

George Grant Gillette

Owner of "the Gillette Ranch" near Woodbine, KS

Born: January 1868 in Galena, IL

Died: December 4, 1929 in Los Angeles, CA

In the early years of Kansas Statehood, the uninhabited Kansas prairies seemed vast and endless. The opportunity for grazing cattle combined with the shipping opportunities that were being opened by railroad development resulted in the rise of several men who made (and lost) fortunes in the cattle business. Names such as Joseph McCoy, Charles Alioth, Thomas Henry, the Huston's "Geraldine Ranch", Albert Crane's "Durham Ranch" and the Grant Gillette's expansive ranch near Woodbine were all well-known establishments in the late 1800s.

George Grant "Grant" Gillette was born in Galena, Illinois in January of 1868 to parents James A. Gillette, an immigrant farmer from England, and Margaret I. Gillette. The family came to Dickinson County around 1870. Grant attended Kansas schools and graduated from the Kansas State Normal School at Emporia. He then attended Central Business College at Sedalia, MO. For a period of time, he worked as a railroad telegraph operator in Marion County. While in Marion County, he developed a business scheme that purportedly involved shipping grain in partially filled freight cars, and subsequently billing the railroad for a full car load. Using this scheme, he was able to generate some "venture capital" sufficient to build his business. Unfortunately, for Gillette, the scheme was uncovered but Gillette was able to pay his debts to the satisfaction of creditors and was never prosecuted.

Gillette applied for the job of Deputy Sheriff in Dickinson County but did not get the job. In the mid 1890's, while still below the age of 30, he then began a cattle operation near Woodbine, KS which grew into one of the most spectacular examples of frenzied finance in the Midwest.

Using a similar scheme to generate his own "venture capital", Gillette borrowed money from banks and commission houses in Kansas City and St. Joseph, MO to purchase cattle about 3,000 head at a time and secured the note with a mortgage on the cattle. He had them shipped to his Woodbine ranch where he employed local settlers to herd and feed the cattle. Gillette then sold the cattle on credit in small lots to feeders. Then he would deliver the notes for these sales to his creditors promising a 9-10 percent commission. These creditors would in turn sell these notes to banks all over the East and West at a 5-6 percent interest, keeping the remaining percentage as their profit. Due to the large profits on these notes, bankers and others were eager to purchase the notes on Gillette's cattle. Although some were suspicious of his methods and suspected that they might be in trouble if the banks demanded payment all at once, they took the risks due to the large profits that were estimated. Within a period of 3 years, Gillette's worth was estimated at 300,000 cattle and had secured nearly unlimited credit to purchase cattle in Texas, bringing them to Woodbine for sale and grazing. He was frequently referred to as the "Cattle King of Kansas." But by November of 1898, it was discovered that Gillette also had liabilities

amounting to an estimated 1.5 dollars. Before he was 30 years old, Gillette had made and lost a fortune and was bankrupt.

When the amount of debt was discovered, his creditors began demanding payment and Gillette left the United States and travelled to Chihuahua, Mexico to escape his creditors. Gillette's whereabouts was discovered when a young man by the name of Thomas Foley Fountain who had contrived an extortion scheme by claiming (to Gillette) that a posse had been formed to kidnap Gillette and bring him back to Kansas, dead or alive, to collect a reward. Fountain claimed that he had been chosen by the posse to kill Gillette, but that he was willing to let him go if Gillette would pay an extortion fee. The conspiracy was not well organized and was discovered by Gillette who immediately arranged to have Fountain arrested in Mexico.

Meanwhile, in Mexico, Gillette had secured a position as a supervisor of a mining property near Chihuahua, Mexico. Around 1902, Gillette purchased a lease on the Santa Gertrudis gold mine in the Parral district of Chihuahua, Mexico. After obtaining control of the Santa Gertrudis mine, Gillette ordered the workers to create "cross cuts" every 60 feet within the primary tunnel. Within months, a rich vein of gold was found and by November of 1902, the mine was producing gold ore worth an estimated \$5,000 per ton. The Mexican mining venture turned out to be a very lucrative one and by 1903 Gillette was again back in the United States, working with his creditors in New York and had started to pay off his debts. By December of 1903, Gillette had moved to Fostoria, Ohio and apparently offered to settle with his creditors and pay off about \$300,000 of his debts in Woodbine by offering them this amount of stock in his mining ventures. The proposal was rejected by his creditors. The Chihuahua mining venture continued to be very prosperous however, allowing Gillette to finally pay off the estimated \$1.5 Million debt in June of 1905.

In February of 1908, Gillette had sold his interests in the gold mine, purchased a home in the aristocratic neighborhood of Westmoreland Place in Los Angeles, CA for \$75,000, and became involved in the Cleveland Oil Company in Los Angeles. By December of 1910, Gillette was again arrested on accusations of mail fraud involving get-rich-quick schemes in the sale of stock in the oil company. In addition, he continued to be plagued by demands for payment from additional creditors and ranch workers for unpaid ranch labor and undocumented loans. In December of 1913, after a 36 hour deliberation, a jury acquitted Gillette of the mail fraud charges involving the Cleveland Oil Company.

It seems that Gillette was successful in adding to his fortune through his oil ventures in California. He was married in 1895 to Amanda E. Baumbaugh and they had at least 2 children, Waldo Allen (who later graduated from Harvard University) and Helen Bernice. George Grant Gillette died in California on December 4th, 1925 at the age of 57 years.

The Gillette Ranch property was eventually parceled out and sold with a portion going to the Fengel family near Woodbine. The Santa Gertrudis mine in Chihuahua, Mexico is still an active mine producing Gold and Silver ore yet today.

George Grant Gillette:

Parents: James and Margaret Gillette

Siblings: Lydia A Gillette (b:abt 1858), Joseph Gillette (b:abt 1861), Emma Gillette (b:abt 1863), James A. Gillette (b: abt 1866), George Grant "Grant" (b: abt 1868)

From: Brian Obermeyer, bobermeyer@TNC.ORG

Date: July 27, 2010 8:01:25 AM CDT

Last time I spoke with Herb was this spring when I was trying to find the exact location of the Gillette Ranch line shack that Herb's father (my great grandfather Adolf Beckel) stayed in. I'd called him on my cell phone, and he was able to describe the exact location as if he was sitting next to me in the truck. As you may remember, Adolf met Sadie when Gillette's wild steers got mixed up with Great Great Grandpa George Ruckert's milk cows. Below is an email I received from Herb at about the same time. - Brian

My Father worked with Grant Gillette on many cattle drives around the late 1800 and told us stories of the large herd's coming in from the south to graze on the rich grazing land near their home, These stories bring back memories of a lot of those days that I tried to copy in my days working cattle, Now in my old age I still think I would like to get on my old trusted pony to follow the herd again. Their line shack was four miles east of Woodbine Ks. on a high knoll of land on the north side of the road from Woodbine to White city, The stones still may be there that the cabin sat on, it was about 10ft. x 12ft. for four Cowboys, My Father worked the south west quarter of the ranch and three other Cowboys each with a quarter of the ranch land that extended from Lions Creek to Clarks Creek, about five miles wide and about five miles north of the line shack and five miles south from the line shack. as you may know this was all government land at that time Grant Gillette leased grazing on that land, they drove in cattle from the south to fatten on the lush grass land, in the late 1880s the land was sold, A Mr. Fengel bought large acreages of that land for very little money, only to prosper at re selling it in smaller amounts, In the late 1800 my Father bought 160 acres for \$650 after a few years he bought 160 acres adjoining for \$1300 [both of these quarters had been part of the Gillette Ranch that Adolf looked after], That was our home farm, As I lived on the old home farm for only 12 years I did get the feel of Cowboy life and enjoyed living that life very much, Oh yes Brian the old Gillette Saddle was well worn when I got it but I still used it for work on bad weather days and rough work but I had a new Newhall Saddle for show time, Yes I do wish I could have kept a lot of the old time things from those years, I hope this gives you some Idea of our life on the old farm,

LOVE U. Uncle Herb & Aunt Marg

Source: When Kansas was Young by Thomas Allen McNeal

The Topeka Daily Capital 31 May 1920 page 4

The Rise and Fall of Grant Gillette

About thirty years ago a young telegraph operator out in Marion County was accused of putting up a job to defraud the railroad company which seems so simple in its conception that one marvels that it should have worked, even for a limited period. The scheme was to put a few bushels of grain in a freight car bill it out as a full car and collect from the railroad company on the basis of the full car load

Naturally as might be supposed the young man got into trouble and left that section of the country for a year or two. He seems to have been able to satisfy the railroad company in some way however and was never prosecuted. It was a year or two after that that this same young man sought the job of deputy sheriff in Dickinson County. The emoluments of this office at that time amounted to some fifty dollars per month. He did not get the job. Possibly the necessity for making a living suggested to him that there ought to be some shorter road to fortune than working as an underling at the modest stipend of fifty per month. At any rate there seemed to be a change come over the spirit of his dreams. He evidently decided that the world was his oyster and he proposed to open it. The young man was Grant Gillette of Woodbine who within the next four or five years furnished the most spectacular example of frenzied finance ever seen in the Middle West. Within these few brief years this young man still under thirty years of age with little business experience and only local acquaintance, bought herds of cattle from Texas to the Canadian line and from the Pacific coast to the Missouri River all on borrowed money advanced by experienced bankers and commission men and even by the great leader of the packing industry, Philip D Armour. When the crash finally came his indebtedness had mounted to the dizzy height of \$2,000,000 or somewhere in that neighborhood. The men who had advanced the money were holding chattel mortgages on herds as they supposed aggregating 60,000 cattle of all grades from long horned Texans to the highest grade Herefords. His methods were bizarre and it would have seemed not calculated to appeal to a careful hard headed business man but the astonishing fact was that somehow he did appeal to them so that they advanced large sums of money on his unsupported promise and even seemed eager to do it. On one occasion he stepped into a commission house in St Joseph and nonchalantly asked the broker to cash his check for \$10,000 saying that he would have a few carloads of cattle on the market within a week and would then settle. The commission house promptly cashed the check which they were still holding after the crash came. Possibly there was an element of greed in the case, for Gillette promised his backers large profits on their investments. It is probable also that his breezy confidence impressed these men for in the heyday of his career. Grant Gillette was the personification of confidence in his own ability. True there was much of the grand stand in his methods. He hired and uniformed a large band known all over the country as Gillette's cowboy band. This band he carried about on special trains to cattle conventions and other gatherings. He rejoiced in the title of the cattle king of Kansas. His shirt front and fingers were decorated with large and glittering diamonds and he had a peculiar habit of carrying a handful of diamonds in his pocket which he would carelessly jingle in his hand when engaged in conversation. He cherished political ambitions and was talked of as a candidate for the Legislature and even Congress. The crash came in 1898 when some bank or commission house began to get uneasy about its paper and then it developed that Gillette's creditors did not know \$1,000,000 how much money had been advanced the young Napoleon of finance. On November 27 1898 the following telegram was received at Woodbine. "Will leave today for Spain Cable

me at Cadiz how are my wife and baby." However he was not sailing for Spain but was heading for old Mexico. It was three years afterward that a Kansan returning from Mexico brought the news that he had met Grant Gillette in the city of Chihuahua where he was living in a state of poverty. His baby had died. His wife had been taken down with the smallpox and Grant himself had nearly died from accidental poisoning. He had been running a dairy but had lost that when sickness came on and was then earning a somewhat precarious living by making and selling shirtwaists to the Mexican maidens. However Gillette was not the kind of a man to get discouraged by fickle fortune. Five years after he had disappeared leaving his creditors to gather up what they could he returned to the United States. He called some of his creditors and informed them that he had procured a large interest in a valuable mine and wanted them to take stock in the same to the extent at least of his obligations to them and perhaps some more to finance the proposition. How many of them took stock I do not know but at any rate all talk of prosecution of the erstwhile cattle king was dropped and my last word concerning his whereabouts was that he was living quietly near Fostoria, Ohio, was accumulating land and was on the road to fortune. Having seen and having tried to study the character of Grant Gillette I have often wondered how he was able to go as far as he did I have often wondered how a man like him could so impress a man like PD Armour who had the reputation of being an excellent judge of human nature that he would back the speculations of the young adventurer to the extent of thousands of dollars.

Possibly the explanation may be that of the western man who loved to sit in a poker game who declared that a bob tailed flush was just as good as the real thing if you only had the nerve to bet it high enough and at the same time look as if you really held the cards.

Source: Indianapolis News, November 28, 1898, Page 1

GILLETTE GOES TO SPAIN.

His Brother-in-Law Receives a Telegram from Him. Woodbine, Kas., November 28.—Grant Gillette, who failed here last week, with liabilities it is now believed will amount to \$2,000,000. has, it is said, sent (lie following telegram to his brother-in-law in this city: "New York. November 27.—I will leave to-day by steamer for Spain. Cable me at Cadiz. How are my wife and baby? "G. C. GILLETTE." At the home of the departed Gillette no one would vouchsafe any information as to his whereabouts, and the receipt of the alleged telegram was kept a secret. It was generally believed that Gillette had first gone to Texas, and from there to old Mexico, a traveling man claiming to have seen him at Chihuahua. Gillette is said to have, telegraphed friends here on last Friday from Texas that he was then en route to old Mexico, and by some this is believed to have been a "blind" to give him time to get to New York and set sail. In an interview to-day J. H. Hollinger, president of the Gillespie Commission Company, whose attachment caused Gillette's collapse, is quoted as saying that Gillette had planned for his departure for several days previous thereto, and that he had taken \$20,000 in cash with him.

Gillette's Methods.

Gillette's plan of operations was to buy cattle in bunches of about 5,000, with borrowed money, secured by a mortgage on the cattle, and would ship them to his Woodbine (Kas.) ranch and sell them in small lots to feeders, taking their notes. When these notes were paid he would settle with the commission men from whom he borrowed. The commission men would receive from Gillette 9 and 10 per cent, for their loans. They would sell the paper to bankers and others all over the East and West at 5 and 6 per cent interest, the commission men making 4 and 5 per cent, interest on their loans. It was these enormous profits which made the commission men eager for Gillette's paper. They were suspicious, it is said, of his methods, but the profits were so large they took the risks, each hoping to get from under before the crash came, if one did come. A good deal of Gillette's paper is past due; much more of it falls due soon. If the investors in the East, who have bought these notes, demand payment at once it will cause trouble.

Source: Western News - Democrat, Volume xm, Valentine, NE, December 22, 1898,
No 48

Gillett's Brother Also a Victim.

J. W. Gillett. hardware and implement
dealer , has turned over his business at
Woodbine , Kan. , to his creditors. Gillett
b a brother of Grant Gillette , the abscond
ing cattle king , and held \$190,000 worth of
cattle paper issued by his brother. The
cattle which J. W. Gillett supposed he
owned have been found to be mortgaged to
others.

The Bee

Contributed by [klstacy_home](#)

Description: Grant Gillette in Poverty

Date: May 10 1900

Newspaper published in: Earlington, KY

Source: <http://www.fultonhistory.com>

Page/Column: Page 3, Column 4

Grant Gillette in Poverty

Chihuahua, Mexico, May 6.—Grant Gillette, once the cattle king of Woodbine, Kas., is living in poverty in this city, supported in a large measure by the labor of his wife. It was commonly believed when Gillette fled that he took a large sum of money.

Source: The Topeka Daily Capital, Friday, December 11, 1903, Page 1

WILL RETURN Plunder Gillette Settles With Creditors. DE HAS PLENTY OF HONEY Successful Mining Deals of Ex-Cattle Magnate Enables Him to Pay His Debts A Man 'who Kept No Books. Woodbine, Kan., Dec. 10. A letter from Grant Gillette, at one time the biggest Mexico several years ago, to avoid debts estimated at \$1,500,000, has been received a woman near here on whose farm he holds a mortgage, in which he says: "I will be in Woodbine within a few days." Oillottf say thnt lift hri mart a. Ret. tl t Uh m of hig creditors. He is supposed to be at Fostoria, O., where, it is said, he recently purchased a residence near that of his father-in-law. Fostoria, Ohio, Dec. 10. Grant Gillette, who recently came from New York, said tonight that he had through his attorneys arranged a basis of settlement with his creditors and would meet them in Kansas City, soon, lie has recently oeen successful in mining ventures in Mexico, He has purchased a home in Fostoria. it-b-fattlA TTino- Grant Gillette was. known as the cattle King of the Southwest. He controlled at "" "" nVT w "b. ", "uvsiuusi, xcwo, mated at \$1,500,000. A few days before his failure became public Gillette made an assignment ana aeeuoi iru. u Belongings to D. W. Naill of Abilene Gillette at once departed for Texas and next was heard of in Mexico, where he has lived until recently. Mr. Naill refused to accept the trusteeship and the papers were never filed. When this condition of affairs became known Gillette's creditors. who reached from Denver to New York, came down upon Woodbine in droves. Men representing 25 commission firms in Kansas City arrived the next day on a gpedai train and immediately began a search for Gillette's cattle, which were ranging over central and western Kansas, Oklahoma, Indian Territory and Texas. A 2eteoric Career. Gillette's career was meteoric. ,In 1894 he lived on a mortgaged, quarter section of land near Woodbine, where he t?an his cattle trade by feeding- steers for others. Within three years he had laid the ground work of a business that enabled him to handle over 200,000 cattle. Soon he secured unlimited credit and hnuiirit ETvat droves of cattle in Texas muthmiti of doinir business was that he kept no doobs ; ana too ne annarent y carried in his v... This eomnlicated matters and since vA la fnr Mptlo.o flocres of suits have nr ea m a igt - mTtte had ien interested in various mining and other deals and has constantly carried on negotiations with nis creditors iooKinB to nnirnmn sr irrrn Pftn "

Source: The Wichita Daily Eagle, Friday, Dec 11, 1903, Page 1

GILLETTE TO SETTLE Woodbine Cattle King Promises to Meet Creditors. IN - KANSAS CITY SOON Has Purchased a Home at Fostoria, Ohio, GOT FORTUNE MINING Review of His Mammoth Dealings and Failures. Fostoria, O., Dec. 10. Grant Gillette, who recently came from New York, said tonight that he had, through his attorneys, arranged a basis of settlement with his creditors and would meet them In Kansas City soon. He has recently been successful in mining ventures in Mexico He has purchased a home in Fostoria. Kansas City., Dec. 10. Grant C. Gillette was known as the cattle king of the southwest. He controlled at one time thousands of cattle on the southwestern ranges and who failed in November, 193. His liabilities estimated at \$1,590,000. A few days before his failure became public, Gillette made an assignment. Gillette at once departed for Texas and was next heard of in Mexico, where he has lived until recently. Men representing 23 commission firms in Kansas City arrived the next day after Gillette's failure was reported. He began his career at Woodbine on a cattle ranch. Within three years he became worth 300,000 cattle. Soon he secured unlimited credit and bought droves of cattle In Texas and brought them north for sale and feeding. A remarkable thing about Gillette's methods of doing business was that he kept no books and took no one into his confidence. All the details of his enormous dealings were apparently carried in his head. This complicated matters and since he left for Mexico, scores of suits have been filed in a fight to get possession of his cattle. While In Mexico Gillette has been interested in various mining and other deals and has constantly carried on ' negotiations with his creditors looking to his return to the United States. Kansas City, Dec. 10. A special to the Star from Woodbine, Kan., says: A letter from Grant Gillette, at one time one of the biggest cattlemen in Kansas and who fled to Mexico several years ago to avoid debts estimated at \$1,500,000. has been received by a woman here on whose farm he holds a mortgage, in which he says: "I will be in Woodbine within a few days." Gillette says that he has made a settlement with many of his creditors. He is supposed to be at Fostoria, Ohio, where it is said, he recently purchased a residence near that of his father-in-law.