

# The Legend of Cattle King Pete French

—BY STEWART HOLBROOK

OF THE several notable figures of the Old West, that of the Cattle King was perhaps the most romantic, or rather it has been made so by the tireless labors of thousands of writers. Uncounted tons of pulp paper are required annually for the



imprint of Westerns; tons more of slick and book papers are needed to tell the identical story; while the film footage devoted to the Cattle King and his minions, the cowboys, and his enemies, the rustlers, is probably greater than that for all other kinds of movies combined.

Why this is so is a matter for psychologists, or possibly psychiatrists. Perhaps it stems from the ancient appeal of the man on horseback, the plumed knight and charger combination. In any case the Cattle King survives as a glorified symbol long after his kind disappeared, at least in Oregon. The annual Roundup at Pendleton is devoted to perpetuating the symbol. This is proper enough; eastern Oregon was and is our great range country. One has no difficulty naming the Northwest's most eminent cattle king. He was Peter

French, who easily stands first in the legend as he did in fact. When he died, in his boots, in 1897, the twilight of the open range set in.

For a quarter of a century Pete French successfully held at bay all of the natural enemies of the cattle kings, including the government, rustlers, Indians, competing cattlemen and, worst of all, the homesteaders. When he died, none of his kind was left with the ruthlessness needed to hold out against encroaching civilization.

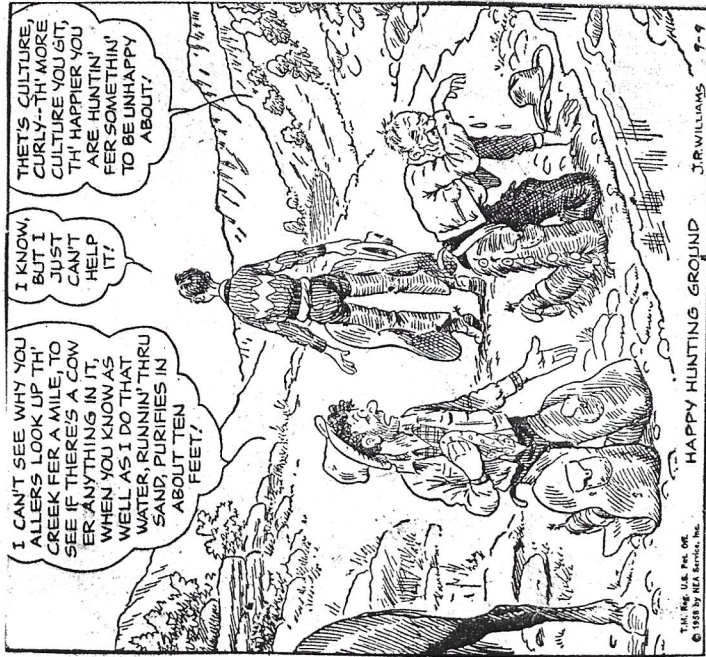
In 1849, young Pete French ran away from his father's modest ranch near Red Bluff, Cal., and went to work for Dr. Hugh Glenn, a big wheat-and-cattle rancher of Chico. In a short time he married Dr. Glenn's daughter. In 1873, the doctor sent his new son-in-law to scout the vast-range-country of eastern Oregon; and to buy some of it if good. Twenty-four-year-old Pete French rode over a good deal of the region, crossing deserts marked by shallow, shimmering lakes, great marshes of tule-butties and sagebrush, to find what he sought only when he came to the Donner and Blitzen river in what is now Harney county.

The Blitzen Valley enchanted him. There the river tumbled down the slopes of grim Steens Mountain to thread a valley that for 70 miles was a fine wild meadow. The nearest railroad was at Winnemucca, Nev., 250 miles distant. In this great wilderness a scattering of ranchers ran cattle undisturbed, almost unknown to the

With a singularly dedicated ambition, he drove his men hard, and drove himself even more. He erected barns, coorals, houses, bunkhouses. His corrals of posts lashed together with rawhide. His miles of fence were of juniper stakes, bored to carry the unbarbed wire. He set to draining marsh land. One of his canals ran a good 15 miles and cost one dollar a lineal yard. At times his crew of men ran as high as 200.

He continuously added to his holdings until they embraced some 200,000 acres, during the accumulation of which he laid the slow-burning fuse that was to bring about his violent death.

Editor's note: A second article on Pete French will appear tomorrow.



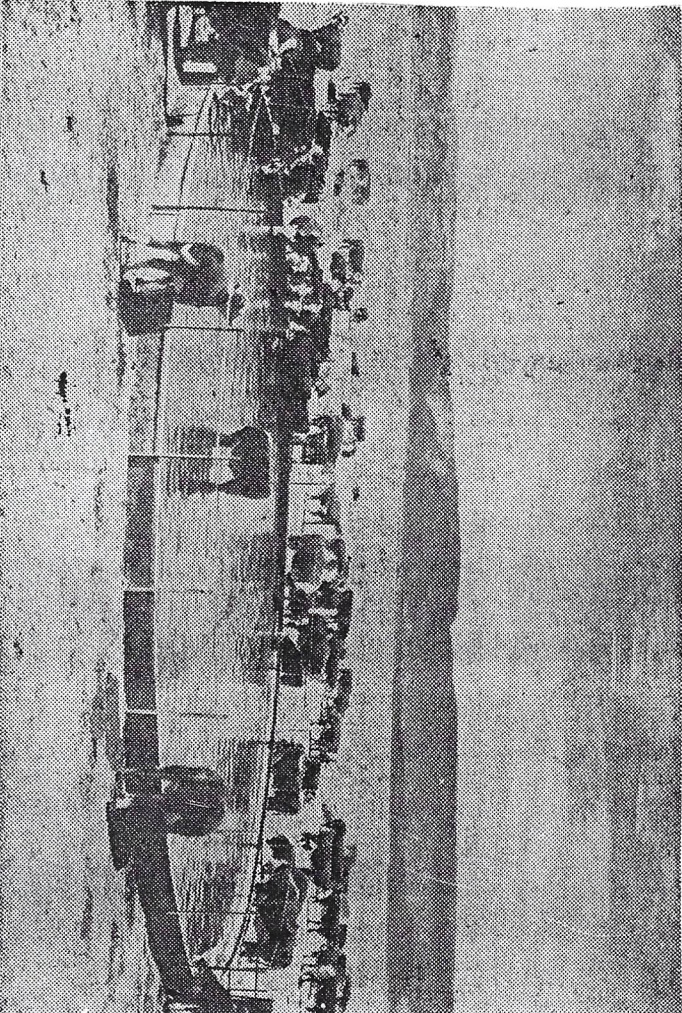
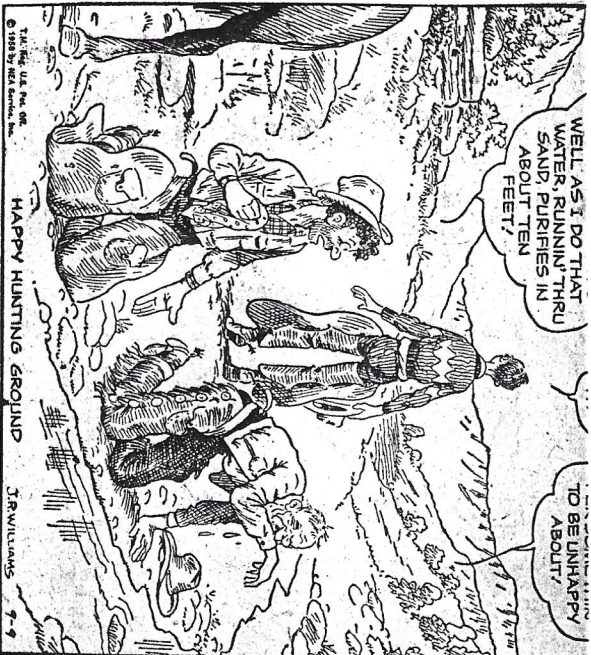
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using about in his character. He never slapped backs. His hospitality was open-handed, but this was a tradition in range country.

With a singularly dedicated ambition, he drove his men hard, and drove himself even more. He erected barns, cook-houses, bunkhouses. His corrals were the best, made of clusters of posts lashed together with rawhide. His miles of fence were of juniper stakes bored to carry the unbarbed wire. He set to draining marsh land.

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**WATER** Cattle come down from distant hills to find water during long, dry, summer seasons in eastern Oregon. Here they are shown drifting into man-made drinking hole on section of desert range of the vast Roaring Springs spread.

# Life of Cowpoke on Harney County Ranch Little Resembles Westerns Depicted on TV

BY GERRY PRATT  
Staff Writer, The Oregonian

## Pictures on Opposite Page

Five hundred and some miles southeast of Portland lies the West.

It's a West you seldom meet on your television screen, a country living today much as it did when the Earps and Hickocks were writing their legends in Colt smoke.

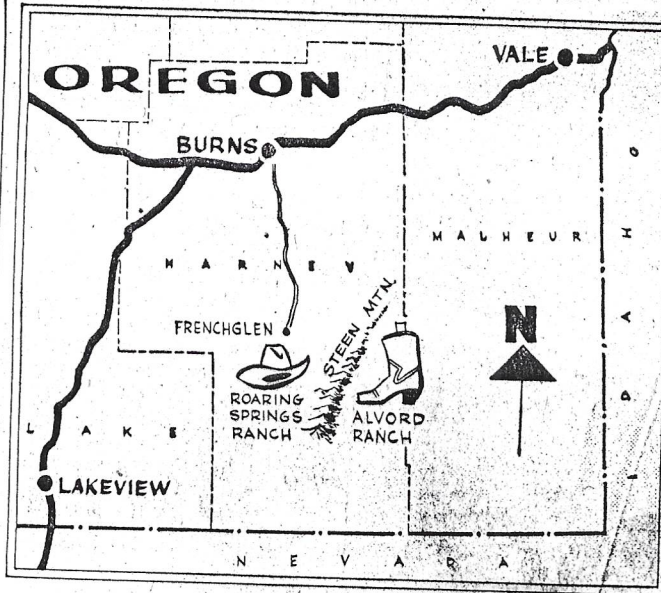
This is country deep in Harney county, the land of the Roaring Springs, reckoned to be one of the largest blocked-out ranches in the world, the Alvord, picturesque pride of the old Lux-Miller cattle empire, the Mann Lake and the White Horse ranches.

It's a country of sprawling cattle herds, some of them 11,000 head and bigger. In the magnificent stretches of rim rock are rattlesnakes by the thousands, each a mankiller when in a tail-shaking temper. Jack rabbits, bobcats and coyotes dodge among the sage clumps while deer and antelope still feed in the grassy Steens mountain meadows.

### Ranch Covers 400,000 Acres

Get up before the dawn with a cowpuncher like Clifford Fine, cattle boss on the Roaring Springs spread, ride with him until the cook's bell reminds you of an empty belly at noon, and you have seen more of the west than could be crammed into a lifetime of TV thrillers and Zane Grey novels.

This is a ranch of 400,000 deeded and leased acres stretching so far you can drive at 30 miles an hour for a full hour and still fall five miles or more short of going from one end to another. It's 20 miles wide,



Oregon's king-sized cattle country some 50 to 150 miles south of Burns spreads out around the base of Steens mountain. The cattle once were driven to Lakeview, 160 miles.

At 35, tall, raw-boned Cliff Fine is as much a cowboy as a lifetime in a stockman's saddle with a rope in hand can make a man. Handling a searing hot branding iron, a rambunctious bronco, cutting cattle and riding through gulch and prairie, these things he does in stride.

### He Seldom Uses Gun

Except for deer hunting season when he sometimes joins the city hunters to knock down a pair of horns, he has never pulled a gun.

Fine, who with his dad, Joseph Fine, six feet and a hand tall and just as lean as his son, has driven Hereford herds from the

Steens mountain ranch land to Lakeview while still only a boy.

That was in the day before the cattle transport trucks that now haul the steers from the ranch to cattle cars in Burns.

As cattle boss, it's Cliff Fine's job to look over the buckeroos who come seeking a bunk on the Roaring Springs. And though it wouldn't sound so good on television, he doesn't bother to see how quick they are with their fists, how mean they look or how fast they can toss a .45.

### Car Tells the Story

'I look at a man's car—most of the guys coming in here have cars,' he said, pointing out it

was 80 miles to Burns, the nearest town. 'If a man takes good care of his car it's generally true, he's going to take good care of his horses and the ranch property,' said Fine.

'Then I check his saddle. We don't hire hands unless they have their own saddles and bed rolls. If those things are in order I begin to find out how good a hand he is.

'He's got to be able to shoe his own string of horses on the Roaring Springs. All our hands do. Then if he can run a mower, do a little machine shop work, know cattle, is big and can stand the gaff—why, we generally hire him.'

The pay for such a man? On most of the big ranches it's \$150 a month and grub. That's top hand money and to earn it you are up before the dawn six and sometimes seven days a week.

Stories of ranch hands sitting down to dinners of juicy steaks six nights a week are just that—stories. Chances are dinner will consist of rump roast, meat loaf or stew, generally backed up with potatoes, ranch bread, and cups and cups of hot coffee.

They are heavy meals. Breakfasts run to fried eggs, heavy slices of bacon, fried potatoes and beans. Only men working hard in the high ranch air can handle them.



SEEMS LIKE ANY BOYS THE FOLKS LIKE WEETEENA TURNS THUMBS DOWN ON—

LOVELY BOY YOU'RE DATING SO WELL MANNERED!

I KNOW HIS FAMILY FINE PEOPLE!

HE'S A DRIP! I KEEP TRYING TO GET RID OF HIM BUT HE WON'T TAKE NO FOR AN ANSWER!

BUT THE ONES THEY'D LIKE TO SHE FLIPS FOR—

WEETEENA? WHAT'S THAT YOU DRAGGED IN?

WHERE'D YOU FIND HIM? IN A REFORM SCHOOL?

HE'S V