

Memories of Rudy Balke City of Victor's Benefactor

Rudy was a quiet man with an immense knowledge of nature and a high competency for ranching. Ranching in Teller County was at best difficult due to the extreme weather patterns, the altitude, and the rocky terrain. Rudy lived in a one-room cabin that he built by himself. The cabin was about a half-mile from the Phantom Canyon Road and about six miles from the town of Victor. Rudy's nearest neighbor was another rancher whose name was Gene Niphong. Gene lived about a mile east of Rudy's cabin. Later the Niphong place was sold to a Dilly from Canyon City.

Rudy had an interesting history: he was born in Germany and came to the United States on a merchant marine cruise vessel serving as a cook for the passengers. On one trip he terminated in Miami, Florida and spontaneously decided he no longer wanted to be cook, but had no idea what to do in the future. He hitchhiked to Austin, Texas, but decided he did not like the flat topography of Texas or the personality of most Texans and moved north to Colorado. He ended up in Victor, Colorado and procured a job as a baker in Butler's Bakery on Third Street, working there for several years.

Rudy told Sonny he needed to be outside in the country as Rudy had been born and raised in a mountainous region of Germany and the mountains around Victor reminded him of home. Rudy had saved some money and purchased a small acreage. He bought a few cattle, a horse, a dog, and built a cabin and corral and started his lifelong career as a rancher.

Rudy's personal appearance seldom changed: he wore WWI enlisted, cavalry pants, leggings (that he bought surplus after World War I), a khaki shirt, and an English cap. Even in the bitter winters, his

appearance did not change—only occasionally did he wear a coat. Rudy did not care for his teeth and he soon lost most of them to attrition. His face and exposed hands were burnished a copper color from the weather. His intense blue eyes sparkled. Like most people of the time, he wore a pocket watch at which he seldom glanced. In the early days Rudy rode his horse to town for groceries and supplies. Rudy never learned how to drive a car. Later the Quality Cash Market delivered Rudy's groceries and mail each Saturday night in all kinds of weather.

Rudy spent spring (and the miserable weather it brought) pulling calves and sheltering calves and cattle from the bitter cold. When the weather became a bit more bearable, he drove his small herd to the higher climes near Bison Reservoir. He spent much of his summer camping out, as it was too far to ride back to his cabin each night.

One summer Sonny worked for Rudy and was able to drive him home each night, which was greatly appreciated. At one time, he began building another cabin just above Eagle Eye inside the fence. He never finished the cabin as he hired Roscoe Hall (a local rancher) who drove him to his destinations. Most of his time in the summer was spent repairing fences, cutting down Aspen trees for feed, and hauling salt blocks. He spent much time protecting his calves from mountain lions and coyotes, which were numerous during those times. On one occasion a rustler shot one of Rudy's steers and loaded it in his pickup. Rudy found the steer with his brand imprinted and decided to take the law into his own hands. He pulled the rotor from the coil on the motor and flattened all four tires with his pocketknife, then rode into Victor where he reported the incident. Armour Olsen drove Rudy back to cow mountain and the pickup. The two of them searched for hours but never found the culprit. The truck tires were patched and the truck was towed to impound in Victor with the steer in the back. Charlie, at the Quality Cash Market, cut up the steer and Rudy donated the meat to the Old Folks Home in Cripple Creek.

In the fall of the year, Rudy shipped most of his cattle to feedlots or ranchers who lived in more temperate climates. Weather was too brutal and the cost too great to feed cattle in the winter. Rudy did not have enough farmable land to produce enough hay to sustain the herd through the entire winter. Repairing tack and tools and trapping bobcat and coyotes occupied most of Rudy's winter.

Later in life, Rudy hired a local rancher (Roscoe Hall) to help with his herd, and they became good friends. Roscoe had a truck and took Rudy to his various destinations. By this time Rudy had built up a fair size herd and was worth a good deal of money.



A total surprise was visited upon the people of Victor when Rudy's sister bought a house in Victor. Her name was Dr. Florence Brumbaugh, and she ran the gifted program at Hunters College in New York City (a very

prestigious institution). They seldom spoke to each other or recognized the other's existence.

Sonny moved from Victor and lost contact with Rudy. The last time he saw Rudy was at the County Hospital in Cripple Creek. Rudy had suffered a stroke and when Sonny visited, he could barely speak though he recognized him with a big smile. Rudy passed away soon afterwards, alone as he had lived most of his life.

Rudy left the bulk of his money to the City of Victor and the attorneys who administered the Trust. Some people believe legal fees have taken entirely too much from the needy—a fact that would have greatly displeased Victor's greatest personal benefactor, Rudy Balke.