

APRIL 17, 1980

Dr. Weather has narrowed the Shortgrass Country's problems to a single channel. March has extended over into April; winter, it appears is going to last through spring. The cares of the world and the woes of the industry seem mighty insignificant through the windows of a feed wagon. All of our grief has been pinpointed in one area.

It's been months since anyone has discussed anything but the drouth. For example, I haven't heard a word about the shortage of cowboys in a long time.

However, cattle are so sack broke that one measuring cup full of 20 percent range cubes would be potent enough to gather every old cow from here to the Mexican border. About all a horseman could be used for is in case the herds need to be held off the feed barns. I suppose in the case of a wild stampede after a feed wagon an old pony would help to throw them in a turn. The pressure on borrowed money is that it takes to pay and feed a man is probably the main reason that the subject has been tabled. The last boots and hats that I saw around the banks in San Angelo were during the March rodeo. I don't know what the herders are doing for financing. As accustomed as we are to the world of notes and debts, I can't feature the hollow horn society banking by mail or coming around to the back entrance of the jugs. Maybe it's the price of gasoline that's keeping them home. I am not going to believe it's the high interest rates until CBS proves it over the tube.

The few jugkeepers that I've had the nerve to talk to have been so irritable that it was like visiting the IRS. I made a short run by an Angelo bank yesterday to check on the 10 o'clock interest rises. The last time I was treated with that much suspicion was at a customs point in Morocco in North Africa. I felt like I was carrying off part of the fixtures or asking them to take a second lien on a load of heifer calves.

Tension was so high around the chambers that the maintenance man had put a straw on the spout of the water cooler to keep down strangulation. I followed a 19-year-old clerk down a hallway. His whistling was so thin and sporadic that the tune sounded like he'd sprung a leak in his lung cavity.

Not one senior officer was in sight. It didn't matter, as I sure wasn't going to discuss the ranch business. No need of bringing up the flour shortage in a doughnut factory, especially when sugar is in low supply, too. I mentioned to a girl that I would be in next January to renew the rent on my safety deposit box. I don't ever remember seeing the streets of San Angelo look so bright and sunny.

Banks and loan companies are being reduced to unwilling members of the federal bureaucracy. The only thing negotiable around a jug today between the banker and his customer is whether they eat lunch together or not. The fed has taken out the fun and replaced it with plenty of misery. For an outfit that couldn't run a hotdog stand on Coney Island, the government sure has a lot of nerve to think they can run the banks.

One rain would change our scene. The feed bins are running low and the pickups are groaning from the overloads. What seemed like grave problems last fall look mighty unimportant this morning. Without a banker's shoulder to cry on, we are going to be in a wreck.