Si Lockhart

"I have a fondness for the old days, but I wouldn't ever want to go back!"

By Jill Lockhart Montieth

"Well, there's a beginning and an end to everything, so I'll just start at the beginning. These are my memories of the horse and buggy days of long ago, and some that are more recent. But they are all still fresh in my mind, and I am anxious to tell you about them, so you'll know what it was like, and what we went through with horses and all to get our work done."

I'd like you to meet my grandfather, Si Lockhart. He's going to be 80 years old in January, but in his heart he has a spirit of youth which keeps him as young as I am.

Si's father, Austin Lockhart, was a captain in the Spanish-American War. When he returned to Kansas and his family, he wanted them to come to Canada with him. He had the "wanderlust" as Si puts it, to see a new kind of country. But Austin's wife, Elizabeth, did not wish to go to that remote place and leave her parents, as they were getting up in years. So the marriage ended in divorce in 1902. A few years later, Elizabeth's parents passed away and she remarried a man by the name of Rufus Hosier. He was Si's stepfather from then on.

"My stepfather was a man who believed in children a workin', and he taught us young. He was so anxious for me to get started on planting and raising corn that first year on the home place, that he fixed me up a sled cultivator that worked two head of horses instead of three, and only cultivated a row at a time. He put a tongue in it, he put a seat on it, and I got to work. At the end of the rows I had to lift the discs out of the ground to turn around which was quite a job for me. One time I turned too short and upset the whole thing. A disc hit me in the head and I got this scar here," he said, pointing to his forehead.

"But the horses and mules we worked with were very gentle so that most anybody could work them. One pair of mules I was workin' with always knew when it come noon. They'd stop right in the middle of the field or wherever they was at. Twelve o'clock, and it was time to go to dinner. They just wouldn't move! By the time I was seven or eight I could work three and four horses instead of two, so I thought I was a pretty good hand. I learned a lot about horses then. I have since then owned, sold, ridden, and handled hundreds of them, and I have the battle scars to show that," Si remarked.

Si lived on that farm in Kelly, Kansas for two years. He had to move on to Shively, Kansas when his stepfather's brother, Lou Hosier, moved there. It seemed that these two brothers could not stay apart all their lives. So when Lou moved, his brother Rufus took the same road. In Shively there was no schoolhouse, so Si missed his second grade term. But they moved on to a bigger farm near Sand Creek, Kansas. Si was back in school in a one-room schoolhouse that sat atop Pleasant Hill. This was his school and home for three years, and it was back to raising corn. I asked Si if they ever made any money raising corn. "No, but we could always pick out the good corn to get seed for the follerin' year," he explained. "Another advantage was that we fed the horses corn right off the ear. They were used to it, and that saved us money on that part of the deal." He continued, "We didn't have the expenses that you'd have today farming. With the high price of machinery, seed, and repairs on your equipment, it's awful hard to stay ahead."

Si went on to say that back then it was hard to keep everything going well and eat at the same time.

"There was no money to hire anyone. We changed work with the neighbors. We'd go to their place and help them, and they'd fix a big dinner. Then the next week or whenever, why they'd come and help us back. And that's the way we got along. We traded wheat to the mill for flour and canned everything we raised. Like hominy, sweet potatoes, and sandplums that grew along Sand Creek. I know many ways to fix those. In our spare time we fished. Oh, there were a lot of fish in that country. We hunted cottontail rabbits and ducks in the summer, and trapped skunks and possums in the winter time. I've ate possum and sweet potatoes together many a times. We just lived off the land. It was a question of surviving, you know. But we sure didn't run to the store very often."

At this time, around 1910, Si had never seen an automobile. He did make sure that I knew how important the horse was.

"We took great pride in our horses then. We had an extra good team, gray ones, name of Doc and Prince. My father kept 'em until they died. Course we had balky horses, and runaways. My mother and I had a driving team get away with us once on a spring wagon. They broke the tongue out and tore up the harness. Another man I worked with had a runaway with a pair of mules that ran right square into the barn. Now mules are usually pretty careful about where they run, so you see we had accidents in those days too," he reasoned.

"But horses have come to pass the way I knew them to be. Comparing prices of long ago and today, work horses are really selling high. More so than when we absolutely had to have them. The horses will always be with us though. People are using them for show and rodeos, advertising and some novelty things too. There's a lot of horses broke just to ride, so people still love them. As they say, the outside of a horse is very good for the inside of a person. But as for myself,

I just can't give them up; they are my love, my life.

"The first horse I owned was given to me," Si recalled. "My father had saved up some money by working on the threshing machines. I think it paid two dollars a day. In those days people saved money. But anyway, my father and his brother used this money and took the train to Colorado. That's all they'd been hearin' about was Colorado, what they raised and all. They went to Fort Collins, and oh, it looked so very good. My uncle came back to gather his outfit up and get ready to go in 1911. He had this one drivin' mare with buggy and harness that he didn't particularly want to take with him. So he said to me, 'If your father will let ya, I'm just going to give you that horse and harness.' I was ten years old, and I was kind of proud when I drove her to school and was able to say that she was mine!"

Lou Hosier had rented a ranch in Bellvue, Colo ado. He would write his brother, Rufus, and tell him how good the people were, and how great the living was until Rufus just couldn't stand it anymore. He decided to come to Colorado.

They brought cook stove, walking plow and harrow. There wasn't going to be a chance to get these things once they got to Colorado, and the money just wouldn't be around then, either. The covers for their wagons came from Montgomery Wards. Their cows sold for $25 a head, the farm was sold, and it was September of 1913 when they set out towards the Rocky Mountains.

They were on the trail with their covered wagons for about eight weeks. They took corn to feed the livestock, and things like cheese and crackers, sardines, and Van Camp pork and beans for themselves.

"Van Camps' been in business a long time, because we had Van Camp pork and beans with us on that trip," Si observed. "It was a dry, hot fall, so there were times we had to ration the water to the horses. We hauled the water in 10-gallon milk cans, and sometimes we went for days and couldn't get water enough to fill them. We got held up for almost a week because of too much water though. There was a great big rain storm while we were in Nebraska. You know you can't travel in the rain with wagons. The mud sticks and rolls up around the wheels 'til they won't turn."

The farther West Si's family got the better it looked. The first time they saw mountains was when they reached Fort Morgan, Colorado. It was around here they also watered their horses in the first irrigation ditch Si had ever seen.

"On this trip, my mother would write ahead to my father's brother at about every country store we came to," Si commented. They used one-cent stamps which were green. Also the red stamps were two cents.' They knew about where we were at, and knew that we made about twenty miles a day. They had it figured right out to the 'T' when we'd arrive in Fort Collins. We hit it right on the day. Oh, we met a lot of other wagons on the road, going this way, going that way, everyone was looking for a new location," Si remembered, "but on that trip we certainly never met an automobile!"

The last night they camped out was in Timath, Colorado. One woman saw them coming, and picked them a bushel of apples. Another farmer they stopped and talked to was digging sugar beets. He gave them five or six beets, and they cooked them on a fire that night. It was the first time they had ever tasted them. "I'll tell you what, they were sure a treat after being on that long, hard trip!" Si reflected.

That was in October 1913. They reached Bellvue, near Fort Collins in time to start school at the new schoolhouse. It consolidated the districts in that area. Si thought it was interesting that they used school wagons to bring the children to this school, and they got awfully cold when the first snows hit. But then the snow kept getting deeper. They couldn't use the school wagons as they were, so the blacksmith in Bellvue, (Si smiled as he recalled his name, Ed Williams) made runners for these wagons. They used this way to take the kids to school during the winter months.

"Nineteen and thirteen is the year that you and I will never forget," Si mused, pointing a rugged finger at the center of my eyes. "It was the winter of the big snow at Fort Collins. The snow just kept a comin'. It was very difficult to keep the horses fed and all, what with the snow too deep to even have a team pull your hay wagons to the field. It was very unusual for the snow to get that deep here. And by the way, we ran out of money. I was twelve, and by George, I was out of a pair of shoes. I couldn't go to school all that

Si on Paint. 1939. Howelsen Hill is in the background.

winter because the snow was so deep. My half-sister, Inez, brought my books home. I had a lot of time to learn those books, and when I got to go to school again, I knew those books by heart, and was way ahead of the other kids. So I got in the lead and stayed there."

Si finally did get shoes when his father went to work. There was no snow removal equipment like we know today. So the county put men to work shoveling out some of the main roads. His father got enough money to get Si some new shoes, and back in school.

Si mentioned that because of the deep snow he first became acquainted with skis. There were some families that lived up in the hills west of Bellvue. They had to come down out of them when they ran out of supplies. One fellow stayed at Si's place all night before heading back into the hills with supplies. He showed Si how he'd made the skis he used to travel in that deep snow.

As Si recalled, "We took two good boards off the barn and ripped 'em down to four inches wide, and cut 'em off to seven foot apiece. Then we sharpened one end to a point, and this would be the front, and we planed off the bottom. This man drove a staple about eight inches from the front of the ski and twisted a wire through it, around the front of the ski, and back to the staple. Then we used the coal cookstove and boiled some water. The skis were placed in there when it got very hot. The wire pulling on the end, and the heat of the water let the ends of the ski bend up so they wouldn't catch in the snow. For the bindings we fastened a home string to the ski, and a buckle from that went around your boot.

There was a block of wood to catch the heel. We used broomhandles for poles, and really, we did good with just this. It wouldn't compare with anything that they use today but what you never had, you'll never miss."

Si remembers that they made it through that tough winter, and even got a good crop the following summer. They didn't have any cows, then, and Si's father bought a red 'muley cow from his brother for the price of $55.

Si stated on this, "I won't ever forget when my father got us our first cow. When he got it, he said, 'I'll never sell a heifer calf from that cow, and I'll never sell a heifer calf from any that she has. And he built a wonderful, wonderful herd from that very one cow in a period of years. As they say, if you have patience and stay in the boat, you can always get along."

That fall when Si went back to school, he found out that he would need a reading book that cost eleven cents. "But we didn't have the eleven cents," Si scoffed. "I'll tell you, there was just no way to get that kind of money in those days. So I talked to this Doc Wallace in town. He owned the drug store in Belmont and had a barn and chicken coop in the back. He traded horses and chickens for medicine and the like, and kind of ran the whole country," he reasoned. "I told him my situation and the doctor said, 'I'll tell you what. I use a lot of these small bottles for medicine. Young man, you can go around to your neighbors and tell them what your deal is, and they'll probably give you the bottles. Bring them to me, all washed nice and clean, and wrapped up. I'll see what I can do about gettin' you that reading book.'

"So down the road I went, and whoa! I wasn't

gone a half a day before I had about fifteen bottles!" Si exclaimed. "I washed them up real good an wrapped them in paper. My mother needed some medicine, so we got together five of our roosters, and put 'em in gunny sacks that had holes cut in them to stick their heads out of so they wouldn't smother. We loaded them and the bottles in the buggy and headed down the road the six miles or so that it took to get to town. Doc Wallace saw us comin' and helped us turn the roosters out, and carry the bottles in. He reached up high in a bookshelf and brought down this reader for me. He read a chapter out of it, then closed it and handed it to me. Oh it was a dandy! "he beamed." Then before we were ready to leave the doctor said, 'By the way, you've brought me four extra bottles. I'll tell you what I'm gonna do. You'll need a slate, and you'll need a pencil in school to work your problems on.' And he handed me one of each. So in this deal, I not only got on the trading list, but I got a reader book and my first slate and chalk, and I'll tell you what, I felt like a great big guy!"

At school though, Si found that half the kids didn't have a reader book. The kids sat together, and the teacher put a boy by Si who didn't have a book. He wasn't real anxious to give this book away to someone else after working for it like he had. But the teacher made him share it with him anyway. He remarked, "I wasn't the only one hard up in those days, and most of the kids never did get a book, so we had to do a lot of sharing."

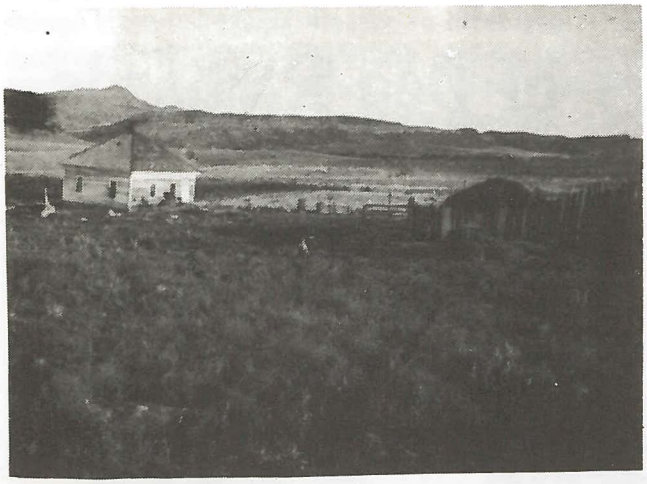
In the years when World War I was beginning, Si was too young to join the Army. He had a wide variety of jobs during that time. One was working in a sugar factory where the men worked 12-hour shifts, with only a 20-minute break for lunch and a rest. There was a lot of machinery and many belts running so it was a pretty dangerous job. A person couldn't very well leave his station for fear that a belt might break or fly off and kill someone.

"It wasn't pleasant, but it was before they had formed unions to protect the workers," Si said. "So a man either worked or passed out, and all they would do then is stick another fellow in your place. But I did want you to know about the long hours that I had to work. Of course, those hours don't compare to when I worked on an irrigating farm for my brother-in-law. The irrigation was on for three days and off three days. I had to stay with that water day and night. I wore rubber boots, and carried a lantern and shovel. Had to be careful not to let a drop get off the place or on the road, and that was quite a job. There was a man we called a ditchrider. He came around to the different places, and if there was water going to waste, he'd make sure your water was shut off. Along in the fall there was a beet harvest to do. We drove four head of horses with a load of beets up a steep ramp. The beets were dumped into a car and shipped to the factory. That made a lot of work for a lot of men. I hauled beets for a guy who'd give me an extry dollar a day to get four loads in one day, and three the next. Sometimes it took me 'til midnight to get that last load on, but I made it."

I was the best dressed man there was.

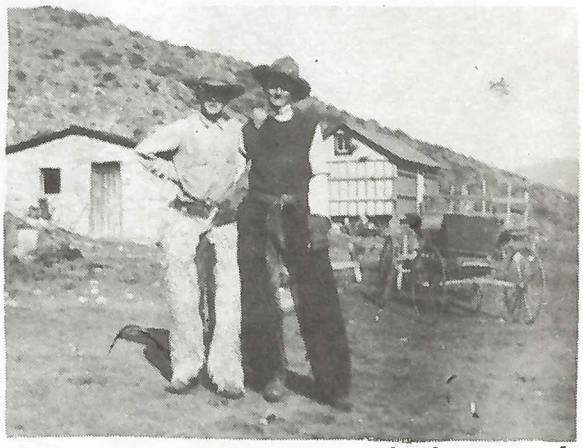
When Si was sixteen he went to work for the Buckeye Land and Livestock Company. He was impressed with the amount of men and horses they worked. When he first started he was a chore monk. He had the jobs of cleaning the barn, putting hay in, and milking the cows. That kept him pretty busy. Then in January the men went out and gathered in the livestock. Si got to ride on that round-up. It lasted about ten days. The first morning there were some horses in the corral. Si described them as "pretty bronco'y." One of the old-time cowboys would rope a horse, bring it out and hand it to one of the men. Then it

was saddled, and a hackamore was put on, and that was the man's horse for the rest of the round-up.



"The horse the man handed you was yours. You couldn't go back and trade for another. There was too much work to be done to be wasting time with that," Si explained. "When you first got on him in the morning he'd try and buck you off, but by that night he might play out. It was a great experience to ride in the cold wind and weather. Sometimes the sandwiches we carried in our saddlebags would freeze. Not hard, but they'd get frosty. You had to eat them right on the horse. Didn't dare get off him, 'cause you might not get back on. If the horse would get away from you, there you'd be, some 25 miles from nowhere!" he gleamed. "So's all you could do was stay on one of them ol' broncs all day and hope you made it back that night!

"Now that was a good experience as I said, but I probably learned a little more from a man who fed sheep there. He collected bounties on coyotes he killed, not too much though. He wanted me to come with him once, said he had somethin' to show me. Well, he had these four greyhounds. He fed them cooked barley and corn meal. He never did give them all they wanted, said if you feed a dog all they can eat, they don't care if they hunt or not. That also kind of holds true with people. If you feed them all they'll eat, they don't care if they work. But what he wanted to show me was this: The four dogs he had were getting up in age and weren't able to catch the coyotes as well as they used to. So he bought a bitch out of Oklahoma for a good price and she was the fastest thing that ever ran. We rode along on two good horses until we jumped a coyote, and this bitch took off after him. The older dogs, well they spread out. Two of them went to the right, and two to the left. And just about the time this bitch was ready to catch the coyote, he turned around on his hind legs and started backtracking. He ran right into one of the old dogs, nd they would catch the coyote. Of course the bitch would try to turn around too, and she would turn end over endd. And by the time she got stopped and got back to where the coyote was caught, why the man already had the dogs whipped off and the coyote on the horse. And he said to me, 'Well, I wanted to show you that she's the fastest thing on wheels. She's never caught a coyote in her life, and I don't suppose she ever will. The old dogs are the ones that catch the coyote.' So there's always a place for the old dog, and in turn, I guess that means that there will always be a place for older people," Si added. "So I learned a lesson there and that is the fastest one does not always catch the coyote!"



Si (dark chaps) with his side kick, Elmer Foster. 1919.

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