

## **HISTORIC CATTLEMEN OF GILA COUNTY, ARIZONA**

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Many early pioneers that entered the Tonto Basin discovered prime livestock grazing areas and cattle ranching quickly became a major economic industry in the region following the Civil War as drought conditions in West Texas and slowing mining operations in California funneled families into Arizona Territory. The Cline family was one of the first to immigrate to Arizona beginning in the 1870s, eventually establishing a homestead and ranching operation at the confluence of the Salt River and Tonto Creek. Other families settled in the area prior to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but were displaced by 1906 with the construction of Roosevelt Dam.

The Hicks-Pike's Peak Grazing Allotment represents an amalgamation of several historic grazing areas within this portion of Gila County. According to Globe Ranger District range staff Jamie Wages (pers. comm. to Shane Montgomery, December 3, 2018), numerous families managed grazing allotments in the past, although few specific details were given as records do not extend into historic times. Within the existing Hicks-Pike's Peak Grazing Allotment, several ranching operations were established before 1930 in and around the Wheatfields area, including those associated with B.C. and B.E. Hicks, Stephen Bixby, the Jones Family, Zee Hayes, Arthur Scarborough, the Bohme family, and Henry Mounce (Arizona Memory Project, accessed December 10, 2018).

B.C. Hicks and his wife originally moved to Casa Grande from Texas before settling in the Bloody Tanks area, northwest of the Tonto Basin. Eventually, the Hicks Ranch was bought on lands between Globe and Miami. Mark Hicks continued operations of the family ranch into the 1940s. Fred Bixby, Stephen Bixby's father, operated several ranches in central Arizona during the early 1900s, including 3 Bar Ranch north of the Salt River and Diamond 2 Ranch on the Mogollon Rim (Figures 1 and 2). Stephen Bixby, searching for lands more conducive for the breeding of Hereford cattle, purchased acreage adjoining the Hicks Ranch from Max Bonney in



**Figure 1.** A group of Herefords gather at the Bixby Ranch (from *Progressive Agriculture*, July-August 1964).



**Figure 2.** S.L. Bixby poses with a brand at the Bixby Ranch, ca. 1951 (from the Richard Schaus Collection).

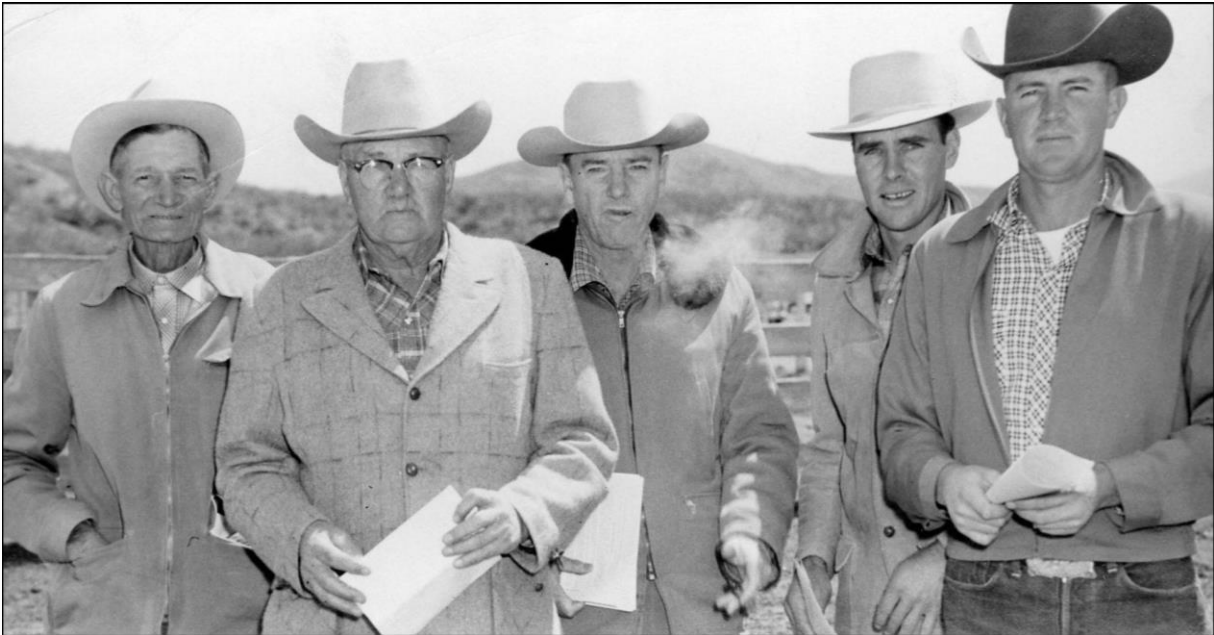
1928. In 1940, after running a successful cattle operation for over a decade and serving as president of the Gila County Farm Bureau, Stephen Bixby was elected state senator, and held the position from 1941 to 1948 (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** S.L. Bixby, Arizona State Senator and rancher, ca. 1941 (from AZ State Library, Archives and Public Records).

After his political career, Bixby and his son, Steve Jr., continued cattle operations, establishing Gila County Cattle Sales in the late 1950s. The Jones family began cattle ranching in the Pinal Mountains south of Globe in the late 1800s with the creation of the VF Bar Ranch. Roland Jones relocated nearer to Wheatfields by the 1920s and occupied lands that would border the Hicks and Bixby Ranches (Figure 4). During the Great Depression, Roland worked for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the Globe-Miami area. An inscription on a concrete trough by a

Cornerstone crew during archaeological survey in the area was dated to July 1933 and signed “Kid Jones”; it remains unknown if the inscription related to Roland or one of his sons.



**Figure 4.** Wheatfield ranchers at auction, ca. 1959; from left to right: Jack Martin, Roland Jones, Steve Bixby, Unknown, Fulton Weeks (from the Richard Schaus Collection).

Limited archival information exists for the remaining individuals in direct association with ranching activities within the Hicks-Pike’s Peak Grazing Allotment. Louis Bohme moved to Gila County with his mother following her separation from Louis’ father, and the family raised goats in Webster Gulch near Miami. Louis’ grandson, Bill, served as Gila County Supervisor, and his brother, Fay, managed a cattle ranch north of the Bixby property (Figure 5). The Mounce family settled in Globe in 1876 with a large herd of cattle, running the livestock between the Salt and Gila rivers (Figure 6). Buster Mounce became a well-known figure within the Gila County livestock industry, and served as a broker, auctioneer, and the county cattle inspector. One of the many historic Mounce ranching properties bordered the Bixby ranch to the south. The Mounce family continues to work within the ranching business, with an operation bordering the San Carlos Indian Reservation east of Globe.



**Figure 5.** W.E., L.W., and P.F. Bohme, ca. 1950s (from the Richard Schaus Collection).



**Figure 6.** Buster Mounce and “Big Al” pose for the camera, ca. 1962 (from the AZ Republic, June 5, 1962).