Three Years on the Gumbo Flats: The Memoir of Sedley M. Lingo

EDITED BY DAVID P. LINGO

The Lingo clan made its way to South Dakota in 1926, literally one step ahead of the bill collectors and with scarcely more than what they wore on their backs. They had been here before, spending a few years beginning in 1919 as managers and part owners of the King Ranch north of Huron in Beadle County. There, they had a large home, sturdy buildings, extensive herds, and a generally sound and profitable business. The future had indeed looked bright. Then, with little warning, a recession, sliding land prices, bank closures, and other reverses forced the family off the ranch and took virtually all of their personal property. They returned to their origins in Iowa, broke and losing hope.

This memoir is about the Lingo family's second arrival in South Dakota, still broke but without other options. Its author, Sedley Lingo, who was twenty years old in 1926, had stayed behind with well-established relatives in southwestern Iowa to complete high school. At the beck of his father, Walter M. Lingo, he then traveled to South Dakota to join with his father and stepmother, Margaret Hickey, in establishing a ranching operation to rescue the family from poverty.

Sedley's rather curious first name came from the name of the young protagonist in a popular youth book of the period entitled The Boat Club, *by Oliver Optic. In these stories, Captain Sedley and his son Frank Sedley were involved in various adventures. Perhaps the naming was portentous, for Sedley had a remarkable and adventuresome life. His birth mother, a refined Iowa woman named Bartie Dennis, died when he was only seven. While his father Walter was busy trying to earn a living, Sedley, his older siblings Samuel and Alice, and younger sister Florence lived for awhile with*

their well-off grandfather Selkirk Samuel ("S. S.") Lingo and his wife on a comfortable farm in Page County, Iowa. The elder Lingo had a sumptuous place, with many well-fed cattle, extensive pens and corrals complete with a railroad loading spur located next to his stockyards, lush fields, and a large home, modern for its day. Sedley did the customary things for a lad of that period, attending school, participating in athletics, and dating a few girls.

That life ended abruptly in 1926. Upon graduating, Sedley felt duty bound to go to the ranch seventeen miles south of Highmore and help his father and stepmother begin anew. The Lingo brothers, Walter, Earnest, and Otis, had managed to squander most of their share of the S. S. Lingo estate within a few years due to poor economic times and poor business decisions. An automobile dealership, a gas station, apartment-building management, and other endeavors all ended in loss for one reason or another. These and other steps and missteps all led up to Walter's decision to make a completely new beginning south of Highmore in the area known as the Gumbo Flats.

Walter was fifty years old at the time; hardly a propitious point in life to begin to create some degree of financial security, let alone prosperity. Earnest, three years younger, was in no small part to blame for Walter's predicament. Earnest was always sniffing out the next "big deal" on which the brothers might make a killing, and Walter was not armed with sufficient native skepticism to discern whether or not a scheme might work. Neither man apparently had anything more than average business skill, and both perhaps had a larger-than-normal supply of poor judgment. At the time the story presented here begins, Walter was living on a ranch with Earnest near Ancar in the Sand Hills of Nebraska. Walter's youngest daughter Florence was attending a rural school nearby, while older daughter Alice was finishing a term at Southern Normal School in Springfield, South Dakota. Sam, the eldest son, was supporting himself by teaching and doing farm work.

The following excerpt is part of a larger memoir entitled "Lingo Family History & Chronology," which Sedley completed in 1987. A copy of the entire memoir, compiled in electronic format by his grandson Steven David Lingo and Steven's wife Lise Markl Lingo, resides in the State Archives Collection of the South Dakota State Historical Society in Pierre. The excerpt presented here has been lightly edited for style and readability. Punctuation and paragraphing have been added where they improved the flow of the

narrative, and repetitive or overly long passages have been condensed slightly. Any omissions of a paragraph or more are indicated with ellipses.

During the fall and winter of 1925 and spring of 1926, Dad had been buying a few things in anticipation of moving to South Dakota. About February he had written me and asked if I, upon graduation, would help him get started in the ranching business again. He said Margaret owned 240 acres, unimproved, in Hyde County, which we could use as a headquarters. There was also a school section (640 acres) adjacent to it that we could rent and other land that could be rented rather cheaply. He wanted to go there and "start up," thereby getting free from Earnest, and have a place for the family to live. Being a dutiful son, and wanting to do what I could to help, I agreed to do this, although I had hoped somehow to go to Iowa State and take a course in veterinary science. This plan, of course, was a pipe dream as there was no possibility of obtaining the necessary financing, from any source, for such an ambitious undertaking.

Soon after Sedley Lingo (right) posed for this photograph with a high school track teammate, he set aside his college plans to help his family in South Dakota.

Such was the setting from which the long road back began. Sometime in March, Dad drove up to this place in Hyde County. Whether he had been there before and knew what was there (or more appropriately stated, not there), I do not know. What was there was a forlorn, long-abandoned house. A tornado and vandals had taken the buildings, whatever they were, from this homestead years earlier. The house had stood vacant for several years and had been vandalized badly. Windows were missing or broken; holes had been chopped in the floor by trappers looking for skunks; doors were missing; plaster on the ceiling had largely fallen off, and in places it was covered with a heavy red building paper that also had holes in it. This state of affairs is what he found when he arrived there. Not much of a place to start from, but it was his only hope.

Dad stayed with a neighbor who lived about three miles' distance away and arranged with him to help fix up the old house to some extent and erect a couple of basic buildings. They got new doors and windows, patched the floor, put new paper over the holes in the ceiling, patched the chimney, and gave the place a general, but limited, cleaning up. Then they got some long posts and rough-sawed lumber and rolls of tar paper with which they constructed two rudimentary buildings. One was a small barn, consisting of two stalls and a garage on one end. The other was a combination granary and chicken house, neither of which there was much use for at the time, but it added to the appearance of a homestead setting.

There were no fences. A cave or cellar that had been dug adjacent to the house had long since caved in, leaving a depression that had become the dumping place for refuse of former residents. There was a well, but it, too, had fallen into disrepair, with the curbing rotted and sides falling in, so it was not usable as a source of water. That source was a small pond behind a dam in the creek that ran past the house a short distance away. With the house patched up and the two crude buildings erected, Dad and the neighbor drove back to Earnest's Nebraska ranch. Then the neighbor, with Florence as a passenger, drove the car back to his place. She started going to the local school with his children, and the teacher soon learned that she was very far behind where she should have been in her knowledge. So the teacher started

Florence on an intensified schedule to get her up to the proper level. She was concerned that Florence wouldn't pass the eighth-grade examinations required in the spring.

Papa loaded up his remaining household effects and a few other items he had collected onto a hayrack, tied two extra horses behind, and started the long trek from Ancar, Nebraska, to Hyde County, South Dakota. What a sharp contrast to the migration some years earlier, when we had moved from Page County, Iowa, to Beadle County, South Dakota, where Dad was to manage the King ranch. Then he had everything: big ranch headquarters, lots of livestock, financial affluence, and a promising future. Now his worldly possessions were contained in one hayrack; his livestock consisted of four horses; his financial position was next to zero; and his future was questionable. About all he had was determination, hope, and what support the family could contribute to this new beginning.

Dad arrived at the neighbor's place, and they took care of the horses and gave him a hand in moving in and getting together the basic needs to start a home in this isolated prairie location. There were no other houses within sight, no trees, no fences, nothing but the three buildings set along the creek in a vast expanse of prairie grass. Had he, and we, known what was ahead, I don't think this start would have been made. But, bleak as it was, it gave us some roots and him a place to claim as his own, independent of Earnest and others on whom he had been much too dependent. I later learned that this area was referred to locally as "the gumbo flats." And such it was, for after a rain, the soil would just roll up like a big tire, making it next to impossible to do anything that required traversing it with a wheeled implement or wagon. Even the cars on the so-called highway would get mired down and have to be rescued with a team. It was real gumbo, but it would grow good grass.

With these rudimentary living quarters established, Florence moved from the neighbors with whom she had been staying. Since she was now in a different school district, she had to attend a different school, which was about three miles from our home. However, the two teachers collaborated on the intensified program previously laid out, enabling her to pass the examination for eighth-grade graduation. For

Having lost all of his material resources, Walter Lingo, shown here in his later years, was forced to start over at the age of fifty.

her transportation, Papa bought an old pony named "Peanuts." He was slow and needed a lot of prodding to keep him at any sort of pace other than a walk, so it was a time-consuming effort to get back and forth to school. She was happy when that term was over, as she had been in three different schools. Her graduation was a significant milestone in her life.

The two of them, Dad and Florence, batched in this patched-up house until the other schools were letting out. Then each of us came from our various locations to this "island in the prairie" home: Margaret, from Ree Heights where she had been teaching; Alice from Springfield, South Dakota, where she attended the normal school; and me from Coin, Iowa, following my high-school graduation. During this period, Papa had made a few other improvements, although nothing of any significance. Upon our arrival, we could see that there was much to be done and very little to do it with. Margaret and Alice set about cleaning and fixing up the house as best they could, with Florence lending a helping hand to the extent she was able. There was a small pantry off the kitchen, and when Papa went into town to get my things that had been shipped up on the train, I had him get enough lumber so that I could put some shelves in this pantry to store staple

foodstuffs. Florence found some metal containers (where, I don't know), which she painted and labeled, i.e., flour, sugar, coffee, etc. This improvement was a great satisfaction for both girls and me. Any little improvement, inside or out, was an achievement we were proud of.

My experience in getting from Coin to this location was, again, quite an experience. My sole possessions were a few clothes, a small library table, and the tool chest I had made in manual training class at the high school. Since I was allowed a certain amount of baggage with my ticket, I was able to ship these two articles to Highmore with little, if any, additional cost. Since they were baggage, they took considerably longer to get there than I did, traveling as a passenger. . . . The Milwaukee train chugged up across South Dakota—the same train we had ridden in 1918—and finally arrived at Wolsey, a few miles west of Huron. There I got off and waited for a westbound train on the North Western line. This train carried me further west than I had ever been, to the town of Highmore, so named because it was the highest point on that line between Minnesota and the Black Hills. This was my destination.

I got off at the depot and looked around feeling lost in these strange surroundings. I concluded that the town was approximately the same size as Coin and consisted of essentially the same sort of stores, supply services, hotel, barber shop, lumber yard, bank, and garage. Not much of a town. I walked downtown from the depot and stopped at the hotel. There I inquired about Dad. They knew nothing of him. There were no telephones out our way, so I couldn't call anybody. No arrangements, instructions, or directions had been given me as to how to get out to our place. So I went to the bank and inquired. Yes, they had met him; in fact, he was doing a little business with them. They had only a vague notion of where the place was, though. "I think he is living on one of those places down on the gumbo flats north of Stephan," someone said. That meant nothing to me, as I had no idea where Stephan was. They suggested I go to the post office to ask where his mail was delivered. So I went to the post office and they referred me to a man who had a "star route" going south. Yes, he delivered mail to Walter Lingo. He said he was going on this route the next day and would take me along. I was to meet him at the p. o. the next morning.

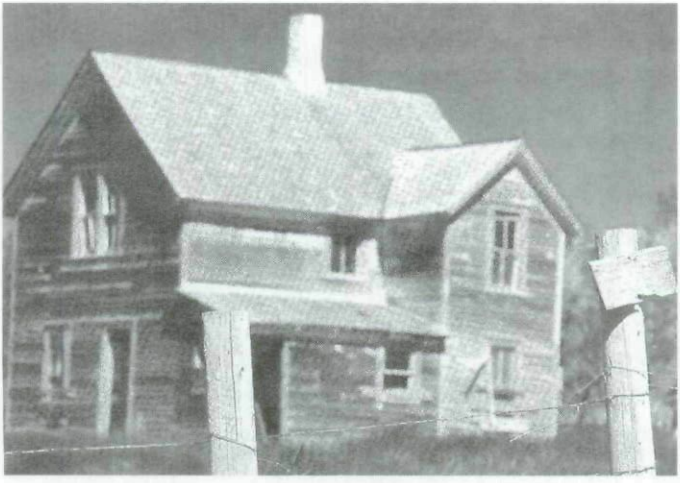
The following day, I was there, waiting. He had an old car with no top and a box built behind the seat that he loaded with small individual sacks with names on them. We drove down an unimproved road consisting mostly of two ruts in the prairie grass that followed the section lines. There were few fences, and these became fewer as we traveled. At certain corners, or at just a post with names on it, he would reach behind and get a few sacks and hurl them in the general direction of the corner or post designated as a mail delivery point. Rarely did he stop—only to bring the sacks up where he could reach them. This activity went on for about fifteen miles. The country was getting less inhabited the farther we traveled. Finally, about mid-morning we arrived at a fence corner. He stopped, gathered a few sacks from his supply, dropped them off at the corner, and said, "I think your folks live over east of here about a mile. I'll take you over to the brow of the hill and you can see the house they are living in." We drove over to where the higher ground dropped down into a broad flat. There were buildings visible from this point, and he said, "I think that's where they live." So I left him, and he continued his route, wishing me well as he departed. I had a small suitcase, and with that I started walking toward the buildings. No one knew when or how I would arrive, so there was no greeting party. They just accepted the fact that I had arrived somehow—a brief greeting, a little visiting before joining with the others in the big job of trying to make something out of this place.

Having just left a place like my uncle Chester's in Iowa—a fine home with electricity, central heating, running water, nice lawn and trees, a large barn with all the necessary equipment, good teams, wagons, and farm implements—the shock of arriving at this isolated, barebones old house with practically nothing to commend it was almost too much for me. I'd had no idea what it would be like when I agreed to come and help Dad get started. I decided to stay for a while to visit with the family and then leave for a more promising locale—wherever that might be. It couldn't be worse than here. There was no well, no fences; one cow tied to a rope constituted our bovine asset. The early settlers in their "soddies" could not have had much less. But there we were, and a thousand things needed doing. Since there wasn't even an outhouse, the women deemed this task to be one of the highest prior-

ity. So dad selected a site not too far from the back door and set me to digging. I had done a lot of posthole digging in Iowa, but I had never encountered a situation like this. After the first spadeful, you encountered the gumbo, which, when dry, was almost like cement. I chipped away pieces a little at a time, then threw out the loosened material and chipped away some more. Somehow, I dug the pit deep enough to suit Dad.

While I was working at this, Dad went to town in the Ford to pick up my tool chest and table and to get some groceries. He also got some lumber with which to build a "two holer" above the pit I had dug. It was a basic building, just functional, with no frills. I recall that we had no saw to make holes in the seat. I did have some good, new chisels in my tool chest and used one of them to make two holes in the seat board—not very smooth, but functional. When we got the door made and hung, with a spring to pull it shut and an inside latch, it was "open for business." The women were delighted—no more going behind the barn.

Meanwhile, various projects were underway inside. Curtains were



While visiting South Dakota in 1989, Sedley Lingo photographed the old ranch house, which once again looked much like it had upon his arrival in 1926.

made, walls calcimined, and window casings painted. Linoleum was ordered for the upstairs bedrooms to cover the slivery pine-board floors, and a plasterer was engaged to replaster the ceilings and walls, which were down to the bare lath. Headway was being made, and I was too busy to think about leaving. Inside and out, there were many things to do. Fencing had to be done so that we could turn the horses out at night. Stalls and feed boxes had to be added in the barn. The hay-making machinery that Dad had bought somewhere had to be repaired and a hayrack built for the wagon running gears so that we could mow and put up some hay while it was in the best stage of maturity. My help was so desperately needed that leaving was out of the question. . . .

One day while we were working, a car drove into the yard. The driver was a livestock buyer from Highmore who was out making contacts in the community, hoping to do some business later on when cattle were being sold. After visiting with us for a while he said, "Take my advice and move out of here—there is no future in this country." I guess he thought that since we had little in the way of improvements or livestock we could just pick up and leave. What he did not know was that we had no money to move anywhere. Sometimes, in light of what followed, I think we should have taken his advice, but we persevered and eventually things did get better. The fact that we had nothing to sell for income—no chickens, no pigs, or an extra horse or cow—made it very difficult. Where they scraped up the money for the modest, but basic, improvements we made, I do not know. It must have come from Margaret's teaching money, for I don't think Papa had anything left.

Even though it was a very difficult time, little by little things did improve. We never went hungry. We had pancakes every morning for breakfast. Instead of butter or margarine, we used a vegetable shortening similar to Crisco, which was purchased in large containers, and Karo syrup, which came in gallon pails. For other meals we had lots of "mush and milk" and "thickened pudding," which was a mixture of flour, shortening, and milk. Occasionally, Papa would bring fresh meat from town, and we would have boiled meat and dumplings and maybe some vegetables.

We did not attempt to put in any crop that year, 1926, as we had no machinery to do it with. It is just as well that we didn't plant anything, for it was very hot and dry—the forerunner of many more drought years, as we were to learn. It was a poor time to be starting up in the ranching business. Papa lost no time in getting Alice over to the school board of the Peno District, where she applied for the teaching position in the Peno School and was hired. Margaret, likewise, was hired for the teacher's position at the Dewey School in our district. This situation created the problem of how to get them back and forth a distance of about three miles in opposite directions from our place. Papa rose to the occasion and somehow bought a buggy and another horse, which was broken to single driving on the buggy, for Margaret's conveyance. Still another horse, somewhat more agile than Peanuts, was acquired for Alice to ride to her school.

I guess we just took it for granted that Alice knew how to ride and handle a horse. The first morning she was to go to her school, we got the horse saddled and Alice aboard. But the horse refused to cooperate. We would get them started, and then he would turn around and head back for the farmyard. Alice did not know how to cope with this situation. She was crying, papa was giving her instructions, and the horse was being uncooperative—what a time. We had a similar situation with Margaret and the horse and buggy. She knew little about driving and would lose her lines and yell for help. I would have to run after them to get her straightened up and on her way. After these trouble-beset starts, things improved and soon became routine. I would be up early, feed the horses, saddle one and harness the other, and when they were ready to go I would get Alice started off on her horse, then hitch the other one to the buggy for Margaret and get her started off.

Florence, who was attending high school in Highmore, got home only occasionally, when she could get off from the board-and-room job she had and catch a ride with someone. Left on our own to the extent that we were, I learned considerable about food preparation, which has stood me in good stead over these many years. Alice had one bad experience, through which she learned a valuable lesson. Teachers, generally, were targets of roving salesmen, who knew that they had a regular income. They were smooth talkers and none too

honest in their sales pitch. Alice let one of these salesmen come in during the noon hour, and before he left she had signed a contract for an expensive set of encyclopedia, which, of course she was to pay for over a period of time. When she finally realized what she had let herself in for, she was in tears and almost panic-stricken. Papa took the contract she had signed to a lawyer and he advised what to do. This relieved the situation to some extent but failed to stop the letters threatening to sue, to blemish her reputation, and similar tactics from the bill-collector's bag of tricks. The situation was hard on Alice and, to a lesser extent, upon the rest of us, as we did not know just how far they would press their claim.

The neighbor's young folks were helpful in getting us acquainted socially with other young people in the community. We soon learned that the big, and almost only, social events during summer were the dances held in the hayloft of a large barn about four miles from our place. Since dancing was unheard of in the largely Methodist community of Coin, I showed no inclination to learn or participate. But the girls kept after me to take them to a dance, and Margaret, for once, encouraged us to go. So I gave in and one Saturday evening we got cleaned up and I drove them over to this place. We arrived quite early and found hardly anybody there. Gradually, more people arrived, the musicians showed up, and the dance got started. By around ten-thirty, I contacted the girls and told them I thought it was about time for us to be heading for home. (In Coin, everything folded up by ten o'clock.) They protested, and we stayed a little longer.

Over time, we began to meet other young people and grow more familiar with the way things were done in this community of which we had recently become a part. Nine-thirty to ten o'clock was the average time of arrival at these dances; babies were put to sleep in the house or on the floor behind the benches in the loft. Lunch was served around midnight, and nobody thought seriously about leaving for home until near daybreak. Liquor was available, for those who wanted it, in some of the stalls on the ground floor. These "refreshments" kept some of the older ones limbered up and steamed up enough to get them through the night. During the next three years we enjoyed many dances, oyster suppers, box socials, ball games, and other social

activities in the community. True to her nature, Margaret would not attend any of these functions, so naturally Papa wouldn't go, either. On occasion, I would be getting home when Dad was already out doing the chores. I would quickly change clothes, grab something to eat, and head for the field. It seemed he generally saved the hardest jobs—such as walking behind a harrow—for the days after a night out. He gave no quarter when it came to work.

During this first summer, Dad had been going to sales and other sources, buying used mowers, a binder, disk, endgate seeder, corn planter, another wagon, etc., looking forward to the next season when we would put in some crop. He thought we could farm this land like we did in Iowa or in eastern South Dakota. What lessons we had to learn. There were a few small patches of ground that had been farmed, and he could rent another piece that had a sizeable area of cropland. Also, he was buying a few head of cattle from time to time. Since we had no fenced pasture, the cattle ranged on the open prairie while we watched to see that they stayed out of any crops—particularly those not on our land. Obviously, we needed to build a corral.

We were only one mile from the Crow Creek Indian Reservation line, and the Indians soon learned of our place. One of the few things they had to sell were cedar posts, which they cut from trees growing down in the "breaks" along the Missouri River. When they had accumulated a load, they would come into our place and dicker for something in exchange. They had the light delivery wagons and would be on their way to Highmore to get supplies or maybe just to "hang out," which they seemed to have plenty of time and patience for. At first, we had nothing to trade, so Dad would give them a little cash for their posts. Later, he would trade a runt pig, a couple of old hens, or perhaps a combination of cash and barter items for them. Through this source, we collected enough cedar posts to enable us to enclose a moderately sized corral in which to hold the cattle for the night.

Our cattle herd received a substantial increase when one of the neighbors decided to sell out. Dad bought his entire herd, consisting of about thirty head of mixed animals—cows, calves, steers, and a bull. Since we had not been able to get up much hay due to lack of equipment, we had to buy hay to feed them that first winter—and

guess whose job it was to haul it. We had, during the summer, built upon some extra wagon running gear Dad had acquired, the customary high-sided, open-ended rack that was used in the area due to the light hay yield per acre.

With both Margaret and Alice teaching, there was enough money available for groceries and fuel. So we made it through the first winter. I don't recall any real difficulties, except that it was hard on the cattle, as they had no shelter and we had to drive them down to the pond, where we had chopped a hole in the ice for them to drink from. Naturally, filling up with ice-cold water and having no protection from the cold wind and snow was very hard on them. I know that we lost some, and it was my job to get their hides off and the carcasses dragged away to a small ravine behind the barn. Even with better care and protection later, we would always lose a few head. Winter eventually gave way to spring with warming sun and green growth of grass. The cattle that were left gained strength and flesh. A new crop of calves arrived—beautiful little white-faced creatures bouncing around out on the prairie, but never far from their mothers.

The spring weather also got us into the fields. Dad had bought seed oats, barley, and seed corn. We disked, and then, with the endgate seeder attached to the wagon box, Dad would drive and I would keep shoveling seed into the seeder hopper. When the field was seeded, I would hitch four horses to a harrow and drag the field to cover the seed. It was slow going, getting a crop in with this horse-drawn equipment. I was working in one of the fields near the road when I saw the mail carrier stop at the mail box. (The road had been improved and the mail now came down it, instead of the star route I traveled when I first came.) Knowing that it would have a newspaper in it, I walked over while the horses were resting and looked at the headline: "Lindbergh Lands in France." How relieved I was, for most people thought that he didn't have a chance of making it.[1] With the small grain in, we turned our attention to corn. We had a used lister that made a deep

1. Charles A. Lindbergh left New York on 20 May 1927 and arrived in Paris the following day, becoming the first pilot to fly alone nonstop across the Atlantic Ocean. On 1 September, he visited Pierre, located fifty miles west of the Lingo ranch, while on a tour to promote aviation. Over thirty-five hundred spectators turned out to watch the celebrity land his *Spirit of*

trench into which the seed corn was planted. As the corn grew, we had another crude piece of equipment called a "godevil," which, when pulled along the trench, would slice off soil from the sides and move it in around the growing plants, burying any weeds that had also emerged. These were crude methods of farming, but we did get some crop of barley, oats, and corn.

We also got up some hay, just barely enough to get the cattle through the winter. I recall having to go to neighbors on Sunday mornings to bring hay to feed until the grass was high enough to turn the cattle out. The horses were turned out when no longer needed in the fall, and they fended for themselves all winter, coming into the farmyard only when they needed water. They wintered well. We continued to build fences, using the posts we had secured from the Indians. We had started milking some cows, and Dad had purchased some brood sows and chickens. We also got busy on a cattle shed that fall. Dad got a well man out to clean the well, put in new casing, and install a pump, so we no longer had to use water from the pond. He bought a steel tank into which we could pump water for the stock when the pond dried up. As yet we had no windmill, and pumping water for all the cattle was a real job.

All in all, it was a pretty good summer, and we made real progress in the basic components of a ranch operation. Things had improved inside, also. A used piano was obtained so that Alice could continue practicing, and Margaret bought a used davenport, which made us feel ever so much better. The old black heating stove was replaced with a larger, nice one. It had a cherry-red outside porcelain jacket that covered the inner firebox. This stove gave off enough heat to keep the house comfortable, which was more than we could say for the old one. The upstairs floors were covered with Congoleum, making them much easier to clean and less of a hazard to our bare feet.

And so we moved out of 1927 having made considerable progress toward "getting on our feet" with ranch operations and a modest amount of farming. It was grueling work done under adverse and

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St. Louis on a makeshift airfield created for the occasion just north of town. Harold H. Schuler, *Pierre Since 1910* (Pierre, S.Dak.: By the Author, 1998), pp. 176–77.

stressful conditions. The used machinery was always breaking down and needing repairs, and we always had to improvise ways of doing things for which we did not have the right equipment. But we kept working away, overcoming the adversities and making the best of what we had, hoping for better times and pleased with the progress we had made. I had become good friends with the O'Rourke boys to the east, and we had fun just visiting, fooling around, and riding our horses. In this respect, I was much better off than the girls, who were pretty much homebound.

The spring of 1928, as I remember, was a rather wet one. Good spring rains got the native grasses off to a good start, and they produced a heavy growth of forage and hay. The cattle did well once the grass was up enough for them to get it. We took advantage of the moist soil to get a fence around a sizeable piece of pasture land. For this project, we had to purchase posts at the lumber yard, as we needed them to be pretty straight. We would sharpen the small end and load them into the wagon. Then dad would drive the team down the line he wanted. At intervals he would stop the team, get out, and hold a post while I, standing at the rear of the wagon box, would deliver the driving force with a sixteen-pound fence maul. We could drive the posts ten to twelve inches into the ground, which served fairly well to hold them upright. Once we had all the posts in, we stretched barbed wire and stapled it to the posts, completing the fence. What a relief to have a place where we could turn the stock out and not have to worry about them straying.

We also got in a small-grain crop and a larger acreage of corn. The small grain produced a pretty fair crop, but the corn burned up under the hot winds of late summer and we had to cut it for fodder. We even planted some trees, hoping in time to have a nice-looking yard like the one down the road. Also, there was a rather large depression not far from the house where there had once been a cave that we decided to clean out and rehabilitate. With lots of spade work and shoveling, we eventually got to the original floor and sides. We fashioned a door frame and fitted it into the dirt wall where we wanted the entry to be. Then we got some heavy timbers (I think they were old bridge planks that we had picked up somewhere) and made a roof that we covered

Standing in the lane that led to the ranch house, an eighty-three-year-old Sedley Lingo surveys one of the fences he helped his father build.

with soil. After a stairway was added, we had a place where we could keep milk, eggs, cured meats, etc., that needed a cooler temperature. We had been taking these items over to the well and lowering them in a bucket to its cool depths, a task that required a lot of travel back and forth for meal preparation. The cave pretty much eliminated that chore.

In an attempt to get water nearer to the buildings, Dad arranged for a "water witch" to come out and witch the area around the barn and house.[2] He came up with several spots that he felt were likely ones for obtaining water. A driller set up his rig over these spots and drilled, but none of them produced more than a token amount, so we had to fill them in. We then resigned ourselves to carrying water from the well across the creek where our one and only well was located. In the winter of 1928–1929, we purchased lumber for a windmill. A neighbor came over and helped us build the tower and get it up, anchored to some heavy posts we had set in the ground. Then came the challenge of getting the mill to the top of the tower. Platforms were nailed to the side of the tower, and the mill, in parts as small as possible, was leveraged from one platform to the next until it finally reached the top.

2. A "water-witcher," or "dowser," carries a twig or rod over an area of land to locate underground water sources. The point at which the apparatus fluctuates in the dowser's hand is said to be the spot at which to dig a well.

Then it was assembled and maneuvered into position on its supports and securely bolted. All this work was done during the winter, and how that man could work with his bare hands in the subzero weather, I could not understand. Pump rods were added and when all was in place, the mill was turned on. What a feeling of satisfaction prevailed when the water began flowing into the tank without human effort.

This year was marked by a special event. Since Margaret had never been able to have children of her own (we had vague information that she had had a miscarriage), she and Dad began applying for a child they could adopt. I do not know how long this plan had been in the mill, but this summer they received word that the social agency in Sioux Falls had a brother and sister who were available if they wanted them. So they went to Sioux Falls and returned, not only with two children but also a used Chrysler sedan—a fancy rig for us. The boy was approximately ten years old, and his sister Leola about four. The boy was too old to adapt to the change in environment. He did not like to work and just was not satisfied with life on a ranch. As might be expected, he and Margaret got into a terrible fight. She decided she could not tolerate him, so she sent him back. I have no idea what happened to him.

Here, I believe, would be a good place to mention a character trait of Margaret's that had become increasingly worse over the years. Almost from the first, she displayed a tendency to complain and scold. None of us were spared. Each year, it seems, she got worse. Most anything might touch off a verbal tirade, which might last from a few hours to several days. (I do not wish to be overly critical of Margaret in this matter, but this vicious trait of hers so affected all of our lives that we were indelibly stamped by it in one way or another.) For some seemingly trivial reason, she would launch into a tirade, venomous in nature, aimed at one or possibly all of us. Any attempt at defense only infuriated her more and brought on more abuse. Papa, who was not spared, was passive during these tirades. Only once did I see him use some physical force in restraining her from some act she was going to commit, and then she accused him of beating her. How he kept from it, I will never know or understand.

Leola came as near to being spared her forked tongue as anyone,

but she, too, on occasion would receive a tongue lashing. Once when she and Margaret got into a scrap, Margaret told her to go upstairs and get into the clothes she came in, as she was sending her back. Of course, these words hurt Leola to the quick, and she ran off crying. We boys (when Sam was at home) could escape by going outside, sometimes without finishing our meal, but the girls were captive inside and had to bear the full fury of Margaret's cruel tongue. She might go on all day and all night—incessantly berating, bringing up old bygone acts, events, statements, anything at all that might (or might not) be relevant to her present tirade. She would continue until she was utterly exhausted. Then she would go into a long sleep, and we would get some relief. . . .

But back to the subject at hand. Always in need of cash income, Dad turned to the one available source—milking cows. Even though not of a dairy breed, some of the dual-purpose cows we had were reasonably good milkers, and we penned their calves, broke them to milk, and ran the milk through the separator to obtain cream. The skimmed milk was then fed to the calves and the cream either sold or traded for groceries. We had varying numbers of cows, which we had to milk outside. In order to do this without too much trouble from flies, we had to wait until after sundown. This meant that after a full day in the field, we had to milk, separate, feed the calves and do numerous other chores after supper, after dark, and when we were already tired from other work. I would finish up the chores and then (most of the time) have enough energy left to go over to the tank where, under cover of darkness and amid the hungry mosquitoes, I could wash off the day's accumulation of sweat, dirt, and some of the tiredness before crawling into bed.

In hopes of increasing the cream income, Dad visited the Catholic mission at Stephan, which was some three miles south of us.[3] They had a big, modern dairy barn, a sizeable herd of Holstein cows, and a

3. The Catholic Church established Immaculate Conception Indian Mission between Highmore and the Crow Creek Indian Agency at Fort Thompson in 1886. It served as a boarding school for instructing American Indian children in agriculture, domestic science, and the mechanical arts. *Staying Power* (N.p.: Hyde County, South Dakota, Centennial Committee, 1989), p. 7.

herdsman who supervised their operation. It was impressive, to say the least, and the more so because it was located out on the Indian reservation and in a community where most of us did well to have a shed or fenced lot in which to carry out our dairy chores. But at the mission, the Holsteins weren't the only ones that got milked. The mission had a packet of appeal literature, and during the summer high-school girls were hired to address letters to Catholic parishioners throughout the country, inserting these appeals. The response was such that they were able to have not only this fine dairy facility but also a large church, school, store, and dormitories for the Indian children enrolled in their school. The mail volume to their post office was sufficient to qualify it as a "first-class" facility. Along with the financial support that came from these appeals, there were truckloads of clothing donations. These were sorted and put out on racks and became a source of reasonably priced clothing for the community, somewhat akin to today's Salvation Army stores.

Dad was so fascinated by the operation at the mission that he would visit with the herdsman when he went to the store there. I do not know how many visits he made before he purchased a bred Holstein heifer, which was to be the beginning of a higher milk-producing group of cows. He had her delivered in one of their stock trucks, and when she was unloaded in our yard we were all excited about this new addition to our herd. Little did we suspect the consequences of this hopeful purchase.

She came to our place in the spring and was supposed to calve in midsummer. She was, of course, pastured with our other cattle. Sometime between the time we got her and the time she was supposed to calve, she aborted. Concerned about this event, Dad called the veterinarian. When he learned where Dad had bought the heifer, he remarked, "Oh my God. I've been fighting brucellosis in that herd for years." The damage had been done. The germs had been introduced into our herd, and there was no preventable action or cure for it. From then on, over several years, we lost a significant number of calves due to this disease, which was a hard blow when we had such a small margin to work on. Any dreams we had for improving our milking herd or facilities vanished with that costly experience.

Dad had also purchased some Spotted Poland China brood sows. That spring, they each gave birth to a good-sized, healthy litter of pigs. As soon as they were old enough, we began feeding them ground, soaked barley. With their mother's milk and this soaked feed, the pigs made remarkable growth. They were (and I can't think of a better term) beautiful, healthy young animals. Dad, having had experience with hog cholera in Iowa, and not knowing what germs might be lying dormant at this place, decided we had better vaccinate them against this fatal disease. So again, he arranged for the veterinarian to come. I have a vivid memory of how I would catch each pig and hold it while he administered the serum that was supposed to protect them. However, like a Judas, it betrayed them.

About a week after their vaccination they began wobbling, dragging their hindquarters, refusing to eat, lying listlessly with jerking spasms, and trying to walk but falling over. Dad reported these symptoms to the veterinarian, who came and looked the pigs over. The only explanation he could offer was that the serum must have become warm in shipping, causing it to infect rather than immunize. The end result was that, one by one, perhaps several in one day, these once-healthy pigs died and we had to bury them in a deep pit, pour kerosene over them, and burn them to destroy any germs they might be carrying. This experience was traumatic for all of us. I do not recall that we ever got any more hogs for fear they might pick up the germs and suffer the same fate. Nor did Dad try to collect any damages from the veterinarian, for he was a neighbor—quite some distance away, but still considered a neighbor.

During that summer, Dad went to a farm sale and purchased two good shorthorn milk cows. Both had been bred to a good bull, and we were looking forward to a second attempt at improving our milking herd. We got them home and let them run with the rest of the herd. We had a small field of barley, which had been cut and shocked and was off limits to the cattle, to which it offered a special attraction. Dad arranged for someone in the neighborhood to come with his rig and thresh this grain. After the threshing, there was a straw pile left but the grain was gone, so we saw no particular reason why the cattle could not be allowed to go to the field and pick up whatever they could

find. Naturally, they nosed around the stack and found a small pile of weed seed, chaff, and light kernels that had dropped from the screens in the separator. This mixture contained a substantial amount of wild mustard seed, which did not deter the cows from eating it. That night we brought them into the corral as usual, not suspecting any impending difficulty.

The next morning when I went to let them out, there lay the two newly acquired cows and some others, stretched out and dead as doornails. I could not believe it. Dad was crushed. Again, we contacted the veterinarian. He opened up a couple of them and found their paunches full of this grain, chaff, and mustard-seed mixture. He diagnosed that they had died of mustard-gas poisoning generated when the mustard seed had begun to ferment in their stomachs. Again, the skinning knives were sharpened and brought out. Again, with team and log chain, the carcasses of what was to be the start of a milking herd were dragged to the ravine behind the barn. Fate seemed to be against us. We never tried again. We just stuck with the old reliable but not high-producing stock cows. We just had to milk more of them, sometimes as many as eighteen. On occasions when dad was not there to help, I had to milk them all. What a workout.

To add to these serious reverses—and believe me, they bordered on disastrous—Dad had somewhere picked up the germs of erysipelas, which infected his entire face. It was a horrible disease. His face broke out with weeping blisters; he couldn't shave or wash; and he had to keep his face bandaged. The doctor in Highmore referred him to a specialist in Chamberlain, about forty miles away, and he had to drive down there a couple of times a week for treatment. He was incapacitated for normal work, throwing a heavier load on me and Florence, who had taken over some of the lighter chores. It took most of the summer before he was healed enough to do outside work.

Some good things happened that year. One of them was the grading and general improvement of the road from Highmore to the mission, approximately twenty miles, which bisected our land. This work meant widening of the right-of-way and the purchase of a strip of land along each side. I do not know what price Dad and Margaret received for the land taken for the road, but it must have given Dad a little

more financial flexibility, for periodically he would leave for Chicago, or some other destination, to contact an absentee owner of land that lay adjacent to ours. He would deal with them for a quit-claim deed or some other legal transfer of title. Through these and other dealings, he acquired title to a substantial amount of surrounding property, not paying more than seven dollars per acre for any of the new land. . . .

With the right-of-way acquired, the state awarded the contract for construction. It was likely one of the last contractual road jobs to be done with horses and mules. The contractor had an elevating grader pulled by four teams, hitched tandem. It would slice the soil on the side of the road and throw it onto a conveyor belt that moved it up to a discharge chute. Horse-drawn wagons, with bottoms that opened up when released, moved alongside the grader until they were filled. They would then transport this earth to the road's center to attain the necessary fill. This outfit had probably sixty horses, which they tied at night to a long cable along which hay, grain, and water hauled with a tank wagon were distributed. The work crew was set up near our place for at least ten days with their own cooking and eating facility, as well as sleeping quarters for the men.

I spent several evenings watching the operation and visiting with the workmen. I remember the way the horses would roll after being unharnessed. The driver would pull his wagon up alongside of another in a line, unhitch the team, remove the harness, place a halter on each horse, and lead them out onto the prairie. There they would lie down and roll back and forth, scratching their backs and sides to rid themselves of some of the accumulation of sweat and harness weariness. Then they were watered, led to their place on the cable line, and fed. It was much like watching a circus unload its animals in preparation for an upcoming performance. . . .

It must have been this year, too, when an Indian by the name of January Skunk came onto our place. His wife and a couple of children were, as usual, riding in the back of the wagon. Tied to the rig was a nice-looking horse carrying a nice saddle with a metal horn. The two made a very attractive package. He wanted to sell them to us. Dad was gone, but Skunk let the women know what he wanted. I was off somewhere mowing hay. Florence, who by then was a well-qualified horse-

Horse teams pull an elevating grader along a new road bed in this view of a 1920s construction operation much like the one that fascinated Lingo.

woman, got on the horse and rode over to me so I could look him over. I, of course, was impressed, as the combination was such an improvement over what we had.

When Skunk learned that Papa was gone and would not return until after dark, he just drove his rig across the creek and set up his tent. They camped there until the next day, when he and Papa made a deal for the horse, saddle, and bridle. Dad then had to drive down to the mission and call the agent at Fort Thompson to find out if the Indian had permission to sell them, which he did. So we acquired Dick, one of the best horses I ever had the pleasure of riding. He became an integral part of our ranching operations, and I could now join my neighbor friends on horseback expeditions without being ashamed of my mount and saddle. In fact, both were considerably better than what they had.

Getting on Dick and riding was one way Florence could compensate for, and get away from, the frequent abuse she had to endure while helping with the work indoors. One of Florence's favorite rides was to go up on the brow of the hill where the mail carrier had shown me the two or three buildings down along the valley floor in 1926. She would sit there a little while, letting Dick graze. Then she would rein him up, head him in the direction of the buildings and "let him out." He

would come racing down the hill, cross the flat, jump the creek, wind his way through the entrance to the farm yard, and dash through the open barn door into his stall. Florence, riding low over his neck like a derby jockey, would be whipped through that door like a magician's disappearing act. We were concerned that she might get hurt, but she never did. Sometimes, on a cold winter's morning, we would awake to find a bunch of broomtail Indian horses hanging around our buildings. They would drift in during the night, picking up whatever they could to eat and enjoying a little protection from the cold winds. On these occasions, I would saddle Dick and get the bunch headed back to the reservation. He thoroughly enjoyed chasing them—the faster the better. Perhaps the free spirit he enjoyed before being tamed and subjected to man's control still beat in the heart within his heaving chest. What a horse. . . .

When I first arrived at this place, I thought I would only stay long enough to have a visit with the others and then leave to find a better environment. But here I was, two years later, and the prospects for things getting much better were not good. I had to do something to better my situation, so I took a little of the money I had saved and sent away for a correspondence course on how to prepare to take the examination for the position of railway mail clerk. The advertisement in the *Dakota Farmer* made it sound so attractive. I was sure I could gain the necessary knowledge from this course to enable me to pass a civil-service examination. When the course material arrived, I found it contained a huge assortment of almost illegible, handwritten names and addresses and an unassembled cardboard mail rack. The combination was supposed to give one dexterity in the reading of addressed mail and the placing of it in the proper pigeonhole. There were other things, too: names of towns in each state, railroads serving different areas, and all kinds of similar material. Then there were lessons, which had to be completed and sent in.

Well, I made a brave start and effort, taking the cards with me to the field and sorting them as the team moved back and forth. At night I would work on the course, after the chores were done, but it was an uphill battle. I just could not spend enough time with it—the pressure of other work was too demanding. In the face of these odds, I finally

gave up and wished I had my money back. At the end of the summer I was not any nearer to getting away than I had been in the spring. There was so much to be done, and Dad needed the help I could provide so desperately that I couldn't muster up the courage to make the break.

Nineteen twenty-eight was the year of a national political campaign. Our local newspaper, a weekly, kept us relatively well informed about what was going on. We had no radio, so all we got was what the newspaper provided, plus some campaign material that came in the mail. Although we were isolated from it, we learned about the increasing difficulties of unemployment, business recession, strikes, and similar problems in the industrial eastern states. The Republican Party had nominated as their standard-bearer Herbert Hoover, a prominent figure in the reconstruction period following World War I. Their campaign slogan was "a chicken in every pot," implying that with the election of Hoover, employment would be restored, wages would again flow into the working man's hands, families would be adequately fed, and poverty ameliorated. This talk all sounded good, and with Dad's strong ties to the Republican Party, I followed suit and cast my first ballot for Hoover. As we all know, things did not materialize as promised, and the next four years were ones of great difficulty. But this event signified that I had reached the mature age of twenty-one.

Conditions in the East, and to a lesser extent in the West, continued to worsen. Factories were closing down, more workers were unemployed, and business stagnated throughout the land. . . . Out on the ranch, even with all the reverses, illness, and weather problems, we somehow seemed to make some progress. Our main source of income, cattle, continued to increase, and we had some to sell that fall. Margaret continued to teach, and Dad scouted the land situation. We kept on stockpiling posts purchased from the Indians, looking forward to the time when we would be able to fence in a decent-sized pasture. Florence was still in high school, Alice taught near Winner, and Sam worked as a county agent in Nebraska. The year 1929, with Hoover in the president's seat, was beset with troubles. Our little neighborhood read about these things with interest, but they were far away.

Of more immediate concern was what kind of a year we were going to have. Apparently, it promised to be a good one, for Dad and Margaret traveled to Sioux Falls, where Dad purchased a couple of carloads of cattle for shipment to Highmore. We would go after them and drive the herd down the back roads to our ranch. The two O'Rourke neighbor boys and I drove the young yearling cattle home. With this addition, we had a pretty good bunch of cattle grazing over the prairie. Dad also arranged with a neighbor who had a tractor to come over and break about twenty acres of prairie land, which we planted to flax. On the leased farm land, we planted corn. I will never understand why, in that high-risk area of drought and hot winds, but it must have been Dad's upbringing in Iowa, where corn and hogs were a standard formula for farming. The early spring rains produced an abundance of grass and hay. Small grain was good too, and the corn was coming along in good shape. Prospects looked good. We got the small grain harvested and shocked and I was helping to thresh around the neighborhood.

Our milking had increased to eighteen cows, which meant a lot of work each night after being in the field threshing all day. One evening as I was sitting beside a cow milking, I had my right leg extended, holding the pail between my knees, which was the common practice. The cow, still fighting flies, kicked with her left leg and hit my leg. I thought nothing of it, as we were always getting some scratch, bruise, or cut. The next evening when I came home from threshing, I noticed a swollen, inflamed spot on my leg. I called this wound to Margaret's attention, and she got some hot water, bandages, and iodine. After cleaning it well and applying the iodine, she bandaged it up. The next day I was up and worked all day on my threshing job. That night I had some pain in my leg and found it swollen like dough to above the knee; when I pressed in, my finger left a depression.

The next day, I drove up to Highmore and went to the doctor's office. He could see that I had a bad infection. He was not quite reassuring, saying, "You've only got two legs and we don't want to lose one of them, do we?" I was very concerned, for the infection seemed centered right on the shin bone, and I had visions of my leg bone getting infected. But the old doctor hooked up some electric hot plates, which he fastened to

my leg, leaving them on until I felt like my leg was well cooked. Next, he wrapped my leg with gauze, then with some liquid-proof material, somewhat like wax paper. With this material in place, he took down a large bottle of something and poured that down my leg, soaking the gauze. I was to come back every other day for further treatment. He also sent home instructions to put hot flax poultices on the infected area and to change them often so that the heat would draw the infection to a head. This routine went on for several trips. Fortunately, the swelling did subside, except for a rather large area over the place where it had all started. At the appropriate time, he lanced this swelling, releasing the poison that had accumulated there. Then he cleaned it out, applied some medication, and I began to heal. I must have been out of commission for at least a couple of weeks, and I felt fortunate that I came out of this as well as I did. I could have easily lost my leg, or even my life from this blood poisoning, which is what I had.

With the heat of summer, a new adversary—grasshoppers—made an appearance. Why they came in such swarms is hard to explain. I guess they just go in cycles. Anyway, the insects hatched and migrated by the millions. They devoured everything in their path. Our corn was reduced to nothing but the heavier part of the stalks. They completely stripped the tree we had so carefully nurtured near the house and ate our small garden to the ground. The devastation they left in their path was incredible. Fortunately, they could not destroy the cattle, and we had already harvested the small grain. It was a real plague, against which there was no defense.

By the time my leg had healed enough so that I could get back to work, it was time to start mowing hay. For some reason, the hoppers left it alone. We had one area, which had been broken up at one time and allowed to go back to grass, that had particularly good hay on it. We mowed and raked into windrows almost an entire quarter (160 acres) of this good-quality hay. After it was in the windrow and allowed to dry a few days, the hay was ready to stack. A unique method of accomplishing this task was common to this area. A hay loader was hooked to the rear axle of the open-ended hay rack, which was pulled along the windrow by a four-horse team. Roll ropes were laid on the bottom of the rack, with loops at the back. The ropes were hooked to a

large ring attached to a high standard at the front, where it would be accessible when the rack was loaded. This arrangement created a "sling" of four ropes on the rack bottom. As the hay came up the loader and fell into the rear end of the rack, workers pushed it forward by hand and tramped it down until the entire rack was filled to overflowing with hay. They then unhooked the loader and hauled the rack to the stack, backing it up against one end. Next, a long cable was carried from the opposite end across the stack and fastened to the ring at the front of the rack. The team was unhitched and driven to the opposite end and the other end of the cable. As the horses moved forward, the entire load rolled from the rack and onto the stack as far as desired. By keeping the center somewhat lower than the sides, creating sort of a trough through which the hay would roll, you could build the stack as large as you desired. In this instance, we put the entire crop of mowed hay into one large stack. We felt we had considerable insurance against a short hay crop, which we knew would come. We had other hay stacked up around the buildings that we used first. The big stack was considered a reserve supply. . . .

That fall, with the haying finished and no corn to harvest, and with things winding down at our place, I took a job with a neighbor who

This view of an open-ended hay rack like those Lingo described shows how the stacking process worked.

had a threshing machine. I was to go with him as a "spike," a person who pitched headed grain into the elevator, which fed it into the separator. He had lined up some work threshing headed grain, which was a variation of the normal threshing procedure. It turned out to be one of the hardest, dirtiest jobs I had ever had. There was no place to bathe; I slept in the barn or straw pile; and there was not much pay, but it was better than nothing, which was what we got at home. After this job was finished and we had a little cash, we talked with another neighbor who had a Ford coupe. We proposed that the three of us take a short vacation and drive his car out to the Black Hills, which none of us had visited. We found work enroute, putting up alfalfa hay for a week or so, and then proceeded on to the Hills. We drove the Needles Highway, ate at the State Game Lodge in Custer State Park, swam in the covered pool at Hot Springs, and attended the rodeo at Belle Fourche, the first we had ever seen. All in all, we had a great time and something to remember during the upcoming winter. . . .

In October our neighbor Mr. O'Rourke, whose daughter Alice I was going with and whose sons I palled around with, sold some cattle. I remember that he received eleven cents a pound for them. We thought he got a very high price. Anyway, I agreed to help drive the cattle to Highmore. After sorting out the ones to go, we headed them towards town. It was a long trip—about sixteen miles from their place. We got there shortly after noon, delivered the cattle to the buyer, and Mr. O'Rourke took us to dinner. Following our meal, we went over to the Ford garage, and he bought a new Model A Ford sedan. It was one of the first in the county. It was a great car, as we afterwards learned—easy to start, could go anywhere, and was economical on gas, although that was something we did not concern ourselves with, since gas was plentiful and cheap. We started home around two o'clock in the afternoon. Our horses were tired from the morning's work. We had been using Dick hard around home, and this trip was just too much for him. When we got to within about three miles of home, he just quit. So I got off, unsaddled him, and left him there to rest and graze. I walked the rest of the way home carrying the saddle and bridle. We let him rest for quite a while before putting him again under saddle. . . .

I was still grasping for a way to make some money while continuing

to work on the ranch. With this thought in mind, I wrote for a salesman's packet for measured-to-order suits. I thought that with all the young fellows I knew by then, plus some of the more mature men (most all of whom needed new suits), I could have a profitable sideline. Here again, things did not go as well as I had hoped. I got a few orders, one of them being from my brother Sam, who came to visit us. I made a few dollars, but being pretty well tied down to the local territory, I soon ran out of prospects and had to give up on this plan, too. The economy, nationally, was in a bad state of affairs and might have had some bearing on my failure to get customers.

Locally, we had not been much affected by this recession as yet, but we read about what was happening in other parts of the nation. Hoover's administration was in bad trouble. He had failed to come through on his promises; unemployment grew and spread; riots erupted. There were many indicators of impending disaster. Then it happened. The 1929 stock market crash wiped out fortunes, and investors jumped out of windows, ending it all when they learned that they had been wiped out. The whole financial and industrial segment was in a panic. Dad wisely told me, "We'll feel the effects of this out here before too long." How true his prediction was.

The Lingo clan survived not only the winter of 1929, but the Great Depression and Dust Bowl years, as well. Their saga includes many similar events, reversals, and challenges that are not told here but that well illustrate what life and times were like for many rural South Dakotans during this difficult period.

Sedley Lingo, at the urging of his brother Sam and against his father's wishes, left the Highmore ranch in the fall of 1930 to enroll at South Dakota State College in Brookings. He graduated and took post-graduate work in agricultural studies and spent his career with the United States Soil Conservation Service. He retired from the federal agency in 1968, having attained the position of administrative officer for the state of South Dakota. Lingo married Mildred Larson of Brookings in 1935, and the couple had two sons. They lived in Washington, D.C., Lincoln, Nebraska, and Huron, South Dakota, before retiring to Loveland, Colorado, where Sedley won several city and county awards for his dedicated volunteering. He died

Sedley Lingo posed for this portrait after he had left the ranch and embarked on his career in agricultural conservation.

at the age of ninety-seven on 3 December 2003 and is buried with his wife north of Loveland.

Sedley's father Walter Lingo represented Hyde and Sully counties in the South Dakota Legislature for two terms, starting in 1946. He owned the ranch south of Highmore until 1961, having built it up from the original 240 acres to 1,280 acres and selling the land for which he had paid no more than $7.00 an acre for $26.50 an acre. Margaret Hickey Lingo died in 1940 and is buried in the Stephan Mission cemetery south of the ranch. Walter died in 1970 at the age of ninety-four and is buried in Shenandoah, Iowa.

As Sedley Lingo indicates in his memoir, the Lingo children learned from the adversities they encountered and shaped their lives accordingly. Against great odds, all graduated from colleges and universities, established solid homes, and led productive lives. Sam graduated from the University of Nebraska and had a long professional career in agricultural extension and 4-H services in eastern Nebraska. Alice and Florence both went on to successful teaching careers in California. Leola married and raised a family in Sioux Falls.

The story of the Lingo ranch at Highmore could have had many bitter and premature endings. That it did not is an indication of the tenacity and resolve of countless South Dakotans of that time, all of whom have their own stories to tell.

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