

Shortgrass Country

By Monte Noelke

1-14-71

Page 7

Three crimes committed in the Shortgrass ranching country last year remain unsolved.

In the immediate area, a pear burner, including pressure hose and butane tank, was stolen. As I reported earlier, 60 salt blocks were taken from our warehouse. And somewhere close to the same time, a cuckoo clock was taken from a ranch home.

Law officials, I was told, treated these as three separate offenses. The salt banditry was classified in the same category as wool or mohair thievery. The pear burner lifting was charged to the possibility that a foresighted antique dealer was putting back a few burners for next year's tourist trade. As to the cuckoo clock, accusations were leveled at a variety of suspects ranging from husbands who had failed to get their wives a Christmas gift, to low caste criminals so void of grace that he'd steal a tin whistle if the owner didn't have it tied around his neck.

Using television criminology as a basis, I have surmised that the same crook pulled all three jobs. Lifting the cuckoo clock was merely a slick method of diverting attention from the obvious link between the salt and the pear burner. The thief didn't want the cuckoo clock, yet he did not want the law sorting through the dozens of Shortgrassers who were rapidly becoming frost and drouth stricken enough to rob the pantry at an orphan home.

Also, what could have been a better way to conceal the rest of his booty? In these hard times, his neighbors would have certainly noticed an unexplained windfall like a fresh cache of salt or a new secondhand pear burner. But with a cuckoo clock calling off the 15-minute markers, just who could concentrate on what was new around the place? Try sometime to think with a cuckoo clock sounding off the quarter hour. I say that man abandoned cuckoo clocks in search of peace, not fashion.

Furthermore, as I see it, the thief's banker had cut off his expense money. His wife was raising old Ned on the inside of the house and his cows were bawling on the outside. His life at the brightest moments was blacker than a witch doctor's thoughts.

So overcome by the din of his detractors, his honesty wavered, and he turned to crime. A turn, I'll go on and add, that'll probably get him a second hearing at St. Peter's court. Hard indeed, would be an advocate who wouldn't grant mercy on a fellow who tried to silence his mate with a cuckoo clock and calm his cows with a batch of burned pear.

Mr. Nixon promised that he was going to end crime in the streets. He didn't say, however, that he was going to cause folks to pack off salt, pear burners, and cuckoo clocks. Presidents must be so smart that they know crime won't last long in the ranch country. Robin Hood's gang couldn't have stayed in cross bow strings on what there is left to steal from ranchers.

It does make you uneasy to know such villainy is going on. If ranchers have turned to crime, I wonder how many ticker tape machines are missing on Wall Street?