

A 1921 PHOTO OF WHOOPING CRANE

by Kerwin James Finley, 408 Ruth St., Saskatoon

My grandfather, the late J. V. Finley of Luseland, Saskatchewan, once told me a story of killing Whooping Cranes. I had always been of the opinion that the birds in question were probably Whistling Swans until recently when I came upon the accompanying photos while rummaging through some of his old photo albums. I then contacted my grandfather's partner, Mr. Joe Perry, who helped fill in the details.

According to Mr. Perry, the unfortunate event occurred in 1921 at "Buffalo Coulee", 15 miles due south of Luseland. To quote from his letter:

"It was early and quite dark and we were pitted for geese, when up against the horizon loomed three big birds. So we killed two dead and number three went away in the dark also hit—we couldn't find it. We really didn't know they were so scarce—took them with us to Kerrobert and were informed by Hanbidge (Mr. Denny Hanbidge who became Lieutenant-Governor of Saskatchewan, and was a good friend of J. V. Finley), who said the game department might want to hang us for the crime. We gave one away and the people told us they cooked the bird for fours hours, then it was so tough they fed it to the dog."

My grandfather later found out from an irate farmer near Buffalo Coulee that the adults had nested there

every year prior to 1921 and had raised a "golden colored young one." Mr. Perry also referred to this in his letter, saying "They had raised one young one which was a golden color the first year, but it never came back the following spring. That balances up with the old Indian legend about the Golden Bird that never returned."

My late grandfather always felt very guilty about the episode—and confided it to me only in his later years. Since it is documented by a photograph, I thought this account would be of interest.



Two Whooping Crane killed in fall, 1921, near Kerrobert



Detail from illustration at left

Ed. note: Buffalo Coulee, near Superb, Saskatchewan, was thus the third last nesting site of the Whooping Crane in Canada. Another nest was found about 10 miles to the northeast in the following year, May 19, 1922, by Neil Gilmour, and another some 30 or 35 miles NNE on May 28 - June 1, 1922, at Muddy Lake, 7 miles south of Unity, with one egg and one young collected. These were the last nests recorded until the discovery by W. A. Fuller, in

1954, of the Wood Buffalo Park nesting grounds.

We should like to suggest that the government prepare a sanctuary in one of the above areas, probably Muddy Lake, where in years to come some of the captive birds now being raised at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center might be released into the wild in order to reestablish themselves in their natural environment.

EARLY WHOOPING CRANE NEST RECORDS NEAR YORKTON, SASKATCHEWAN

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Whooping Crane observations from 1890 to 1942 were given in my report on the birds of the Yorkton district, Saskatchewan (*Can. Field-Nat.*, 63: 215-241, 1949), though nesting information was not cited.

R. P. Allen's comprehensive monograph on the Whooping Crane (Research Rep. No. 3, Natl. Audubon Soc., New York, 1952) listed seven Saskatchewan nest records: Moose Mountain, 1881; Battleford, 1884; Yorkton, 1900; north of Davidson, 1911; Bradwell, 1912; Baliol, 1922; and Muddy Lake near Unity, 1922.

The Yorkton record was substantiated by two eggs in the Thayer Collection, now in the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. I wrote to James C. Greenway, Jr., Curator of Birds, and his reply of April 7, 1954 stated that the label read as follows:

"From the Oological Coll. Walter Raine, Toronto, Canada, Yorkton, No. Assiniboia, 16 May 1900. 2 eggs (Fresh). Collector: Cowboy Brown.

"Nest: a mass of marsh hay on the prairie 3 feet in diameter, birds very wary, collector Cowboy Brown."

Greenway stated that these eggs could not be differentiated with certainty from eggs of the Sandhill Crane.

Enquiries to museums in eastern Canada and old-timers in the Yorkton area were made but the identity of "Cowboy Brown" was not established.

Further information concerning the probable nesting of Whooping Cranes in the Yorkton area was obtained from the Fernie brothers, both of whom farmed near Springside. About 1955, William Fernie told Cliff Shaw how he had settled first in the Wallace district northeast of Yorkton in 1883 and then moved to Springside in 1889. The last Whooping Crane Fernie had seen was a single young bird at Horseshoe Lake, "the year that Donald Gunn was flooded out." Several years prior to this, no doubt in the 1890's, Fernie had seen a Whooping Crane nest with two white eggs on top of a muskrat house on "Battersby's Lake" later known as "Scheller's Slough", between the old J. Carson ranch and Horseshoe Lake, on section 25, township 28, range 5, six miles west of Gorlitz.

In addition, William Fernie told Cliff Shaw that in the spring the "whoop" call of the Whooping Crane could "be heard for five miles on a quiet morning." He saw no more than three birds together at any time, whereas Sandhill Cranes were much commoner and the Indians often made a meal of "a pot of potatoes and a young sandhill."

In late 1958, when Cliff Shaw gave me the notes of his interview with