

Pioneer cattleman and business entrepreneur George Edward ("Ed") Lemmon spent most of his life as a cowboy on the ranges of the Great Plains and helped to lay the foundations of the cattle industry in western South Dakota.

Lemmon was born 23 May 1857 in Bountiful, Utah, to John H. and Lucy E. Whittemore Lemmon. In 1869, John Lemmon moved his family to Nebraska, where he worked on the Union Pacific Railway, following it to completion in Utah. The next year, the Lemmon family moved back to Nebraska, where thirteen-year-old Ed started working for J. W. Iliff, the cattle king of Wyoming, and the outfits of Lawhorn and Hardimon on the Nebraska Plateau. Ed Lemmon soon became a seasoned cowboy, driving Texas herds from railheads at Dodge City and Abilene, Kansas, to the northern grass ranges.

After recovering from two trail accidents that crushed his right leg, Lemmon went to work with the Sheidley Brothers Cattle Company, owners of the Fly V brand. In the same year, on his twentieth birthday, he purchased his first group of cattle. For the next thirty-three years, Lemmon managed Sheidley Brothers ranches near Custer and Hot Springs in addition to becoming part owner in several other ranching enterprises. In 1902, as a partner in the Lake, Lemmon and Tomb Cattle Company, he leased 865,000 acres of land on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation. The L7 ranch, as it was known, became famous as the largest fenced pasture in the world. The secretary of the National Livestock Association lauded Lemmon in 1904, claiming he had "unquestionably saddle-handled the most cattle of any man in the world."

Lemmon also served as commissioner for Adams County in North Dakota and Fall River and Perkins counties in South Dakota. Because of his familiarity with northwestern South Dakota, he was called upon in 1906 to help map the route of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad. A major townsite located along its route, Lemmon, was named in his honor. Ed Lemmon then began a business career, constructing several business blocks, serving as president of the First State Bank of Lemmon and representing the National Wool Marketing Corporation.

Upon retiring, Lemmon wrote his memoirs and kept in touch with long-time associates. He died on 25 August 1945 at eighty-eight years of age, having become known as one of the greatest cattlemen of his generation.

by Veronica J. Urquhart

Dakota Images



George Edward ("Ed") Lemmon

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