



# Branding Iron

► by **Eric Grant**, president & general manager

## Redefining possibilities

*Ferry Carpenter came to Colorado's Yampa Valley in the 1920s, a young man enamored with the Old West but holding big-time aspirations on how he could transform the sagebrush range into modernity.*

### Establishing a reputation

He was eminently qualified to do so.

He had recently graduated from Princeton University, where he'd studied under Woodrow Wilson, and Harvard Law School. He set up his law office in a bowling alley in downtown Hayden, Colo., where his

reputation grew quickly as one of the West's leading attorneys on grazing and natural-resource issues.

Carpenter, a Republican, caught the eye of Democratic President Franklin Roosevelt to serve in his Department of the Interior, where he was asked to oversee the implementation of the *Taylor Grazing Act*.

My understanding is that Carpenter and his immediate boss, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, did not get along and that Carpenter was either fired or quit on several occasions. Each time, Roosevelt intervened and reinstated the pugnacious western attorney, and Carpenter's work in Washington, D.C., continues to resonate throughout public lands grazing policy today.

### What I learned about branding from Ferry Carpenter.

### Signature herd

Carpenter's thoughts never drifted far from his Colorado home, however, and he built his cow herd into one of the most notable registered-Hereford operations in the country.

In the late 1960s, he was one of the founding fathers of the Beef Improvement Federation (BIF), and he played a central role in moving the cattle industry toward greater performance testing and genetic evaluation.

My grandpa, a lifelong Hereford breeder, became one of Carpenter's closest friends, and when my uncle purchased a Carpenter bull at the Midland Bull Test in 1973, it prompted a call from a Columbus, Mont., pay phone.

"Dad?" my uncle asked, "Leo McDonnell Sr. wants to buy this bull from us."

There was a moment of silence.

"Well, if Leo wants him that bad, and this bull is that good, we'd probably better hold onto him," Grandpa responded.

It was as simple as that. The reality is that the

combination of the words "Carpenter" and "bull" meant a great deal to a lot of people like my grandpa. It was not just a bull that he was talking about; it stood for something. It meant you had a direction, a pathway to

progress, a way that was better than your competition.

### Redefining possibilities

As a boy, the Carpenter experience was my first introduction to the power of branding, and the capacity of a brand to resonate in the marketplace.

Every summer between the hayings, we would journey to the Carpenter Ranch. We'd wade through the orchard grass pastures, evaluating the cows, the herd bulls and this year's calf crop. It was like being in a dreamlike state.

Then we would gather in Carpenter's home — he was too old to tour the pastures by the time I knew him — and he would serve us lunch at his dining room table. My grandpa would sit at the end of the table, his eyes as wide as a school boy, watching the master work his craft through word and deed, entertaining all of us with tales of the old days and sharing his vision for tomorrow.

I've thought a lot about Carpenter over the years, and his ability to influence the lives of people around. He passed away in 1980, long before I'd had much of a chance to know him very well.

In many regards, I think he was the kind of person everyone in the registered-cattle business should aspire to be. He was thoughtful and visionary. He was always controversial, standing up for unpopular and untested ideas at the time.

He also wasn't afraid to say what was on his mind, and the advertising position he carved out for his business positioned him as a pioneer in the still-nascent performance-testing movement.

So when you brought one of his bulls home, and the neighbors gathered to evaluate him, the bull was much more than just another bull. He was imbued with all the ideas, the controversy, the gravity and the vision that Carpenter had to offer.

Most of all, the bull had a sense of destiny, optimism and awe because — like Carpenter when he first arrived in the West — he'd redefine the possibilities and the future in an entirely new way.

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