

William “Bill Kitt” Kittredge HCR 6

William “Bill Kitt” Kittredge put together a ranching empire the hard way: piece-by-piece, and with grit and determination.

Born in 1876 at Fort Simcoe in the Washington Territory, William “Bill Kitt” Kittredge grew up with pioneering parents; his mother traveled by wagon on the Oregon Trail, and his father had emigrated during the California Gold Rush of 1849. The willpower and faith that compelled and enabled them to move out West were traits passed down to Kittredge, in double dose.

Like many other young men in 1892, Kitt was just a \$25-a-month hired hand working in Silver Lake, Ore. However, not content to spend the rest of his life as a cowboy riding on the coat tails of others’ success, he saved every penny he made and eventually purchased a 40-acre parcel out in the dusty dunes of Sand Springs, Ore. With this parcel, and the heifers he took in lieu of wages, Kitt began to build what would soon become one of the finest cattle operations in the West.

He made wise investments, purchasing and leasing land on which to raise and finish his cattle, and constantly made improvements to his property. He turned arid land into irrigated meadows and productive fields, and his great eye for livestock also paid off. In part, Kitt’s success was due to the fact that he wore many hats; he was a cattleman, banker, businessman, cowboy, reclamationist, developer, engineer, horseman, and farmer. He constantly diversified his operations, his goals were always expanding, and no obstacle was too great. He was one of the most influential leaders in the State of Oregon during its first 100 years.

Though Bill Kitt never had a formal education, he was a born leader whose accomplishments included serving as Director of the National Cattlemen’s Association, President of the Oregon Cattlemen’s Association, Vice President of the Pacific States Livestock Marketing Association and Director of the Tri-State Livestock Credit Corporation. One of Bill Kitt’s proudest accomplishments was founding and serving as President of the Klamath Production Credit Association, an agricultural bank formed to provide loans to farmers and ranchers who were losing their properties due to lack of credit during the Great Depression;

At the time of his death in 1958, Kitt owned 19,000 head of raised (one iron) cattle. He also owned and operated ranches in three states and six counties, including Klamath, Lake, and Harney in Oregon; Humboldt and Washoe in Nevada; and Tehama in California. He owned 68,000 deeded acres—34,500 of which were irrigated hay, pasture, and grain fields. He also had leased land totaling 52,000 acres and held Bureau of Land Management grazing permits in Oregon and Nevada covering 850,000 acres. In all, Kitt's deeded, leased, and permit lands totaled nearly one million acres. Country Singer Ian Tyson even wrote a song about Kitt's legendary MC Ranch.

Kitt was truly a self-made man who, from modest beginnings as a day worker, became one of the most impressive ranchers of the West. He took risks, had the extraordinary resolve to succeed in harsh conditions and difficult times, and was a man of great vision who never lost sight of where he started.

His legacy is very much alive in Lake County to this day, with thanks to his nephew "DL" Jack Nicol, and his grandniece Amy Thompson, who have established the MC Chuckwagon Western Heritage Museum in Lakeview.