

# Crossing the lines



Kansas Department of Transportation crews were busy earlier this week repainting the railroad crossing signs.

- Telegram photo by Dana Paxton

# Recalling 'The Last Roundup'

It was about this same time 17 years ago. Conditions in Kansas cattle country were dry — no pond water and little if any growth in the pastures.

I had traveled 245 miles west on Highway 24, from Manhattan to Seguin, to visit my folks. I arrived home Friday evening and during our visit, Dad told me he was going to help the "Reverend Ottley" move cattle in the morning. He asked me to come.

The Reverend, as my Dad called his closest neighbor, was anything but a man of the cloth, but he was a good neighbor and a long-time farmer and rancher in northwestern Kansas. He lived approximately two miles southwest (as the crow flies) of our home.

His real name was Arnold Ottley and he had several aliases including "Baldy." He lost most of his red hair by the age of 25.

I hadn't seen Arn for nearly four years but while I was growing up, I saw him several times a week. Because of the dry weather and no grass, Arn was going to liquidate his cowherd. He'd been a Hereford man for nearly 50 years.

That morning as Dad and I ate breakfast, he told me this was probably going to be "Bandy's" last roundup. Before I could ask him why, he volunteered the following information.

Arn was fighting four different cancers — one in his jaw, one in his stomach, one in his brain and the other in his colon. Dad figured he'd never feed another cow, pull another calf or call another critter once his herd was hauled away that day.

After we arrived at Arn's farm, Dad and I crawled out of the pickup and walked over to help. Arn was seated atop his 560 IHC tractor preparing to move some squeeze chutes next to the corral.

## Natoma Corp.

(Continued from Page 1) USDA Rural Development Office in Hays, told The Telegram that any rural Kansas company is eligible to compete in this program. Natoma has been competing for an estimated six months, he said.

Acting Director Buckman, said, "USDA Rural Development will continue to work vigorously with our state's rural utility cooperatives and local officials to support efforts in bringing new business investment and job opportunities to their communities."

"I want to thank the rural utility cooperatives for their continued

## Retirees to be honored at reception

Recognition of Retirees will be held May 21 in the East Campus Auditorium for those who have served the Norton School District. The reception will begin at 1:30 p.m. and everyone is invited. The honorees are: Sally Clydesdale 18 years; Ida Cochran 11 years (previous number of years was in error); Dale Engelbert 35 years; Judy Luft 30 years; and Janet Porter 34 years. Also to be recognized are staff who will be leaving the employ of the Norton School District at the end of this school year. Light refreshments will be served.

## Insight John Schlageck

I walked up to the tractor ready to shake Arn's hand but before I could he greeted me with the words, "Thanks for coming, Johnny. I'm glad you're here."

That was welcome enough for me. It was time to go to work.

Another neighbor, Vernon Ritcheck, had also come to help sort the cows from the calves and load them into the two semis that were on their way.

I hadn't worked cattle for nearly 10 years although as a youngster I had done my fair share as any self-respecting farm and ranch kid has. Back then, I'd looked forward to working cattle and felt right at home sitting tall in the saddle.

There's a certain modern-day mystique that goes along with working cattle, but believe me, I'd forgotten how hard stockmen work. While I could vaguely remember separating a 1,000-pound mamma cow from her bawling baby calf, I soon received a wake-up call.

As we started sorting, a thin layer of dust hung in the air. The early-morning quiet had been replaced with bellowing critters.

Working inside a corral of cattle, if you don't stay on your toes, you're going to get hurt. A cow will hook you with her head, step on you with her hooves or run you over if you're in her way.

The key is to be in the right place at the right time. That usually means to the side, and slightly behind a mamma cow. While you can manhandle a 150-pound calf necessary, cows don't cooperate.

A couple hours later, all the calves were sorted off from their

mothers and the two semis were loaded. The diesel engines roared to life and the trucks headed down the road. It was time to take a breather.

I pulled up a seat on the nearest wooden feed bunk, took off my hat and wiped the dirt and sweat from my eyes. Dad and Vernon did the same.

But not the Reverend Ottley. He walked over, and looked down at me with his toothless grin.

"You know, you did pretty good for a government man," he said in a gravelly voice scarred by 50 years of smoking Camel, unfiltered cigarettes. As soon as the words left his lips, he raised his head and laughed. Vernon and my dad joined in.

We spent the next few minutes talking about the cow that stuck her leg through the corral fence, another cow that narrowly missed knocking me into the bunk and how bone-dry it continued to be in this country that is always dry.

As we departed, I shook hands with the Reverend for the last time. He died later that year.

While there are many stories I will recall about Arn Ottley, I will never forget the time he forever labeled me, "government man."

Even though it was his way of kidding me about moving away from home and the wide-open spaces while taking up an office job inside, I knew he was dead serious when he said, "You did pretty good for a government man."

Like the precious rains that so rarely fall in this part of our state, compliments are extended only when they are earned. For me it was an honor to be included in this select community of cattlemen who had lived their entire lives running cattle on the High Plains of western Kansas — even if it was only for one day and came with the title, "government man."

*(John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.)*



~ Dana Paxton ~



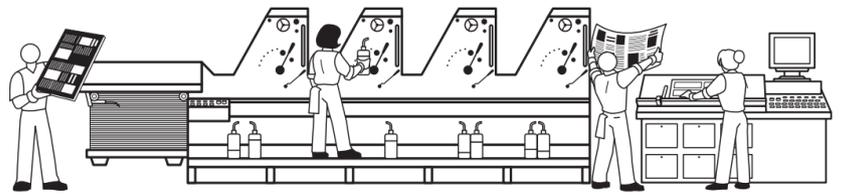
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# Attention Merchants Special Sections Coming Up:

<b>Reservoir News</b>	<b>May-October</b>
<b>Spring Sports</b> . . . . .	<b>May</b>
<b>Graduation</b> . . . . .	<b>May</b>
<b>Mother's Day</b> . . . . .	<b>May</b>
<b>State Track Booster Page</b> . . .	<b>May</b>
<b>Memorial Day</b> . . . . .	<b>May</b>
<b>Play Ball</b> . . . . .	<b>June</b>
<b>Car Show</b> . . . . .	<b>June</b>
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Tuesday . . . . .		Friday Noon
Friday . . . . .		Wednesday Noon
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