

Johnson Administration Fine For Ranchers, Hard On Gold Seekers

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MERTZON, Texas — People in charge of President Johnson's last campaign pulled one blunder, though it didn't show up at the time.

If they hadn't overlooked telling us ranchers what a blissful spring this was going to be, my old hero, Barry Goldflank, wouldn't have received enough supporters among the ranch population to man a racing shell.

Had those campaign experts let us know that lambs were going over the 20-cent market, that our calves were going to get fatter than a brewery hog, and that man was going to find something besides a few grains of dust and a dead horse fly in his rain gauges, we Republican ranchers would probably have protested Barry's name taking up so much space on the ballot.

As it is, this spring under the democrats has been so filled with joy that many of us hard-shell rural Republicans are wavering toward the teachings of the Great Society to the point of surreptitiously checking on whether any new members are being admitted.

Now, if wool and mohair markets were to get in tune with other conditions, there might be a mass exodus of ranchers from the Republican Party that would make a televised cattle stampede look like a graduating class mounting the platform at their baccalaureate services.

However, not every development under Mr. Johnson's administration has been so happy. Take, for instance, treasure hunting.

As you may recall, last winter an old chap was by the ranch, practically begging for the chance to dig up a fortune. He showed up again the other evening at a time when I was more tired than a wash woman in a coal mining town. We were shipping lambs. Instead of bringing me a sack of Spanish coins, he bore the sad news that the purported treasure had been dug up some 50-odd years ago.

He softened the blow somewhat by telling us it would have been a Jim Dandy of a strike if some sneaking scamp hadn't slipped in there and beat us to the money. As on his earlier visit, he mentioned that rainy weather had thrown his treasure-finding instruments off, but nevertheless he was certain there had once been a treasure on those bluffs.

Furthermore, he said if we'd give him a list of the people who were in and out of this country along about 1914-15, his radiothesia machine would identify the dirty crook who'd robbed us.

I started to tell the old fellow that, with potatoes costing more at retail than truffles do wholesale, the odds were slim that anybody who'd found only \$300,000 as late as the first of this year would have 20 cents by now — much less that he could have kept the money intact for half a century.

However, he didn't give me a chance to say a word but launched into a series of tales involving such personal acquaintances as Mr. Jesse James and the Sundown Kid, and buried treasures that, if they had all been uncovered and banker, would make the personal fortune of Paul Getty look like small change.

This went on for an hour or so. I sat there nodding in my chair, wondering how this briefing on all the state's buried wealth and buried bad men would carry me through the forthcoming day jerking the gate on a cutting chute.

Finally the din of my sons' rough-housing began to win over. The visitor's treasures were now diminishing below the \$100,000 mark. The gunslingers were down to the one-gun class, and the turned-up volume of the 10 o'clock news did its part to terminate the visit. After a final 20-minute recapitulation on the vanished treasure at the ranch, he departed, promising to bring me a dozen or so souvenir coins next time he unearthed a hoard.

So, as I started out to say, life under that Great Society may be hell on wheels when it comes to fattening livestock and growing grass, but when it comes to treasure hunting it's a complete flop.