

# Close the Door

**Bobby Paige**

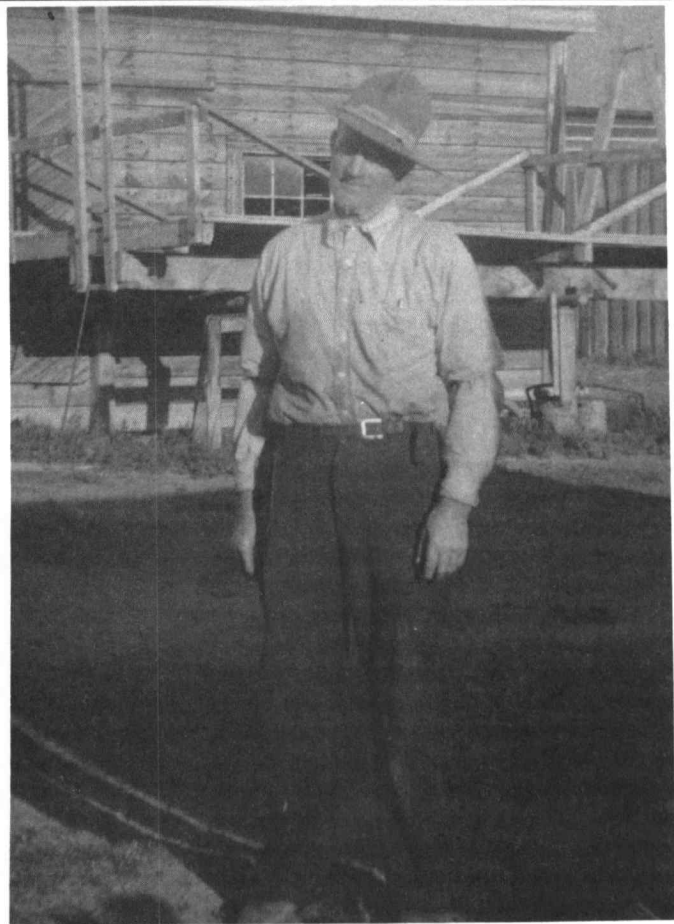
A "DOOR" IS A COMMON ITEM in any building. Webster defines "door" as a movable structure for opening or closing an entrance. In some places doors are covered with a modern art form called graffiti. It is not hard to imagine the stories that could be told if doors could talk. The history of what happened behind closed doors would be a great insight into the past.

There is one door which is able to impart information of the past. This pictured *door* was formerly from the Paige Ranch out of Alder, Mont. The *door*, now on display at the Simmental Headquarters, Bozeman, Mont., was the repository for an early Montana rancher of facts and figures of his operation on the actual date of their culmination. Reading the door is a step into the past of Montana rancher Bert Paige during a time when only the hardest could survive in business.

Bert George Paige was born in Glendale, Mont., on Dec. 18, 1873. He was the oldest of eleven children of Sam and Minerva Paige. A few years later the Paiges moved to a ranch near Alder, Mont., where Bert grew to early manhood. During this early period he learned by actual experience the exigencies of a successful cattle ranch. Bert's formal education was started in one-room schools and ended with a degree in business administration and accounting from Central Business College of Sedalia, Missouri. Bert returned to Montana and established a mercantile business in Twin Bridges, Mont., married, fathered two sons, Boynton and Lowell, worked mines and ran cattle and horses on the rangeland. A chapter in Bert's life ended in 1927 with the death of his wife Florence. Unpaid loans, extended credit, and worthless grubstakes induced him to sell the property and move back to the family ranch at Alder.

THE SITUATION AT THE RANCH was not the best. Extravagant buying and mismanagement in the past had led to a confusion of unpaid bills, disrepair of buildings, untended livestock, broken fences, and barren fields. Bert stepped into the position as part owner and manager. This was at one of the bleakest points in the history of the United States. The stock market crash of 1929 and the following depression era forced many ranching operations to fold. Cattle prices dropped to five cents a pound. Wheat sold for twenty-five cents a bushel, and many agricultural commodities could not be sold at any price. Bert hung on by getting by with the smallest expenditures possible. The ranch became self-sufficient by producing practically everything needed.

Bert had hired a young lady, Mary Salmonsens, as housekeeper, cook, and gardener. Mary raised a huge garden and canned large quantities of vegetables, pickles, apples, and



even meat to get through the winters. Apples were pressed for cider. There were barrels of sauerkraut and glass after glass of beautiful jellies and syrups. Pigs were fattened and provided smoked hams and bacon, sausage, and lard. There were chickens, turkeys, ducks, and geese to be eaten or sold. Sheep were used to eat the weeds around the building and a few dairy cows provided milk for drinking and cooking. Extra cream was sold and the "cream check" brought in a little cash for luxuries such as oranges or grapefruit. During these years Bert would take teen age boys from the Orphans' Home in Twin Bridges and give them a home. In return, they would do chores. All this was done before and after school.

The center of all this activity was a three-story brick house built by his father. The house, once an elegant home, was a shambles when Bert moved back. There was no central heating, electricity, running water, or bathroom. There were many doors, but without any writing or figuring. There were seven doors in the kitchen alone. Each of the five bedrooms on the second floor had a door with its own Yale lock. The house had three outside doors and none of these doors could be locked. The keys had been lost for many years. Even without locks no one ever broke in.

UNDER BERT'S INDUSTRIOUS MANAGEMENT, the ranch gradually began to come back to its former level of production. The cattle herd was built up and its quality improved with registered bulls. These were still the days of open range. Bert, his brothers, and his son, Lowell, had filed on homesteads in the summer range area. Round-up in the

EDITOR'S NOTE: The author, Bobby Paige, is the daughter-in-law of Bert Paige and the sister of Pete Jackson, Executive Vice-President, Society for Range Management.

fall was a major operation. Branding, dehorning, castrating, and vaccinating were done in the spring before the cattle were turned out. This was all hand work with ropes and required many men over many days to complete the project. Here the barn *door* came into its own. Bert recorded the vital statistics on the *door*. Cattle buyers came along in the fall of the year following the round-up and bought calves and other marketable cattle. There would be much hemming and hawing over prices, terms, and delivery dates. Bert was a master mathematician and never let a buyer best him. It was on the *door* that some of these transactions were actually finalized. The *door* also featured Bert's S P brand, one of the oldest in the State.

**CONSERVATIVE WAS THE BEST WORD** to describe Bert's management. He never tried anything new until it was proven without a doubt, especially if there was money involved. He and his crew got along with outdated and worn-out equipment long after the neighbors had upgraded theirs. Bert was adamantly opposed to going into debt and would do almost anything to avoid that situation. He used horse-drawn equipment long after his neighbors had become mechanized. When Bert was finally convinced that it was a sound idea, he bought a tractor and gradually added pieces of machinery until his ranch was mechanized. The era of draft horses ended. When World II brought a demand for beef, Bert was ready and at long last made some money.

Times were better for everyone. Electricity was wired into the house, barn, and some of the out-buildings. The electric pump, refrigerator, hot water heater, washing machine, and stove made life much easier for Mary Salmonsens. Mechanization had reduced the need for so many hired men and there wasn't the need for the Orphan's Home boys. Bert's younger brother, Warner Paige, took over the chore of chopping wood and taking care of the heating stoves.

Warner Paige is also featured on the *door* but not in a complimentary way. His name is featured prominently as "drunk again" and many marks tallying the number of times. In early manhood, Warner had suffered a critical back injury when thrown from a horse and walked the rest of his life with a shuffle that looked like he might fall on his face with the next step. He was the butt of much ridicule and badgering. He probably had reason to get drunk many times, but in reality he rarely did, just took an occasional drink with the hired hands. Warner made his home on the ranch doing what he could. To Bert, Warner was the younger brother who needed help. He cared for him until he died.

**BIG GAME HUNTING WAS A PART** of Bert's life. Every fall he, his brothers, sons, and friends packed up and went to the mountains. The hunting trips were planned for weeks ahead and talked about for months afterward. In 1937 while on an elk hunting trip, Bert met his first grizzly bear. He said it was either the bear or him and fired one shot, striking the huge grizzly between the eyes and killing it instantly. His horse paid no attention while Bert skinned out the animal and tied the hide and hind quarter to the saddle. When Bert got into the saddle the horse turned its head, smelled the meat and promptly went wild. After throwing Bert, the horse galloped away with the hide and meat bouncing up and

down, further inflaming the horse. Bert wasn't hurt, just mad enough to shoot the horse. Fortunately his horse was gone before he had a chance. There was nothing to do but to hike back to camp. He arrived at dusk just as a search party was ready to look for him. The horse had come back to camp dragging the hide. The meat had been lost somewhere along the trail. The grizzly bear hide was a trophy hide when mounted with the giant head displaying omnivorous teeth and man-killing claws. It startled anyone seeing it the first time and terrified all small children.

Bert's last hunting trip occurred when he was in his late sixties. He had followed elk and finally shot one just at dusk. By the time he had cleaned the animal, a howling blizzard had set in and night fell. Bert managed to get a fire going with his last match. He sat by the fire all night, not daring to go to sleep. At daybreak he started back to camp and was met by members of the hunting party who were out looking for him. They hardly recognized him—his face was black with smoke. That hunting trip took the zest for hunting out of Bert.

**BERT WAS DEFINITELY OF THE "OLD SCHOOL."** He doggedly resisted change until there was no other way to go. In 1948 his sons finally persuaded him to buy a new car. It was a two-door sport coupe, straight eight Buick with eighteen-inch wheels. It was built to be a highway car. Bert used it as a jeep. There was no place he wouldn't try to take it. Hunters, after climbing to some high, inaccessible point, would turn around to find Bert roaring up the mountain in the Buick. He chased cattle, checked fences, and distributed salt with it. He drove on whichever side of the road he preferred and was the terror of his passengers and anyone he would meet. He took care of the car as he would a sick cow. It either died or got well. Finally from lack of care and abuse the Buick would no longer start. It was replaced with another Buick, this one with an automatic transmission. Bert did give it a little more respect, driving more slowly, but usually with one foot on the brake and one on the accelerator. He would rev up the motor, release the brake and shoot out of the driveway in a cloud of dust with chickens, dogs, cats, and people running for cover. This car was also driven on either side of the road and oncoming drivers soon learned to approach with caution.

One change that Bert wouldn't make was to get rid of a flock of geese. They weren't liked but to Bert they were watch dogs. If they raised a fuss during the night, something was amiss and should be investigated. They also slowed down the traffic going by the ranch. When a car approached, the geese would slowly make their way across the road in single file. The car would have to come to a complete stop until the procession crossed. As soon as the car moved on, the geese went back to the other side of the road. Brakes would screech and the horn would blare, but nothing hurried the geese. It was a never-ending duel.

**BERT'S PHILOSOPHY WAS THE** Protestant work ethic. You worked until you dropped or your day was wasted, and he expected everyone to do the same. Bert expanded the philosophy by setting the example. He never spared himself and was still riding for cattle at the age of 82. His legs would not let him spring into the saddle. He would lead his horse to

the ditch bank or some higher place where he could just step into the saddle.

Bert Paige was a gentleman. He would never tolerate the foul language that is so common today. He took an occasional social drink and smoked sparingly. He always wore a necktie and a suitcoat with a felt hat. Part of his attire were arm bands that kept the cuffs of his sleeves at just the right length. He wore cowboy boots only when riding.

In 1956 time began to run out for Bert. At the age of 82 he attended the New Year's party in Virginia City and danced a few dances. There was some work that had to be done with the cattle. Bert did it, but the weather was bitterly cold and he was chilled and exhausted. He sat by the fire in the house for several days saying he guessed he had a little flu. However, his home remedies didn't do any good, not the bacon rind

poultice or even the horse distemper medicine placed on the back of the tongue. Finally he agreed to let his son take him to the doctor. He was persuaded to enter the hospital "just to rest up a bit." He stayed three weeks but didn't get much better. The diagnosis was a bad heart.

Finally the doctor released him from the hospital but he was to get lots of rest and watch his diet, no salt or fried foods, the usual coronary diet. His son took him to his home where he had a pleasant evening with his family. Dinner was of the prescribed diet and everyone was very solicitous. After dinner Bert asked his daughter-in-law, Bobby, to play the piano. One of the songs was "The End of a Perfect Day." Everyone went to bed early so Grandpa could, without appearing to be an invalid. The house became quiet, dark and peaceful. Bert closed his eyes and never opened them again. *Thus closed the door on Bert Paige—a survivor.*

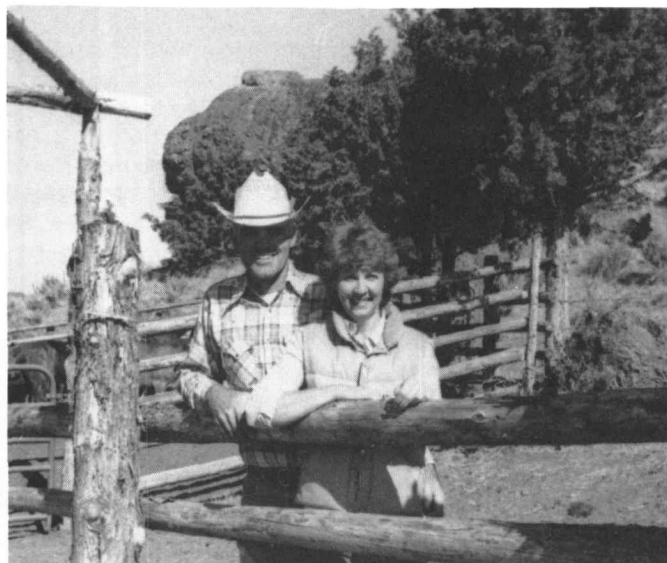
## Cow Camp Comments:

# Conflicts—Let's Try to Understand Them

**Doc and Connie Hatfield**

Conflicts between ranchers and conservationists are becoming more heated every year. The following quotes from an article by Steve Moen in the October *Oregon Ike* are worth some study: "Over the years the Steens mountain-Malheur National Wildlife Refuge-Alvord desert region has been recognized as one of America's outstanding areas of natural beauty." "The Steens-Alvord area would seem to fit well within the national preserve concept." "A national preserve is basically the same as a national park with the exception that sport hunting is allowed." "It may well be that the Malheur-Steens-Alvord region will most benefit Oregonians and Harney county residents as a recognized scenic recreational resource with the establishment of Steens Mountain National Preserve."

Steve is president of the Portland chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America, a moderate conservation group, and a national environmental leader on public lands grazing issues. His view of how a resource should best be managed is shared by many environmental groups. Because of our interest in resource management and the fact that our ranch operation depends partially on grazing federal lands, we became members of the Portland chapter of the Izaak Walton League. We have had Steve Moen and other members of the chapter's public lands committee visit our ranch. We found them to be rational individuals with an honest concern for the environment. The "Ike's" policy statement makes it clear that they are not opposed to livestock grazing on suitable lands.



*The Hatfields.*

However, nearly all their efforts to improve rangelands are based on reducing or eliminating livestock grazing. Grazing is not allowed in national parks and we assume the same would apply to a national preserve. The threat to grazing elimination is more than just the loss of cow feed. It would involve a major change in life style and community structure.