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Credit cards having large enough limits to handle inflation require a street address for the applicant, or at least the ones I've applied for do. Mertzon has street and house numbers, but the mail goes in post boxes, so my office address over in town is no help. The ranch is out of reach of the rural mail route, thus has no postal designation. I live too far off the public road to be on the county map. And I go back far back enough in time to know that when I am broke, street addresses aren't going to give relief. Slow rain, hot wool markets and active cattle booms are what pump up my game.

The big northern banks also require copies of the telephone company's bills attached to applications. Once

Citibank refused to issue me a card after having reviewed my phone bill. There was nothing unusual about the statement, unless a 14-day serial hit of five-hour toll calls from Mertz on to Hartford, Connecticut to seal up one of my son's new love affairs counts as exceptional.

As I've reported before, seven miles of private line hook the ranch's telephone up to GTE's cable. Somehow that faraway northern jugkeeper sensed the telephone wasn't tied in like the ones in the city. He accurately surmised that reaching me at the ranch after a thunderstorm might take several days and a special wiretap to blur out the static. Being the careful banker he was trained to be, he didn't want to have his secretary occupied for a month making one telephone call to Texas. I learned myself not to be smart

and say, "try the wool house's number after nap time." Humor grows thin across state lines.

Finally, Mertzon bankers had to vouch for my credit. In the interim, Visa wrote the *passaporte* working at the line camp a letter offering him a gold card if he'd fill in a few blanks. Closest Jose ever came in the 40 years he worked over here to having a stateside address was the time the Border Patrol held him overnight in city jail in San Antonio and he'd of been insulted if he had to pay a telephone bill.

When I voted absentee in October, the county clerk asked for my physical address. People think just because you don't belong to the PTA or the Junior League, you are without roots. The reason for voting absentee in the first place was because my physical presence was changing in

November to keep my psychic presence from brooding about the dry spell and the cattle wreck that's a continuation of the big weather failure and overall agriculture depression of this century.

The county attorney arrived in time to settle the matter. She ruled that if I declared my physical address as being on the visitor's side of the counter in the clerk's office, the election code defends the declaration. Your physical address is not like your homestead. A citizen is allowed to declare only one homestead by Texas law, but a person driven by a wanderlust, such as myself, might have 44 physical addresses in that many days and still have precincts yet to report.

I meant to ask her the date the law separated our physical addresses from our psychological addresses. More important, I'd sure like for the duly elected in Washington D.C. to try to keep their body and mind on the same banks of the Potomac, especially dealing in Balkan wars and blowing our dough up in the air like it was confetti on seven-day shutdowns with a severance payroll of 150 million bucks a day. In fact, I'd support the county clerks of all 254 Texas counties if they had a plan to keep the worthies in D.C. thinking about business of state instead of, say, the state of their campaign chest.

I don't blame the clerk for being careful of residence requirements. History makes county clerks in Texas nervous about absentee voting. One of the marks of the oldtime

professional politician was a big turnout in the absentee boxes in his favor. Smart operators kept tab on their camp. The "undecided" could often be nailed down by offering a discreet vote up at the courthouse. Also, under the old poll tax law, folks over 65 could vote without showing a tax receipt or being listed on the rolls. So if a son could persuade old granny and grandpa to ride over across a county line to help a family friend, the absentee box seemed to be a more discreet place.

I suppose such simple answers as staying home for the holidays will cause a question in some quarters. Herders hanging around the auction barns would have a hard time locating their presence, either physical or psychological.

Green street signs are popping up in out of the way places.

Maybe in '96, the ranch house will have a number...