

ARIZONA FARMING AND RANCHING HALL OF FAME

Provided by: JANICE BRYSON, ACGA Member

The Beef industry was well represented at the 16th Annual Arizona Farming and Ranching Hall of Fame Honorees Dinner held March 4, 2023, at The Wigwam Resort in Litchfield Park. Honorees included Don Butler, former Arizona Director of Agriculture, and The Griffin Family from the X4 Ranch in Globe. The Horrell/Tidwell Family was honored posthumously with descendant Cindy Tidwell Shelton accepting their honors.

The Griffin Cattle Ranch Family

The present-day Griffin Ranch is what was comprised of parts of four different outfits in Gila County. The X4 Ranch, part of the old JU, the 4 Lazy Y and the I Lazy HL. The ranch carries the X4 brand and operates as Griffin Cattle Ranch. It is located approximately sixteen miles northeast of Globe on Highway 60 at Seven Mile Wash.

The Griffin family is descended from the Romero family who brought sheep to their Spanish land grant in the San Rafael Valley in the late 1700s. The ranch was abandoned due to Indian raids, during which many family members were killed. The family moved north to Tubac and Tucson.

Maria Concepcion Romero was born in Tucson in 1841. She married John C. Clark, a soldier with the U. S. Army and Commissary Chief at the Old Pueblo, in 1858. The family moved to Globe in the 1870s when Clark was appointed chief of the commissary at San Carlos. Their granddaughter Mollie married John Cox Griffin, son of a physician from Hillsboro, Texas in 1912.

John had moved to Globe in the early 1900s to begin cattle ranching in the area. His first ranching venture was in partnership with his brother Fred under the name Griffin Brothers. In 1905 they purchased the Pringle Ranch in Gila County operating with the Flying H brand. The ranch was sold; Fred returned to Texas and John worked on ranches in the area. He owned and was in partnership with other ranches - The TV in Tonto Basin, The Flying V at Roosevelt, and the Wineglass on Cherry Creek.

John was also a businessman becoming vice-president of the First National Bank of Globe. In those days, bank officers personally backed loans. John acquired several ranches when drought conditions seriously hurt ranchers unable to pay their loans. It was in this manner John acquired the X4 Ranch. When there was a run on the bank, John had to choose between keeping the ranch or their home in Globe; he and Mollie chose to keep the ranch.

The ranch headquarters at one time was a three-room adobe structure in the JU area of the ranch. The home still stands and is the base the cowboys ride from when they work at the northern end of the ranch. The Cibecue and White River Apaches would travel to San Carlos afoot, spending the night near the Adobes. They walked half clothed, wearing moccasins, and carrying bows and arrows. The group would come to the house to receive coffee, salt pork and beans from John and Mollie and would be on their way before daylight.

In 1932, John was leading two wild yearlings when they became frightened and headed in the opposite

direction. This caused the horse to rear over backwards, and the saddle horn caused extensive internal injuries. A ranch hand arrived at the scene to help John free himself from his entanglement. John was taken to the hospital in Globe for surgery where he died the next day. John was fifty-six years old; leaving his widow Mollie and son James (Jimmy) who was in seventh grade. Mollie took over operation of the ranch and cowboy Shorty Carraway came back to help run the ranch until Jimmy was old enough to participate.

Graduating from Globe High School, Jimmy attended both Loyola University in Los Angeles and the University of Arizona. In 1940, he left college to help operate the ranch until he joined the U.S. Army in WWII. Stationed in England, he met his future bride Minnie Keeler of Massachusetts. She was a member of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps as a teletype operator with the Eighth Air Force. The couple were married on June 11, 1945, in High Wycombe, England. They were discharged from the military at the end of the war and returned to live at the ranch.

In 1942, Mollie relocated the ranch headquarters to the X4 Camp, where she built shipping pens, a brick house, and a canning kitchen. The new house burned to the ground in 1944. All the contents were lost including John Griffin's papers relating to his early history and the selling and purchasing of ranches. When Minnie and Jimmy arrived, they added it to the canning kitchen making it their home. In Jimmy's absence during the war, Mollie hired high school boys from Globe to work on the roundups.

During those years, cattle grazed all over the ranch and major roundups were held in the spring and fall. In the spring Mollie contracted to sell their cattle to J. I. Wynn of Amarillo, Texas; in the fall to Tubby Upton who owned a feedlot in Tempe. The U. S. Forest Service cut the ranch's head permit in 1966 to revitalize the land. Jimmy chose to fight to keep the ranch viable. Realizing that cutting numbers alone would not work, he sought consultation from the University of Arizona Extension Service. The ranch worked out a management plan by which they began a grazing rotation system. Range conditions improved and the Forest Service recognized the Griffin Ranch for their efforts.

Jimmy and Minnie were blessed with five daughters - Linda (Brost), Sue (Johnston), Janet (Cline), JoAnn (Anderson), Therese (Oddenetto) - and a son John - named for his grandfather. When their oldest daughter Linda was ready for school, they moved to Globe for the school year. Every summer when school was out the family would move back to the ranch.

Jimmy was active in cattle grower organizations and traveled to Washington, D.C. when needed. He worked with the U of A on range management issues; tours and workshops were often held at the ranch. In 1997, Jimmy wrote his biography for the Arizona Pioneer Stockman book. He was happy the ranch was a family operation, and all were actively involved. Jimmy passed away in 1999 and Minnie in 2018.

John assumed control of the ranch after Jimmy and



Above Left to Right: John Griffin, JoAnn Anderson, Linda Brost, Janet Cline, Sue Johnston, Therese Oddenetto.

took over the responsibility of dealing with the Forest Service. He handles the day-to-day operations and Therese Griffin Oddenetto does the books and grants writing for the ranch. Both siblings have belonged to the Gila County Cattle Growers, Arizona Cattle Growers, and National Cattlemen's Beef Association. Therese represented ACGA on the NCBA Public Lands Committee for several years and was the first woman president of the Gila County Cattle Growers. She and her husband Pete have the Haystack Ranch up the road from the X4.

John also served as Gila County Cattle Grower president. His years serving as an officer in the association were a very challenging time for ranchers in Gila County. In 2002, the Forest Service completely destocked the Tonto Forest affecting the livelihood of the ranchers. Previously the Forest Service would leave part of the cattle so a rancher could rebuild his herd. John and other ranchers made many trips to D.C. meeting with the Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, numerous politicians, and government officials. Even the head of the Forest Service made a visit to the Tonto Forest. The ranchers presented their case well proving the land was viable and the Tonto Forest did not need the cattle removed to keep the range healthy.

Both John and Therese have been honored as Gila County Rancher of the Year. John's wife Pam serves as national president of the American National Cattle Woman. All the siblings are active in the ranch operations.

Jimmy Griffin was proud of his family and their role in the history of the cattle industry in Arizona. He wrote "It is our goal to remain a viable operation while enabling the ensuing generations to benefit from the values, traditions, and lifestyle which has been handed down through me by my ancestors. It is a legacy to be treasured."

