

The Cosgriff Brothers

The largest single operators in Wyoming were the Cosgriff Brothers who at the peak of their career ran as many as 125,000 head. The two elder brothers came to Wyoming in 1882, originating in Burlington, Vermont. About 1890 their younger brother, James E. Cosgriff joined them. Before coming up to Wyoming Thomas - and John Cosgriff had operated a freight line into Denver and they had invested all of their spare earnings in sheep. These were sent up to the neighborhood of old Fort Steele under the care of their trusty Mexican foreman, Adriano Apadaca. About 1885 they had accumulated two good sized bands of ewes, and moved their headquarters to Rawlins. Their flocks ranged from Rawlins to Cooperton and Encampment and their numbers increased rapidly.

One interesting pioneering venture which they undertook, was a series of chain stores developed from their commissaries, located from Encampment to Fort Steele to Rawlins and totaling between 40 and 50 in number. They were also pioneer chain bankers. Their first bank was purchased in Salt Lake City, the Commercial National. They changed the name to the Continental National and made it the forerunner of 27 banks under their direction. These were scattered as far west as Caldwell, Idaho, as far north as St. Anthony and Rexburg, Idaho, and Sheridan, Wyoming, as far east as Cheyenne and Denver, and as far south as Monte Vista, Colorado. In the southern Wyoming sheep country they operated at such points as Rawlins, Laramie and Encampment, and financed many of the large and small sheep outfits of Wyoming. From their other banks they rendered similar services to the sheep men of Colorado, Utah and Idaho. Among other outfits may be mentioned the Winders of Utah and Colorado, with whom John Cosgriff held a partnership until 1905, and L.E. Vivian of Wyoming and Colorado.

Shortly after 1910, the Cosgriffs decided to break up their partnership. The Cosgriff Sheep Company holdings were divided into thirds - The Cow Creek outfit going to J.E. Cosgriff, the section west of Saratoga being sold to John Hartt, and the portion east and south of Rawlins being sold to L.E. Vivian. This last portion included the 10,000 acres purchased by the Midwest Refining Company on which the town of Parco is located.

The greatest single shipment of wool ever 1895 for 8 cents, paid off his debts and was in sent out of Wyoming was a trainload of 800, 000 pounds shipped to Boston from Fort Steele by the Cosgriffs about 1905. T .A. Cosgriff passed away in 1915 and John Cosgriff in 1917, both dying young before attaining their sixtieth year.

By a curious circumstance two of the pioneer outfits, the Ferris and Cosgriff

outfits, were blended in the spread now handled by L.E. Vivian of Rawlins. Vivian came to Rawlins in the mid-eighties working for Bennett & Hunter, a cattle outfit, and then for I.C. Miller. He finally started in cattle for himself. In the spring of 1892 George Ferris lambled near Vivian's headquarters and Vivian spent many busy hours chasing the Ferris ewes out of his garden. He asked Ferris if there was money in sheep, and upon being assured that there was arranged to buy a band that fall. He sold his cattle at \$14 per head, calves thrown in, and bought old ewes and ewe lambs, omitting yearlings and two-year-olds. For the old ewes he paid \$1.00 per head and for the lambs, \$1.50. In order to complete the payments he borrowed money at 18 per cent from J.C. Davis of the First National Bank at Rawlins. Then the Cleveland depression came on with a vengeance. Coincidentally George Seeley had purchased a similar number of sheep from Ferris, so that Vivian and Seeley formed a partnership, throwing the two bands together. Seeley furnished the herder and his "grub," while Vivian furnished the team and acted as camp mover. They sold their wool in 1893 for only 5 1/8 cents and the lambs at \$1.25 per head, and still made money. The partnership lasted six years and when it was dissolved each partner had clear title to 4,400 sheep.

In 1894 a butcher from old Carbon, named Robert Jackson, a Lancashireman, wanted Vivian to accompany him to Bate's Hole to buy steers. Returning, they met a band of 3,000 ewe lambs known as the Pick outfit, belonging to Boney Earnest. Jackson paid Vivian for his services in steer buying by loaning him money purchase was fortunate for he sold his wool in a position to grow.

When T. A. Cosgriff died Vivian was appointed to settle the estate. When everything was completed there still remained 20,000 acres and 1,800 old ewes. Half of this land was sold to the Producers & Refiners Company for \$60,000, while Vivian purchased the rest. This joined onto the other range he had been using and was the scene of travel for numerous of the old trail herds that crossed the Shirley Basin enroute to Colorado and the East.

Source: Historical Phases of the Sheep Industry in Wyoming, published by the Wyoming Wool Growers Association, 1940