

ROPING AN EAGLE

Some wonderful things can happen down on the farm and some are worth reporting!

For a good number of years, a golden eagle or two would winter in the pastures south of the house. Dad was proud that eagles would hang around, and was very aware of their wintering needs, and habits. He kept watch.

A late-winter ice storm descended upon us one year, and resulted in a thick layer of clear ice covering everything. Dad saddled up the horse, and rode to the pasture. Sure enough, the eagle was in his usual place in a huge cottonwood tree, and he, too, was completely coated with ice. As Dad approached on the horse, the eagle attempted to fly, but managed only to fall to the ground. He then began running, jumping into the air, but repeatedly came back down. With each attempt, however, some ice was dislodged, and his running and flying were improving in quality, as used to be said, by leaps and bounds. Dad was riding the horse alongside the eagle that by this time was flying at about the height of the saddle. Dad, always confident of his skill with the lariat, now found himself in a position to attempt to rope a “flying” eagle, and did so on what I remember he reported as the second try. Anyway, he returned to the house with the eagle in tow, very proud indeed of this singular accomplishment.

The first order of business was to call Uncle Mason on the phone, and get him there to see this historic event first hand. When Uncle Mason arrived, there followed a long discussion on the best way to set the eagle free. The eagle, now on a stump in the front yard, had a number of ways to express his general unhappiness at his predicament. The ice had long since disappeared of course, and his wing span was beautifully displayed whenever anyone approached too near. But it was his beak and talons that attracted our attention. His ability to protect himself had to be carefully considered.

The measurement of the wing span (six feet) was determined by the use of “experienced” eyes, from a safe distance.

While Dad made threatening motions in front of the eagle, Uncle Mason approached as closely as possible from the direction the tail was pointing (this

direction varied) until the rope was released. Initially, the eagle did not detect that there was any change in his status, continuing to sit on the stump. A couple of minutes passed, enjoyed by everyone, before someone waved his arms. The eagle departed forthwith, and what a splendid sight it was to see the lift-off from a distance of only ten feet or so.

We have speculated on the frequency of eagles being roped by men on horseback, and think that such an achievement must be fairly rare. A good test of the rarity of such a thing happening is that at first hearing, most people are reluctant to believe the story. But it all happened--I saw the last part of the story myself, with my own eyes. When Dad arrived at the house with the eagle at the end his rope, believing that he had roped him was for me very easy.