

## CHAPTER XXV

### SILVER RANCH, INC.

Two of the most meaningful words heard daily in Jaffrey are "Silver Ranch", and people immediately think of a multiplicity of enterprises. The establishment is unique, for there never before was anything like it in Jaffrey or vicinity. From small dairy farm beginnings, it has developed during two generations of the Sawyers into a realm of diversity of interests and recreational facilities, business enterprises, farming activities, and numerous other facets.

The story of how Silver Ranch came about to be is beyond our capabilities and is best told in the words of David Russell Sawyer, the youngest son of the founder of the establishment, Roscoe A. Sawyer, whose original enterprise was that of a simple New England farmer bent on making a livelihood and raising his family close to the good earth. But, as the family grew up, the Fates decreed it otherwise, and the story is narrated by David Sawyer, with characteristic candor and humor, on the following pages.

### SILVER RANCH

#### *THE BEGINNING*

Skills, talents and avocations tend to run from generation to generation in many families. And that likely explains how SILVER RANCH came to be the people center it now is.

The JAFFREY Sawyer family began taking "Summer Boarders" at the old homestead in the 1870's (the present home of Jason and Elizabeth, Richard and Ann Sawyer). When Roscoe came along in 1892, he was born into an already established family tradition of serving summer and city folk. He also was born into a family that had outstanding horses even for those days when faulty family transportation visited the veterinarian and the blacksmith rather than the garage. When he married and moved a mile or so down the road with his bride Rita, onto the old Bacon Farm in 1917 (at which time, incidentally, he was turned down upon trying to insure the buildings for \$580), he carried with him not only his love of farming, but also the idea that he would someday again be involved with people and horses.

After an abortive effort at hen raising, a more successful and long enduring stint at the commercial milk business and the accumula-

tion of five youngsters, Roscoe and Rita slowly turned to horses and people.

### *PEOPLE*

On the people side, one of the early stimuli was the building of a dam on the brook. The dam was planned primarily to provide an ice pond; which it did . . . said ice providing the refrigeration for the milk enterprise for a number of years. However, once the dam was built and a little waterfall established, it looked like fun to try something else: a waterwheel; power from which would saw wood and pump water. Charlie Bacon and wife Hattie (Hadley) long time owners of the Ark, were alive in those days, and good pals of Roscoe's. So, together they built up a waterwheel, mounted it, tarred the old Harry out of it and let the water onto the wheel. It turned real nice, but not as fast as Charlie had visualized. "Cy, that damn thing ain't never going to run your saw rig!" and so saying, Charles planked his foot on the wheel to demonstrate how little power the device had. Well, water wheels may not turn very fast, but when loaded with water, they do have power. That fresh tar grabbed Charlie's foot just long enough to throw him, bottom over bandbox, 20 feet away, all in a heap. What Charles said should not be recorded; but he did concede there was power in the wheel. All of which is sort of beside the point; which is that that little half acre pond was an instant and continuing center of family, neighbor, and indirectly, community fun. Everyone used it for swimming and skating. And the old Fish and Game Club for many years raised umpteen thousand trout there each year. Henry Buckwold, Leon Jackson, Louis Duval (Pete), Alfred Despres, Buster Austin, and Robert Bunce (just a kid in those days) came down daily, ground up a bunch of liver and fed those fishes as faithfully as if they were family pets. Each spring, the Club, cooperating with famous warden George Proctor, father of Donald Proctor, of the State Fish and Game People, would drain the pond every spring until only the old brookbed still had water in it; and there were more fish than water! Then they would net them out, put them in old milk cans and take off in a Model A truck to stock the local brooks. Of course there were always a few who got away downstream, upstream, or just simply stayed right there to enjoy another year of ease with regular meals. They would show up the next season as real monsters!

Shortly after building the dam, Roscoe dragged a little cabin

down by the pool so the kids would have a respectable place to change their clothes. (Ha! What self-respecting kid would use the cabin when the woods were so handy?) A couple of years later, he improved the cabin a bit and rented it to some family friends. Four other simple cottages followed and voila! A summer resort! Later on, daughter Nancy and her husband (Ray Ford Moore) would build a home there by the pond, take over the cabins and build several more themselves. The little pond remains the focal point.

### *HORSES*

In the meantime, Roscoe's love of horses was getting to him. Along about 1930, now dairy farming and in the wholesale and retail milk business, he got a horse for the kids to play with. Well, he should have known better! . . . one horse with five youngsters, to say nothing of himself and his wife; that didn't make sense in any book. In about the time it takes to tell, old Dad was talked right into a half a dozen more equines. (In retrospect, it seems more likely that HE had it in mind all along.) In any case, despite all the talk, which existed even then, about those rich Sawyers, Roscoe Sawyer could no more afford family pleasure horses than he could afford a villa in Vichy. And don't think that Mr. Rich and Mr. Symonds at the Bank didn't let him know! A feature of those days of the thirties were regular visits to the old homestead by the directors of the Bank; probably a lot of people thought it was so they could confer with Roscoe about important bank matters; in a way it was: they were there to see where in heck Roscoe was spending the money from that last note he'd signed. Perhaps it was also to insure that he didn't disgrace his old Grandad Alfred who had been President of the Bank until he finally quit at 98. (Please don't consider Grandad a quitter, though . . . he died at 98). Well anyhow, Rita and the kids (excepting David, who never had much use for horses) agreed that the smart thing to do was to keep the horses for fun and rent them out to anyone who had a dollar an hour and hope that a breakeven operation could be maintained. It worked out just about that way.

At first the horses were tied here and there under the old cowbarn. But by the time there were ten or eleven, that got kind of cramped and difficult. So in 1912, Roscoe bought the old gambrel-roofed Mort Cutter livery stable barn that stood below the Center Meeting House right on the big curve. He took it down piece by

piece and re-erected it at the farm. And now the outfit was really in the horse business.

There were a number of JAFFREY people who were riding enthusiasts at that time: Johnny Evans, Oren and Homer Belletete, Charlie and Hattie Letourneau, Leon Jackson, Wilfred Cournoyer, Raymond Roy, Albert Deschenes, Homer and Ruth Chouinard, Randyl Cournoyer, August Duval, Leonard Allen, and others. And the time had come for a rodeo. It was held right in front of the new barn. Homer Chouinard took movies of the affair, which show chariot racing, Roscoe "whipping" Rita with a 25 foot bullwhip, Raymond Roy and Pete Deschenes riding Roman style, and Wilfred Cournoyer bulldogging a steer. It was quite an affair; everyone had a lot of fun, and the name of SILVER RANCH began to spread.

### *THE NAME*

For by now the old farm was on longer the Bacon Place, or the Sawyer Farm it had turned into SILVER RANCH. It seems that in those hard days in the thirties, Roscoe got wind of an outfit that was just introducing a wonderful, new ALUMINUM paint; guaranteed to rejuvenate the saddest of old lumber. The miracle was that they agreed to give him a bunch of this great paint as an advertising stunt. Well, you can bet that Roscoe took them up on that deal pronto. He painted every board on the place with that aluminum paint. "Aluminum Ranch" didn't sound appropriate, so naturally, the family homestead became "SILVER RANCH".

Over the years it became apparent that aluminum paint left something to be desired as a building protector, and gradually its use was discontinued but the name stays on . . . a reminder of those depression years when every straw that floated by was grabbed at.

### *HORSES, COWS, and MILK*

So, while the milk business earned the family living, the horses and cabins grew into a modest, self-supporting sideline that satisfied the needs of a hobby. It was a genuine family endeavor all the way; Marie, Nancy, Phyllis, Alfred, and David, each in his turn became intimately familiar with all the aspects: Porches and refrigerators all over town, (Raymond Boudrieau worked and lived at the Ranch then, and was head milk peddler; every Sawyer youngster served apprentice to Ray on that milk route), maintaining the farming operation 365 days per year, washing and filling milk bottles, bull raking in June and July, picking up that poor rowen in August and

September, hauling pine slabs from Annetts for the old vertical 'steam' boiler for the dairy, cleaning out the cows, milking, fixing the pasture fence, (those cussed cows could find the weak spot like water finds a hole and nine times out of ten, the first report of "the cows are out" would come from someone in Cheshire who would rather tersely inform the Sawyers that "your cows are in the Catholic Cemetery!"); and finally, caring for the horses.

The cows were sold off in 1950 after a disastrous fire in which the cowbarn burned just after haying was complete. The milk business was discontinued finally in 1965.

Although father, mother, and all five kids at various times worked at the horse activity and all were proficient horsemen (women), Roscoe and Alfred were real horse lovers, and carried the main effort of teaching and training. While still relying on the milk route for livelihood, father and son spent virtually all their spare time with the horses, with more and more of the stable responsibility becoming Alfred's, and in the 1960's, Roscoe retired and Alfred took over the stable operation. It is now run as a full time department of Silver Ranch. Good luck has it that Alfred's son Lee shares the family regard for horses and has become a fifth-generation expert on the animals. (Reflect a moment on how lucky we are that the Grand Design allows us to overlap our adult lives with those of our predecessors, so that at least some of the wisdom and experience of age can be transmitted directly.)

Alfred and Lee now run one of New England's outstanding horse centers. Known as the "LAST OF THE LIVERY STABLES", the average horse population is around thirty. A number of these are brought to the RANCH for training; some are boarders whose owners come to ride at the RANCH, and the rest are owned by the operation. A large tack shop is operated, and, interesting to many, there is a collection of over two hundred gigs, buggies, sleighs, farm wagons, sulkies and every other type of horsedrawn vehicle you might think of. Staff member Ray Wheeler is constantly involved in carriage restoration.

Part of the Stable operation is the Party Hall, which is used for Country Dance Parties after the group has enjoyed a horsedrawn sleigh or hay ride. Fall and winter evenings are usually booked solid from November thru March for this activity. Alfred's good wife Fay (Sherwood) serves as hostess for these affairs. Her home-made doughnuts are consumed by the thousands.

*RITA SAWYER*

In the meantime, as is so frequently the case, the balance wheel is getting insufficient credit for keeping the operation together. Rita Cushing (Parsons) Sawyer, wife, mother, friend, treasurer, business secretary, housekeeper, laborer thru these years of loving devotion made all else possible for her husband and family. A marvelously well-balanced and organized woman who came to Jaffrey from Newburyport, Mass., to teach the fourth grade, she epitomized the loyalty and self-sacrifice men seek, often find, but seldom recognize in their wives. Always groomed and lovely, never cross or curt, always busy, but never short of time, it was only many years later that her family knew the full load she carried for them. She cooked and kept house for a family that normally numbered ten or eleven; alone maintained the business records for the whole operation; did chambermaid duty in the cottages; worked in the dairy like a man; scooped ice cream like a kid; was hostess at sleighride parties; and took five of her own from the birthbed to adulthood. Rita Sawyer was a full and fulfilled woman.

Outsiders have said for a hundred years that the Sawyer men habitually marry above themselves. It is more credit than otherwise to Roscoe to say the same of him and Rita.

*AVIATION*

Along about 1945, son David started learning to fly. In 1946-7, Roscoe cleared the 1938 hurricane debris from a little stretch across the road and David came home one day in 1947 with a brand-new Piper Super Cruiser airplane. (Financed by the Bank with the generous backing of Frank Baldwin . . . a man looked on by many as a super-conservative Yankee banker.) The story of the airport is told elsewhere in this history. Suffice to say here, that for about twenty years, David operated the field in somewhat the same fashion the rest of the family had engaged in the horse business; i. e. as a self-supporting (sometimes) sideline.

In 1968, Alfred's son Harvey graduated from college and returned to the RANCH to take over the aviation department as a full time operation offering instruction, charter, sightseeing and other services. They are responsible for a US Weather Bureau reporting station there also. He is as interested in flying as his brother is in horses. Harvey and his wife Lee (Stanton) and son Tyson (fourth generation at the RANCH) live right on the field.

### *THE STAND AND SHOPS*

A long standing Sawyer passion has been the consumption of ice cream. In 1952, shortly after the dairy business was incorporated, David and his bride Betty (Frost) announced that they intended to build an ice cream stand . . . in or out of the company. Well it took a couple of years, but in 1954, the first part of the present "stand" was built (under company auspices) .

Harry Whitney and his traveling troupe of family carpenters built the original building. Joe and Mayo Gamlin did the masonry using secondhand bricks from the cellar of the White Brothers mill in the center of town. There is a picture of Joe on a scaffold there taken on his 76th birthday.



SILVER RANCH

David had the installation of the extensive refrigeration system virtually committed to a Massachusetts firm, when George Sirois drove in the lot one day. Don Perry had sent him down he said, to sell the refrigeration for the stand. David hardly knew George then, and the openers were discouraging in appearance: George is blessed with a black beard, and extra black it was that day; his greasy green tee shirt just failed to cover his navel; his old car, converted to a service truck, was, typically, about as neat as the town dump on a

Monday morning; and George's opening remarks indicated that David was sucker bait for those Massachusetts sharpies. Not that day, but later, after some discreet inquiries, David decided to take the chance; George got the contract. And over the years, it proved to be a happy relationship (despite the fact that in 1970, there is still a place or two where the 1954 work has never been finished). Never once has George failed to respond to an emergency; and once even left the old man's game on a Cape Cod golf course to return to Jaffrey for a refrigeration problem. What's the old saw about judging books by their covers?

The stand was put across the road from the homestead in an abandoned gravel bank. Thirty feet long, it was sort of homely and lonesome looking. Alphe LaMothe was the first customer. The parking lot was gravel and sand; when the wind blew, ice cream cones got awful gritty awful fast; and if the wind wasn't blowing, then one of the few customers would likely have his car stuck in the sand somewhere. In those early years there was a sign that went in the window and said: "closed 2 to 5 - for service, call at farmhouse across the road".

The stand survived, and grew. In 1957, a "hot" side was added, and in 1964, the Patio and Saddle and Gift Shop were built on. In 1968, the original "cold" side was doubled in size.

The stand operation is open from late March thru Christmas Eve each year. It has become a landmark for many thousands in the central part of New England. A typical summer weekend will see upwards of 5000 people visiting the stand. A large part of the staff consists of local high school and college youngsters, as well as many members of the Sawyer family.

The Gift Shop is now a major operation in itself, with David's wife Betty carrying most of the responsibility there. Mrs. John (Helene Whitehead) Hackler designs the outstanding merchandise displays the shop has become noted for.

In 1970, a new store, the YANKEE SHOP was opened at the RANCH with Mrs. Edward Herrick as manager.

Sister Marie (Sawyer) LeCuyer safeguards the family religion and conducts the JAFFREY BIBLE HOUSE adjacent to her home at the RANCH. She maintains a uniquely large and varied stock of Bibles, religious books, and other Christian supplies.

### CONSERVATION

MONADNOCK FORESTS is the farm and woodland aspect of

the RANCH. It consists of an integrated conservation practice on over 1000 acres of farm and forest land.

Most of the RANCH buildings are constructed of lumber cut from the RANCH itself. Although it is unlikely that much future construction will utilize home-cut lumber, the RANCH does still harvest about 300 cords of firewood every year, most of which it offers for sale, cut and delivered throughout the local area.

Other ways in which the land and forest is made useful to the RANCH and to the community at large are its use for bridle trails, Christmas trees, hay/sleighride roads, hay crops, pastureland, riding rings, sale of land, sale of sand and gravel, selected sawlog cutting, swimming, wildlife support, vacation cabin sites. The RANCH makes good use of its extended acreage.

#### *FUTURE?*

SILVER RANCH is an extensive and diversified Yankee business. The family running it is now into the fifth generation of a continuing broad interest in serving the general public. Its leisure-oriented activities would seem to make it a good bet for continued existence as one of JAFFREY'S more interesting businesses.