

BOWIE, ALEXANDER
August 8, 1848-February 27, 1916

TRIBUTE BY JOHN CLAY

It is a far cry when you look back to the 8th of August, 1848. On that day, Al. Bowie was born at West Aurora, Erie County (?-print blurred), New York state. In 1869 he evidently got the western fever and came to the Chicago Stock yards. More than one man has remarked in my hearing that he was one of the best chute men they ever saw. His talent lay in the (unreadable) of (unreadable) and methodical work. His training in the above market made him a certain counter and in better days, he would pass a big herd of cattle betwixt a cowboy and himself and never make a mistake. He had an intuitive way of handling cattle.

The lure of the west took him further afield, and after about a year later, after acquiring this primary education, he went to work for Hill in northern Colorado, and then he moved northwards toward Wyoming and there fell in with the Swan Bros., and for thirty-five years he remained with the Two Bar outfit. From the ordinary cowhand, he rose gradually to wagon boss, superintendent, then manager. In 1907, he retired from management of the Swan Land & Cattle Company whose headquarters are at Chugwater, Wyo., He gave up business, at least partially, going to Wheatland where he built a very unique and beautiful house. But ill health followed him. He sought relief in California and other places, but two months ago, he returned to Denver, took up his abode with an old friend and co-worker at the "Swan", Fred Haight, and under the shadows of the (undreadable) which he loved so well, he passed peacefully away the last day of February.

It was in 1882, just after the Swan Bros. and their other interests became merged in the big Swan Land Company, that the writer met Al Bowie. Then he worshipped at the feet of Aleck Swan, who along with Tom Sturgis, who was a big factor in the range business of those days. They were giants in their way. Swan, especially, was aggressive in branching out in many directions. The winter of 1886-7 burst the bubble and ruined most of the big cattlemen on the west. A great many of them recovered, but neither Swan or Sturgis got on their feet again. The Swan company, which was owned in Scotland, pulled thru, altho the fortunes went to a low ebb. It was the mission of the writer to help pull it together. Bowie was moved from Cheyenne to Chugwater, to be near the front of the operations, instead of being at the beck and call of Aleck Swan, most of whose time was taken up with matters foreign to the company of which he was the originator and manager.

Memory takes me back to the first day of May, 1888. We had partially organized the outfit out of the ruins of the business. The cattle had been more than cut in two. Mr. Finlay Dun, secretary of the company, who had spent that summer of 1887, looking after the outfit after the Swan failure, made an attempt to count the cattle, using paint as a marker.

The result was a failure, as the paint washed off, and late in the summer the project was given up. It was an up-hill business which we had before us, but many a time the subject was brought up in later days and talked about. The writer was manager, Bowie was superintendent, Duncan Grant was ranch boss, Billie Booker and Frank Sheik were wagon foremen, while Ed Banks and Dave Morris were taking leading positions, the former on the ranches, and the latter with the cattle. The chain is broken and Bowie is the first to go.

As ranch superintendent, Bowie had no superior in the west. He had an intimate knowledge, a sort of intuitive affinity for the business and he was marvelous in detail. His place was on the range around his herds of cattle. Here he shone and as conditions changed and hay feeding, which, of course, meant raising it also, was the order of the day, he met these difficulties and mastered them. Many a winter day we spent on the Chug and the Sybille watching the thousands of calves that were wintering there, cozy under the shelter of the mountains and making their beds under the giant cottonwoods and box elders that line the banks of the above streams. Those were happy days and nights too. After a long drive, it was a joyous sight to catch a glimpse of the twinkling lights at the big hospitable ranch house at Chugwater, the warm glow that dwelt inside it, and the easy chairs that felt good after a day on horseback or many miles of rough road in a buggy.

It was Bowie's great bump of human kindness that made him loved by all, more especially by his employees. He was ever ready to share his last crust with them and many a word of good advise he gave to them over the campfire. Then he was simple minded to a degree. It was his nature to trust people, judging them by his own standard, and consequently he was more successful as a superintendent of a ranch than its manager. In the former capacity, he was "at home". His intimate knowledge of the business gave him a commanding position. He was a peer among his fellow workers for he could do anything the occasion required. But when he took the management of the Swan company, he had to go out to the business world where he met men trained in a different school and then miles away in the romantic capital of Scotland.

And so another light of the old ranch day passes. Just as Swan, Sturgis, Gilchrist, and many other men of mark, of delightful personalities, have left us, so Bowie has run his course on this side of the mysterious river. To us that are left, there are fragrant memories of silent hours on wind-swept plains. If there were any faults, they were forgiven, and there remain examples of earnest endeavor and simple thoughtfulness that, like some brilliant star, radiate their light all around.