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WINTER'S WAY



4,600 cattle in the yards when this photograph was made, November 7, 1941 of the Winter Live Stock Commission Co., Kansas' largest livestock auction. Today, Winter Livestock, Inc., is the largest independent cattle auction in the United States.

Brian Winter and the author in his office in the Winter Livestock Sale Barn in Dodge City. (Staff photo)



By Barbara Oringderff
Winter Livestock, Inc., with its locations in Dodge City, KS, La Junta, CO, Riverton, WY and Pratt, KS, is the largest independent cattle auction company in America, and it is also one of the oldest.

Brian Winter, who manages the Dodge City operation, is a third gen-

eration Winter who has been at the Dodge City sale barn for 25 years. And he is still excited about being part of the cattle industry.

"I was raised in this business, and it's been good for keeping our family together for 80 years!" grinned Brian.

Winter Livestock began in 1936,

when Brian's rancher grandfather, Karl, purchased the livestock auction barn and facilities in Dodge City from J. C. Renner. Karl called his new business the Winter Livestock Commission Company. In that first year Karl sold 29,886 head of cattle, and Winter Livestock was on its way to becoming a cattle industry



This same building, modernized and greatly expanded, is still a part of the Dodge City Winter Livestock Auction.



In this photograph you can see the original Renner auction building and how the addition was built onto the front of it.

powerhouse.

In 1946 Winter Livestock expanded when Karl's son, Ray, Brian's father, started the La Junta, Colorado livestock auction. Ray and his wife, Sue lived in La Junta for 22 years and raised their family there. Brian was in junior high school when the family moved back to Dodge City, where they stayed for about 10 years.

In 1956, Ray's brother Ross built the Winter Feed Yard in Dodge City and it is managed today by his son Ken. Ross Winter died in 1995.

Ray and Sue and their son Mark moved to Enid, Oklahoma in the late 1990s, where they started a new Winter Livestock Cattle Auction. After Ray passed away in 2012, Sue

remained in Enid, OK where she still resides. Mark has remained in

Enid in the Winter Livestock office. (The family has sold the Enid sale barn.)

In 2006, Winter Livestock branched out again when they bought the sale barn in Riverton, Wyoming, and in 2009 they bought the Pratt, Kansas sale barn.

Since Karl bought the Dodge City sale barn in 1936, Winter Livestock Inc. customers have sold over 33 million cattle through Winter Livestock facilities, with a total cattle value of more than eight billion dollars, and it's still all in the family.

"No, we don't plan any more expansion for a while," laughed a busy Brian when I asked him that question, while we visited in his comfortable western themed office in their Dodge City sale barn. The original Renner sale barn that Karl bought in 1936 is still there, because the modern sale barn office and café were actually built onto the front of the old one.

"My day includes a lot of phone time," explained Brian. "We have a sale here in Dodge City every Wednesday, and we have people who call up and consign cattle to us a month ahead, and some who don't consign until the day of the sale."

"We have 35 to 40 staff here on sale day. Fifteen are full time employees. When the customers bring

Sue Winter (Mrs. Ray Winter, and Brian's mother) wrote the following history in 1993 to celebrate Winter Livestock's fifty-seven years, and no one can tell that early story better than she did:

Late in the year of 1887 Henry Winter left his Iowa home in search of land. He brought his spring board wagon to rest by Pawnee Creek, in Garfield County which is now Finney County, Kansas where he built a sod home on what was soon to be known as the Winter Ranch. Henry filed his claim January 18, 1888 and immediately sent for his wife Kate and three children to join him at their new home.

April 21, 1889 a fourth child, Karl Mark Winter was born to Henry and Kate. As a youngster Karl saw the great herds of cattle trailed in from the south. Some were driven across the eastern corner of the Winter ranch to water at the Pawnee Creek. It was a great source of entertainment for young Winter and his brothers to ride alongside the drovers and marvel at the herds. One of these was said to be 10,000 head of cattle on their way up the Chisholm Trail.

Karl farmed and ranched alongside his father until the age of 21, when he took over the ranch. In Karl's capable hands the ranch increased in size many times over. The brown-eyed neighbor girl who won young Karl Winter's heart was Gladys Brown, whose parents had come from Cherokee County, KS. After marrying in 1914, Gladys and Karl ranched on his home-place. They were the parents of three sons, Ralph, Ross and Ray.



An aerial view of Winter Livestock Auction, in Dodge City taken by Troy Robinson.

their consigned cattle in on sale day we have nine staff members who create a dot card; that's a hand-written card for each customer. Then we split the consigned cattle into salable groups," said Brian. "We have three people who feed and

water the cattle. Then the auctioneer takes over. On an average sale day we sell about 3,500 cattle here, but it's a very seasonal business. It's a little slower in summer because people are farming, but then we have our cow/calf time in Novem-

ber and the wheat pasture cattle in March. After the sale is over we just start all over! Getting ready for next Wednesday," Brian said. "It sounds hectic, but we're pretty used to it."

Brian's father always contended that the success of Winter Livestock

In 1936 Karl and his family moved to Dodge City because of Gladys' failing health. That year, Karl purchased the livestock auction facilities in Dodge City from J. C. Renner and leased the adjoining Santa Fe railroad pens built by the railroad in the heyday of the cattle drives. Gladys' illness brought about her death in 1939. In 1942, Karl married Grace Bayless. Together they made a home for his sons and their daughter, Phyllis.

Winter Livestock Commission Company was the name of Karl's new enterprise and some 29,886 head were sold in the first year of operation. In years to come Karl sold half interest to Ted McKinley, and together they kept the business growing at a steady pace. Winter Livestock Inc. acquired the La Junta, Colorado sale facility in 1940 in an effort to further serve the farmer, rancher and cattleman. Later, Ted McKinley sold his share of the partnership back to Karl. With Karl's sons beginning to take on the management of the firm, Winter Livestock expanded again. In 1956 Winter Feed Yard was built by Karl and Ross Winter. The feed yard is still managed by Ross and his son, Ken.

In the following years, Winter Ranch, Winter Livestock and Winter Feed Yard continued to dedicate their efforts to serving the needs of the cattle industry. Today the Winter family is still farming and ranching that same piece of land in Finney County. The Winters have never strayed from their commitment to the cattle industry and that dedication has made Winter Livestock, Inc. and Winter Feed Yard Inc. industry leaders."



Brian and Darci Winter.

was due to the excellence of their personnel, and Brian agrees:

“We have great people. John Campbell manages Winter Livestock in La Junta, and Mike Lewis and his son, Jake, manage the operation at Pratt, Jeff Brown manages Riverton, WY, and Diane Felder manages Enid, OK office.”

Brian can remember how before cell phones he had to be on the phone all evening, too. “Now we do most of our business during the day so I have more time with my family.”

Brian and his wife, Darci have four children: Whitney, 20, who attends the University of Kansas; Mason, 17, Baron, 15 and Grace, 12, who are all at home.

I asked if he thought they would be part of the fourth generation to run Winter Livestock. “Yes,” answered Brian quickly. “They all have had different degrees of interest in the business and they’ve all been here at the sale barn a lot. Right now Grace is really into hors-



Winter Livestock in La Junta, Colorado.



Ray Winter posed in the sale barn in the 1990s with his sons, Mark, Brian and Weston. (Photographs loaned to the Territorial by the Winter family.)



This great photograph of Winter Livestock auctioneer, Cowboy Jack Steinmitz, was taken by Troy Robinson, Dodge City, KS.

es,” he laughed, “but we’ll see. My brother Mark, who is in our Enid office, and his wife Katrina, have three children, a boy Hayden, who is 16, and two girls, Ashley, 13, and

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Brothers Ross and Ray Winter often discussed business in the early days of Winter Livestock.

McKinley, 6 that we hope will also be interested in the family business.”

It takes a dedicated family to maintain a family business for so many years, and their reputation of fairness to both buyers and sellers is of the utmost importance to the Winter family. Brian’s father, the late Ray Winter said: “When you’ve dealt with a man’s grandfather, his father and now him, it makes for a lot of trust.”

That’s the Winter Way, and it’s all in the family.




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