast and wept. Angeworm patted him on the back and made a few remarks in Swede and Limburger replied in his native tongue.

Bennett hunted up Deacon Barnes and brought him around to deliver the stake money over to Arkansaw, and as the Deacon did so he peeled off twenty sawbucks from the top of the stack and

said, "Gentlemen, as I understand the agreement, ten per cent of these stakes is to go to the Home Mission Fund, is that correct?" "That's up to you and Arkansaw," replied Bennett. "I haven't a working interest in that wad now."

"Perfectly satisfactory to me," answered Arkansaw. "Well," went on the Deacon, "If it is agreeable I will accept it, but I wish it understood that by so doing I am not in any way approving gambling but will accept it as a tribute of vice to virtue, do you get the idea?" "I think I do," said Arkansaw as he winked at Bennett.

When Arkansaw dropped into the "White Elephant" that evening he found Limburger seated astride one end of the bar with a schooner in one hand and regaling the company with one of his yodel songs while Angeworm was coiled around a post at the other end singing.

A tank A bane a yentleman
A dry dish-rag at noon
And if A see sheep-herder man
A shoot him pretty soon.

Bennett was standing with one elbow leaning on the bar listening to Angeworm's song when Arkansaw walked over to him and tapping him on the shoulder said, "Bennett, this has been some day," then winked at Bob Faddis. "Been the most pleasant day of my life," replied Bennett. "Can't recall an experience that has been a marker to it,

**Carver Ranch,
Cherry County, 1900.**
NSHS RG2608:3119



but say Arkansaw, could you please spare a few of those dish-rags of yours. My cook is a little shy?" "Why," said Arkansaw, "guess I could, always glad to oblige a friend; might swap you a few for some shavings." Then they shook hands and laughed, and as Arkansaw beckoned to the gentleman in white, he said, "How will you have yours, straight or with a little syrup?"

Afterword

BY JOHN E. CARTER

While I had some reservations about following this story with historical analysis, questions arise, questions of the nagging variety, that really are worth looking at. One very good, and very obvious, question is: Did these events described actually happen? If they did, at least in some semblance, then they become a window on Nebraska cowboy culture, rather like using Mark Twain as an expositor of the complex world of life on the Mississippi.

Clearly if this piece is pure fiction its use anthropologically is limited. But it is hard to believe that it is pure fiction. If you are going to create a fantasy world, Oz for instance, why would you go to the trouble of drawing a road map across Kansas to get to it? And that is exactly what John Jenkins did.

This story is populated with a lot of very colorful folks, and when we looked we found historical evidence (newspaper accounts, census records, etc.) for almost all of them.¹

Exceptions include two of the principal characters, Hans Sprechelmeister (Limburger) and the Swedish sheep herder, Swen (Angleworm), whose last name is never revealed. Oddly, we were also unable to find any record of the two ringers from Omaha, Jack Simpson and Jimmy Rainford. The absence of Limburger and Angleworm makes sense as they are clearly caricatures, but Simpson and Rainford are hardly that; they are baseball players.

Clearly Arkansaw Bob and Bennett Irwin are real, and each have a precinct in Cherry County named for them. Gillaspie Precinct is located about twenty-five miles south of Cody, and Irwin Precinct is in the county's northwest corner.

Moreover, the places mentioned are real, as are the people associated with them. C. J. Anderson did run the Diamond Bar ranch, and Arkansaw Bob did work for him.² The Spade Ranch, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was associated with Bennett Irwin. Irwin sold his ranch to Bartlett Richards, and for some indeterminate time handled cattle-moving and branding for him.³

The White Elephant Saloon was a very real place, as evidenced by the large advertisements it placed in *Cody Cowboy* in September 1905. By reading between the lines of an article published in the May 2, 1928, issue of *The Valentine Democrat*, one can infer something of the place in its heyday. The article, entitled "Cody Legion Reopens White Elephant Saloon," reports,

The White Elephant Saloon of former Cody fame, is annually commemorated by the American Legion in a big ball given in Cutcomb hall.

People come from long distances to attend this party and visualize the scenes that were in bygone days.

Dancing occupies the greater portion of the crowd but at the edge of the hall is a roulette wheel and various gambling devices, only instead of the former clink of money is the exchange of tin money furnished by the legion.

Recall that this is at the height of Prohibition, which no doubt closed the White Elephant, and the presence of gambling devices left over from that earlier era, would indeed bring back memories of the earlier days—the days when people might well have put big wagers on bucking horses and baseball games.

So if the people are real, mostly, and the places are real, what about the story? If you spend time in the social settings of the Nebraska Sandhills cattle country, you will frequently hear people tell stories about local goings-on, but with what we might with charity refer to as embellishments. And as those stories pass from person to person they are refined and, often, expanded. I suspect that this is the case here.

First, Arkansaw Bob has quite a reputation for the laconic humor typical of cattle people. Take for example this story. Arkansaw Bob met a crew trailing cattle near his ranch, with whom he spent the night. And of course he got to spinning yarns:

He (Arkansaw Bob) told of telling some traveling man a wild story about trailing cattle from El Paso, Texas, to Chicago. One of the listeners thought they would catch Bob in a lie and began asking questions. "Which way did you come into Chicago?" "From the east," Bob said. A smile came on the questioners face and he said, "Isn't there a lake on the east of Chicago?" Bob wouldn't be cornered. "You'd thought there was a lake if you'd been with us, we were swimming cattle for 14 days," he said.⁴

So then how did the story of the baseball game in Cody get to John C. Jenkins, who operated 200

miles to the east in Neligh? Diamond Bar ranch owner, C. J. Anderson, moved his family to Neligh in August of 1905.⁵ He was also related, or said to be, to John Jenkins, who wrote the story and first published it in the *Neligh News* in the November 6, 1916, edition. The story may have been reprinted in the Cody area in 1930, but we were not able to find that reprint in our search of the local papers.⁶

The story has been reprinted a number of times since. *The Nebraska Cattleman* published it in the June 1946 edition under the title "Reminiscences of the Bygone Days," but without citing Jenkins as the author. Author Nellie Snyder Yost reduced and re-wrote the story, told as true, in her book *The Call of the Range*.⁷ A decade later Olin Waddill published it with attribution to Jenkins in *Saddle Strings*.⁸ And in 1986 local historian Marguerite Wobig recrafted the story, this time into verse.⁹

Olin Waddill, in a brief editor's note, further clarifies the connections between Jenkins and Cody, Nebraska. "This is a reprint from the *Neligh Weekly News* of November 9, 1916 . . . The Neligh newspaper account was preserved in its entirety, and provided by *Clinton Anderson, Selma, California, a former Cody, Nebraska resident.*" (Italics added.)¹⁰

The point of course is that this tale resonates among cattle people. And as such it serves well as evidence of a culture in time. One thing within that narrative artifact is worth noting: the rather unrestrained use of dialect and ethnic stereotype, particularly in the characters of Limburger and Angeworm. These, too, reflect their times. Humor often rested on ethnicity, just look at the comic pages from this era. But also this was an era of European and Scandinavian immigrants, and was probably the way the streets sounded in Nebraska communities.

A final note about Arkansaw Bob. He really was a larger than life character noted for integrity and humor. Now of course when people die, especially when, like Gillaspie, they die young, you find a lot of people saying glowing things about them. But I think it safe to say that he made a lasting impression on his community.

Gillaspie died, after a long and agonizing fight with meningitis, in 1906. Twenty-two years later friends and family erected a large granite monument to the cowboy in the Valentine cemetery. Not a tombstone, a monument.

And about that name. Even though he hailed from Arkansas he was known as "Arkansaw." That is what shows up in most of the publications that mention him, and that is the name chiseled in the granite monument that honors him.¹¹ ☒



Cherry County, 1900.
NSHS RG2608:3968

NOTES

¹ A great deal of the research for this project was conducted by Vince Goeres and Bonnie Quinn, researchers who volunteer for the Nebraska State Historical Society.

² *Valentine Democrat*, March 2, 1905.

³ Bartlett Richards, Jr., with Ruth Van Ackeren, *Bartlett Richards: Nebraska Sandhills Cattleman* (Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1976), 58.

⁴ Marianne Brinda Beel (ed.), *A Sandhill Century Book 1: The Land* (Valentine, Nebraska: Cherry County Centennial Committee, 1986), 44.

⁵ *Cody Cowboy*, August 24, 1905.

⁶ Marguerite Wobig (comp.), *Cody, Nebraska 1886-1986* (no publisher, no date), 39.

⁷ Nellie Snyder Yost, *The Call of the Range: The story of the Nebraska Stock Growers Association* (Denver: Sage Books, 1966), 378-79.

⁸ Olin Waddill, *Saddle Strings* (Gordon, Nebraska: Tri State Old Time Cowboys Memorial Museum, 1976), 39-49.

⁹ Wobig, *Cody, Nebraska 1886-1986*, 39-44.

¹⁰ Waddill, *Saddle Strings*, 39.

¹¹ "Monument Dedicated to Memory of R. F. Gillaspie," *Valentine Democrat*, May 31, 1928.