

Logan County Cattle King

By Larry Sprunk

We Dakotans are the descendents of prairie natives and roaming hunters, of easterners, southerners, Canadians and of direct immigrants born in homelands an ocean away in the Old World. These homelands range from the Middle East to Iceland; from Russia to the British Isles. All of these ancestors affected our state far beyond merely leaving us behind. They contributed to our total heritage by their presence, by their

involvement and for some by their leadership. The points at which they crossed over varying routes; the places they settled, alone or collectively; the sites where they fought; and the structures where they gathered for civil government, for spiritual fulfillment, for education or for spirited diversions have unfolded as our state's history. Here is one of these pioneer individuals:

Christen Per Bjornstad was born in April of 1870 at Brammen in Norway. C.P. Burnstad died in May of 1950 at Burnstad in North Dakota. And in between? Now that's the story.

In 1887, while still 17 years of age, he came to the United States and arrived in Red Lake Township, North Dakota 18 years later. But why had he come in the first place? He had come as they all had. He had come to prosper.

This determined man moved north from Sisseton in 1905. The young immigrant had been tempered by years of summer farm work in Minnesota and South Dakota. In the winters he had seen to his education. He had been muscled by oxen farming a homestead on the

Sisseton Indian reservation. Poor crops and severe winters in the 1890's had taught him perseverance. Scotch, Irish and German Victoria Day had taken him as husband in 1895 and had already delivered five children to the home. And for several years cattle had shown the ability to provide a living beyond that of small grain.

His homestead rights having already been used and with recent prosperity behind him, C.P. purchased nine and a quarter sections of land along the Soo Line tracks southeast of Napoleon. A land broker in Iowa had sold him the acreage for \$29,000. Twenty five horses and 200 head of cattle were brought up to start the ranch in North Dakota. These carried a YO range brand bought from

Charles Budlong of Sentinal Butte in 1904. The man was ready; the times were ripe.

C.P. eliminated a siding and established a town. The name of the town: Burnstad. But towns are not built by individuals, however well established they might be; they are built by people of like minds and common concerns. In a matter of a year and a half there was a general store, a lumber company, a hotel, an elevator and a blacksmith shop.



On the edge of town were the YO headquarters. By the teens the 200 head of cattle brought up in 1905 had grown in number to 5,000 and they were now



C.P. Burnstad, "The Cattle King of Logan County." This picture was taken in 1913 on the YO Ranch by the Holmboe Studio of Bismarck. (State Historical Society of North Dakota photo)



This 1919 picture of Mr. and Mrs. C.P. Burnstad and their ten children by the Holmboe Studio of Bismarck appeared in the national Leslie magazine. Pictured are from left: Mrs. Victoria Day Burnstad, Helen, Lorna, Pat, Mike, Grace, Iva, Ted, Leo, Ralph, Harold, and C.P. This national recognition brought a front page story in *The Burnstad Comet* which read, "Burnstad recently gained fresh fame through the publication in Leslie's magazine under the caption 'Families Who are Making America' of a group picture of 12 of the Burnstads, all mounted on ranch ponies. This publicity has brought Mr. Burnstad scores of letters from self-pronounced worthy individuals requesting loans of \$700 to \$7,000 for the raising of the mortgage on the old homestead and other meritorious purposes. It has also brought the sons a number of perfectly good proposals from susceptible damsels to whom the glamour of ranch life has appealed. Mamma Burnstad says that her boys will remain under her wing until Uncle Sam needs them. The oldest is just 21, and the others are perfectly satisfied with mother's cooking and dad's wages." [State Historical Society of North Dakota photo]

registered Herefords rather than the earlier Galloways. Some were on feeding consignment; others were owned. The nine and a quarter sections were now part of an owned or leased 54 sections in Logan and Sioux counties. The 25 horses had become a herd of 320 most of which were Percheron draft horses and nearly a thousand head of sheep were raised before the cowhands on the YO discouraged any further development of that potential. And the Burnstad family had grown as well. Victoria and Christen

had a family of 10 in 1919 when they hit rough water in North Dakota for the first time.

During this period C.P. had become the millionaire cattle king of Logan county. A front page news story in *The Burnstad Comet* of Nov. 28, 1912 under the headline "Burnstad A Big Shipping Point" reads, "This has been a very busy year on the YO Ranch and C.P. Burnstad, the proprietor, has in all probability shipped more

cattle than any one firm in eastern North Dakota thus placing Burnstad as the largest cattle shipping point in the eastern section of the state. The YO Ranch has shipped over 90 carloads of cattle to eastern markets, 60 cars of which were in three trains. The number of head shipped amounts in round number to 2,800 and the aggregate value was in the neighborhood of \$150,000." By this time the YO Ranch had eight to ten steady riding cowboys on the payroll and had established a wild west show which toured fairs from Seattle to the Twin Cities and up into Canada.

A Way Of Life

Riding was a way of life on the YO and Pat who still lives just a few miles from where the old ranch house stood remembers that a Burnstad learned to walk and ride about the same time. Riding early wasn't just a matter of pride; you became a hand on the ranch when you could handle a horse. Pat recalls specifically, "I can remember when I was five years there was a guy who done all the breaking of saddle horses and he and I all we did all summer long down there on the river was ride fences. He'd ride these colts and then I'd ride an old horse and if he got bucked off it was my job to catch his horse or else

I'd have to get off and let him take mine until he caught his own. And I rode with him all the time. Each guy had his job." Pat wasn't the only one who started young. The second eldest son, Ralph, started as a cattle buyer for his father when he was 13.

Sons Pat and Leo, who now live in Sandpoint, Idaho, recall that their father was approached to run for governor but never even considered it. He was too busy with the wild west show, the ranch, and promoting the town to become involved in politics though Leo recalls, "he regarded his vote very highly and I knew him to drive more than 100 miles to vote". C.P. loved his adopted state and in an article for the **Comet** wrote,

"We often hear remarks about people going away from North Dakota to look for opportunities.

Some will tell about the good advantages of Canada, while

The New Promised Land is in the Dakotas!

others will praise the superior advantages of other states. Very few who leave this state for other 'Promised Lands' but what are able to ship a carload of emigrant moveables, while the majority came to North Dakota with all their worldly goods in a trunk. I know from my own experiences that we should be thankful for living in such a great and prosperous

state as North Dakota".

For years he leased grazing land on the reservation across the Missouri River and each year donated several steers to the powwow. In formal ceremonies at Cannonball C.P. Burnstad was taken into the Sioux tribe and given the name of Gall.

The Autumn Of 1918

The same fall a boxcar shortage forced the YO to winter thousands of cattle that could have been sold for 17 cents a pound. In the spring after all the costly winter feed they were worth three cents a pound. By the spring of 1920 a South St. Paul bank had foreclosed the Yo to a cow and a calf.

The next feature: will chronicle the rise of C.P. Burnstad as a road contractor from near Lisbon to New Salem; will explain the wild west show and will present the indomitable return of the YO to prosperity.

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