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# PORTRAITS

## Wayne E. Johnston

### Auctioneer recalls 84 years of living

By ANN KAY MARSING  
Staff writer

From a covered wagon to a rocking chair by a warm fire, Wayne Johnston has just about seen and done it all in 84 years of living. He thinks he's retired, but only quit herding sheep a couple of years ago, so he's not sure!

Wayne was born in Kansas in 1909 and along with four other siblings, was raised in a covered wagon. His father was a horse trader and his mother drove the wagon they lived in through Colorado, Kansas, Missouri and Arkansas. It measured eight feet in width by 16 feet in length — a home on wheels for Wayne until he was 10 years old.

His family homesteaded north of Cisco in about 1919. Along with many other families, they worked to "prove up" on their 640-acre tracts of land. In those days, a homesteader lived on his land and made improvements, thereby qualifying for ownership at the end of three years.

The settlement had a school for the children, a place where Wayne said he "sort of finished the fourth grade," even though he never attended any grade for the full term. "What education I've got, I gave to myself," Wayne said.

But the school closed after only three years, as dry farming proved unsuccessful in the rugged country of eastern Utah. "The families just starved out and left," Wayne said. The family of seven then moved into the town of Cisco and ran the local hotel.

Wayne grew up doing just about any odd job he could find. He worked with sheep and other livestock, and when the fruit was in season, he worked in and around Grand Junction, Colo. At the age of

20, Wayne married Edith, a girl whose family was the only one of the homesteaders who owned any water.

The young couple had two sons born during the time they lived in Cisco. "There was no doctor," Wayne said. "He didn't make it until after each one was already born."

In 1933, the family obtained a mail contract. Wayne hauled mail from Cisco to Castleton, now a gold-mining ghost town above Moab in the LaSal Mountains. Wayne signed the second contract, but turned the reins over to his brother a year later. He had an idea he thought might work. He moved his family to Price in 1938 and opened a livestock auction — the first one in Utah.

The auctions were held every other Saturday, started at 1 p.m. and sometimes ran until dark. Livestock came in different sizes and shapes. Pigs, cattle, milk cows, sheep, goats, horses and chickens all run through the gates. "We auctioned everything except dogs and cats," Edith said.

Once a general store in Emery County sold out and the owner brought the entire store to auction. "We had wedding rings, socks, baby rings and cigars — we sold it all," Wayne said.

Without charging his normal commission, Wayne conducted many auctions for the LDS Church. He sold everything from ladies' baked goods to lambs, with proceeds going to the church building fund. Without commission, he also held an auction in Ferron for local 4-H clubs. Profits helped build the livestock barn that is still in use today. "It was a good deal and a lot of fun," Wayne recalled.

Many animals passed



Wayne E. Johnston

through the auction yard that were shipped to other states. Soon after the auction began, Wayne sent mules and wild horses, some he'd chased himself and branded, to Little Rock, Ark. From there, they were sent to Ethiopia for use during the first year of World War II.

When the boys were nearly teenagers, the Johnstons had two daughters. Edith said it was almost like having two families. Besides being a wife and mother, Edith took care of the books and money for the auction. In 1968, Wayne stepped down as auctioneer from the enterprise he'd started 30 years before.

During the next three years, Wayne worked in the Jeanselme slaughterhouse. He bought livestock and

of - all over -

Johnston

fied wood at auctions in California. When making rings and other jewelry, Wayne cut and polished rocks and Edith did the silverwork.

Edith has about 800 bottles in the family home, plus another thousand or so in the garage. Among her collections are bells, cymbals, gallon jars of buttons and a ball of string bigger than a basketball. The living room walls are adorned with Edith's oil paintings.

The couple said they've lived a good life and have enjoyed it. "We always worked together," Wayne said. "Whatever we had to do, we did it. Once, we ran 1,500 head of angora goats and lived in the goat camp. But goats are like measles — you only want 'em

once." Wayne continued with his memories and said, "Edith drove the truck and hauled a lot of cows over the years. I herded sheep for the Stamatakis boys off and on so I'd have something to do, but I finally quit. I thought I'd better stay home and get acquainted!"

The Johnstons' way of life has slowed considerably. They still raise a big garden, but the only livestock they have now is what they eat, plus the three chickens that keep them in eggs. They enjoy their 41 descendants, including one great-great-grandchild. Whatever they do, they still do together — they've been married almost 64 years.

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verton, Colo., looking for  
bles. "I stayed home and  
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e," Wayne grinned and  
id. "I'd make it. She'd spend  
— but never foolishly!"  
Wayne said they've retired  
their "rock money." They  
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