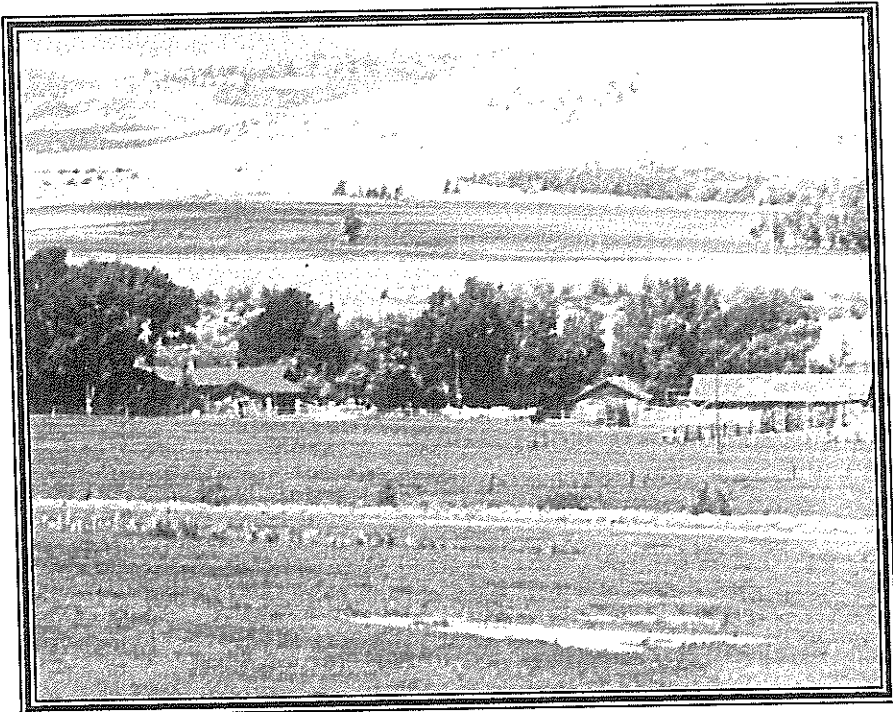


# SIDLEY

WILLIAM D. [1900-1984]  
THELMA F. [1899-1972]

*In the valley (1934 to 1986).* This family history begins during the drought and Great Depression year of 1934 when my 34-year-old late father, William D. Sidley, a native of Chicago, bought the heart of Silver Spur Ranches, the Hawkes-Huston Ranch comprising 3,500 deeded acres of irrigated native hay meadow and some pasture. Included in this first purchase was a small herd of fine Hereford commercial cows. Prior to that time he had been in business 14 years with the old Sullivan Mining Machinery Company in Minnesota, Chicago, and New York City. The Sullivan had become a casualty of the Depression, and therefore the timing was perfect for such a change.



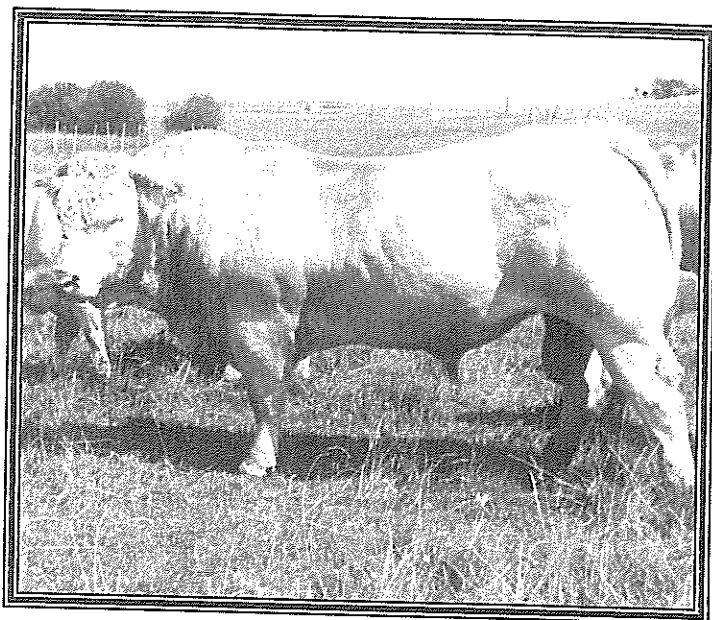
*The historic Silver Spur Ranch with the brand visible on the roof of one of the buildings.*

William D. Sidley's love of the west was kindled through a series of pack trips to different mountain areas of Wyoming each August and early September. These expeditions were organized by my grandfather and a few friends from 1908 to 1926 with the exception of the War year 1918. On August 16, 1909, the party of seven minus my father, who was too young at the time, arrived in Encampment by rail, spent the night at the New Bohn Hotel, and then packed through Hog Park and the eastern foothills of the Sierra Madre Range to Jack Creek.

My grandfather, William P. Sidley, was a prominent corporation lawyer in Chicago. His financial assistance made possible the purchase of the Hawkes-Huston Ranch, which is one of the oldest ranches in the Valley, having been founded in 1879 by Albert H. Huston, who had come from

Fulton, Missouri, and settled on what is now the Silver Spur Headquarters Ranch on Teddy Creek and Cow Creek. Albert Huston was one of the crack game shots of the world and would guide hunting parties from England each fall in the quest for bear, deer, and antelope.

The Hawkes-Huston Ranch was purchased in the 1920s by Benjamin C. Hawkes of Chicago who died about 1931. His son Belknap C. Hawkes was to take over the property, but died of appendicitis in October 1933. The title passed into the hands of the Chicago Title and Trust Company as Trustee of the Estate. Following the legal transfer of title to William D. Sidley in March, 1935, the Hawkes-Huston Ranch became the Silver Spur Ranch which included the Silver Spur South Ranch, my parent's residence for the next 40 years.



*Astronaut at the time of the famous bull sale.*

Over the years through 1950, adjoining irrigated and pasture lands were added, and Silver Spur is today a spread of about 11,000 acres (9,000 of which is fee land) up against the National Forest on the eastern slope of the Rockies. The elevation is 7,200 to about 9,000 feet, at which point it adjoins the Medicine Bow National Forest. The ranch is self-sufficient in the production of native hay, alfalfa and small grains. Water for irrigation is everything in this country, and Silver Spur is well-supplied by tributaries to the North Platte River, famed since pioneer times as a trout fisherman's paradise.

Sam Verplancke was foreman at the time of the purchase of the ranch and remained until 1941 when Billy Wilde, a grand old cowboy from Cheyenne who had an uncanny ability in herd management, became cow foreman. He was with us until his death from a stroke in the spring of 1944.

My father soon became intensely interested in building up our Hereford commercial herd. During that first autumn of 1934, he bought 12 registered cows and a herd bull from Fred DeBerard of Kremmling, Colorado. Further inspiration for improvement came from Andrew Anderson, owner (until its purchase in 1962 by Gates Rubber Company of Denver) of the famous A Bar A Dude and Cattle Ranch near Encampment. Andy had long been a consistent winner with his Hereford feeder calves at the major stock shows, and my father made a practice of accompanying Andy and his herdsman, Ed Davis, to the Chicago International and the National Western at Denver to learn what it took to show cattle.

In 1939, during the Chicago International, Andy announced that they had decided to switch from commercial Herefords to registered Angus. Ed Davis then told my father about a fine but little known five-year old herd bull for sale, bred by John Coder of Elwood, Nebraska, and owned by Bernard Benke of Bartley, in the same area. On the way home my parents stopped there and were very much impressed with the improvement he had achieved in siring bull calves out of Holstein cows. They bought him and he arrived the following spring in the back of a truck which also was carrying Ed Davis' furniture.

The bull's name was Anxiety Junior 45th, but he quickly became known as "Oscar." His progeny nicked with our herd to such an extent that from 1944 through 1948 his castrated grandsons won four Grand Championships over all breeds in five years at the National Western Carlot Feeder Show in Denver. He did the same at other shows where we never stood lower than third place. We stopped showing after 1948 but continued to sell our steer calves to George Hoffman, a famous feeder of Ida Grove, Iowa. In 1953 we returned to compete once more at Denver and captured the Reserve Grand Championship for carload feeder calves.

By the early 1950s, however, it became obvious that something was going wrong. "Oscar" had died in 1949. We bought other bulls but unfortunately got mixed up with some of the genes that were running like a scourge through the British breeds. We began to see strange and "dumpy" looking calves appearing in many of the leading show herds in the country. It was past time to do something radical. Therefore, every last female that did not have a "clean" pedigree was sold, and only a few honest old cows were kept. In 1954, along with Joseph Hewitt of Elk Hollow Ranch who had the same problem, we commenced to breed them to something called Charolais. Nobody in the whole Rocky Mountain Country had ever heard of them.

The earlier culling paid off, and soon it was obvious that Charolais bulls possessed the ability to sire fast-gaining, high performance calves. We purchased a few top Charolais cows from the Michaelis Ranch of Kyle, Texas, and the finest bulls available at that time. These early purchases of Charolais breeding stock enabled us to produce the registered Charolais that won prizes at Denver and Fort Worth during the 1960s. In addition, during those years we produced herd bulls for other breeders in our area and sold some 50 range bulls each year to commercial breeders of Herefords and Angus in the west.

In 1964, the Charolais industry began to rumble with the possibility of getting pure French Charolais from France into the United States. When Union Stockyards of Chicago held their first sale of French Charolais in Eleuthera in the Bahama Islands, Silver Spur Ranches was invited to attend. There was an impressive young bull in that sale named Astronaut, and when the auctioneer's gavel went down, Silver Spur was his proud new owner. Astronaut not only met but also surpassed all expectations of him as a calf. He made a very distinctive mark on our Charolais herd and became the second full French bull to attain the status of a Golden Certified Meat Sire registered with Performance Registry International. Our Charolais herd expanded to around 300 cows, and an artificial insemination program further improved its quality.

Astronaut weighed 2,700 pounds, but he had an unusually gentle disposition, not unlike "Ferdinand the Bull." You could lead him anywhere, drive him anywhere, and doctor him without the benefit of a chute. He would often walk across the corral to be petted and have his neck and ears scratched. Once we haltered him and tied the halter rope to a corral post, where upon he promptly sat down on his hind quarters and contemplated his surroundings. The effect was hilarious!

The proof of Astronaut's quality was demonstrated when on September 19, 1970, we held a Production Sale featuring his progeny and services. Preparation for this event encompassed the better part of that year. The auction took place in a colorful striped tent in the Sidley Field just to the east of the big house at the south ranch. Adjacent steel holding pens afforded easy access to the auctioneer and sale ring, while portable bleachers inside accommodated the large crowd. One hundred Charolais were sold, the average price per head was \$2,300. The Saratoga Inn served as sales headquarters, and a pre-sale cocktail party and buffet were held there the evening of the eighteenth, complete with danc-

ing and swinging music provided by Morton Mann and his quartet from Denver. Some say that was the best party ever held at the Inn.

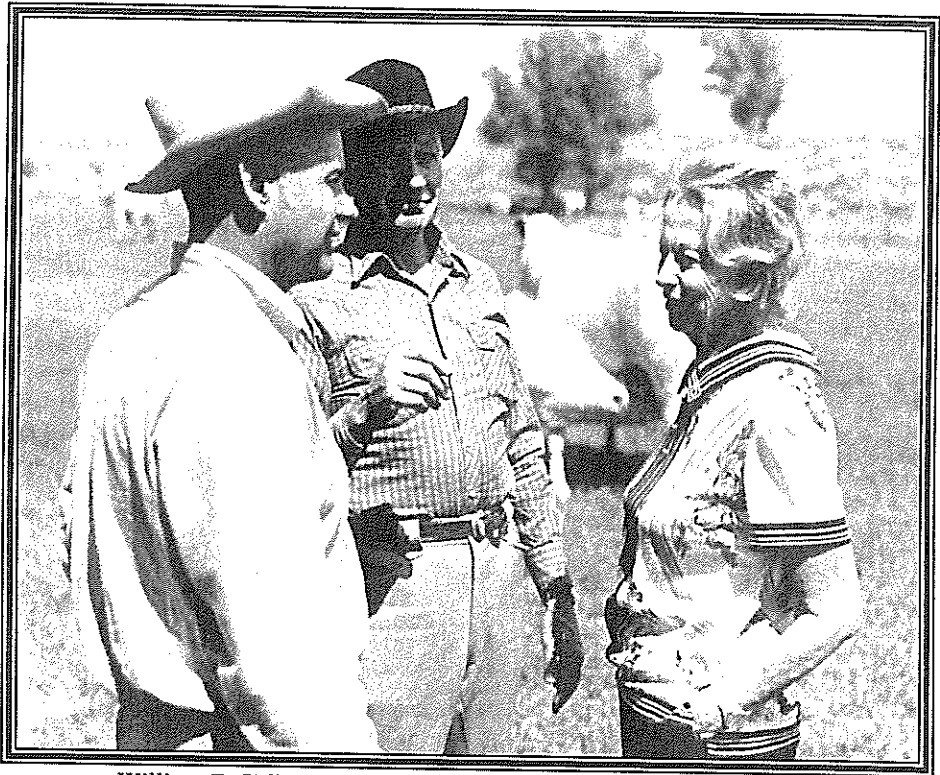
To keep the ranch fully stocked, we also wintered 2,200 to 2,300 good commercial steer and heifer calves every year, many of which were Charolais, cross calves produced by Silver Spur Ranch bulls sold to commercial cowmen. These calves were wintered and then summer grazed and sold in the fall as yearlings.

In 1961, James A. York Jr. became ranch manager and remained in that capacity until the sale of Silver Spur Ranches on December 31, 1974, to Ned Cook, Chairman of Cook Industries, an agribusiness corporation based in Memphis, Tennessee, and his sister Phoebe Welsh from Houston, Texas. In those 13 years through 1974, Jim can be credited with building the ranch into one of the most productive spreads in the Rocky Mountains.

In 1980, it was sold to TeleCommunications, Inc., (Bob Magness, Chairman) now the largest Cable Television company in the United States. It continues as a commercial cow-calf operation and supports some 1,400 crossbred cows. It is comforting to know that Silver Spur is in such good hands today with Jim York's son, Jimmy, managing the Silver Spur and Cow Creek Ranches while his father runs the other Magness holdings in the vicinity.

My mother, Thelma F. Sidley, died in August, 1972, and with the passing of my father in July, 1984, at the age of 84, the era of five generations of the Sidley family in the Valley came to a close. The Silver Spur South Ranch which consisted of his residence, the surrounding buildings, and 80 acres, was always an entity separate from the Ranch Corporation and continued as a life estate until September 1986, at which time the use of it was surrendered to TeleCommunications, Inc. and the Magness family. The Sidleys were, therefore, landholders in the Saratoga and Encampment Valley for 52 years, and Silver Spur was the anchor.

Although the trend today is toward consolidation of the family farm and ranch into larger corporations, ranching and farming have always been a way of life as well as a business. To a lesser degree, therefore, this is still true, and no short history of the Sidley family in the Valley would be



*William F. Sidley with his parents, William D. and Thelma Sidley at the Silver Spur Ranch.*

complete without a few reminiscences. The ranch was my life and my own family's for half of the 40 years we owned it.

How well I remember the passionately enjoyed summers of the late 1930s and the 1940s when my late sister, Elaine, and I were growing up and attending schools elsewhere. The summers were filled with interesting guests. People came from the east and middle west, Colorado, Wyoming, and California; writers, businessmen, statesmen, artists, friends, all stimulating. They would descend at various intervals in the summer and fall a few at a time. Halcyon days and grand times indeed! How fascinated they all were to spend part of each day on horseback, observing some of the details of a working ranch.

At this point I must pay tribute to my dear late mother whose taste, unflagging spirit, and artistic sense created in the Big House at the South Ranch an atmosphere at once romantic and glamorous and yet steeped in tradition. May Eastgate beautifully prepared and served evening meals which were often by candlelight in the dining room. There would also be small and large dinner parties, each one made memorable by the variety of people in attendance. With friends from neighboring ranches, friends from all over, and always the picturesque surroundings of the Cow Creek Valley which was part of the whole Valley, one could hardly escape a sense and awareness of peace and well-being I don't believe can be found in many other places. Therefore, it was a great tribute to my mother's adaptability and taste that she was able to create a remarkably sophisticated and eclectic home which could have been anywhere in the world.

Cattle ranching is a big responsibility, because one is constantly working with live animals and with nature in all her vagaries. God knows that the Sidleys have put in their fair share of the hard, physical, and other demanding work that goes with the making of a successful operation. The Silver Spur Ranches and that way of life are gone now for the Sidley family, but the charm of the Saratoga and Encampment Valley and its wonderful people will be with us forever.

*Written by*  
**William F. Sidley**