

ENJOYING A DAY with his cattle on his southeastern Colorado Ranch, the Maverick, was Bob Gaskill, (above) who his wife said has always thought of himself first as a farmer and rancher, then as a banker.

Man finishes 45 years in banking

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When Oberlin businessman Bob Gaskill bought the controlling interest in the Farmers State Bank, in Winona with his father Ira in 1963, little did he realize that 45 years later he would be the owner of a bank with branches in nine area towns.

Born in Kansas City, Mo., on Dec. 10, 1928, the nearly 80-year-old businessman has been successful not only in banking, but in the cattle and sheep industry, since he graduated from Colorado A & M College, (now Colorado State University) at Fort Collins in 1951 with a degree in animal husbandry.

Among other things, he's been a pioneer in Colorado's river rafting business, an innovator in grassland management and something of an expert at turning around troubled banks.

"A highlight of my college days was when I started a rubber boat business at Glenwood Springs with two friends, offering tourists hourly rides on the fast-flowing Colorado and Roaring Fork rivers," he recalled.

While river raft tours are big business today, hardly anyone offered them in the 1950s.

Mr. Gaskill said he enlisted in the Coast Guard after college and served three years during the Korean War, mostly in the Seattle area, on the Cutter Klamath.

He then started operating a small feed lot on the south side of Goodland and pastured up to 18,000 lambs at a time on wheat fields in the Bird City area. During the mid-1950s, he said, a severe drought hit and there was no wheat pasture and very little feed.

"I took a job as assistant county agent in Chase County at Cottonwood Falls," he said, "and then did a study for the Department of Agriculture Economics at Kansas State during the summer."

"I then completed a master's degree in animal science, then published work in endocrinology and nutrition, before going back to running lambs and cattle at Goodland for two years. During that year, I was named to the National Lamb Council, a special honor for me."

"In March 1960, the deep snow and severe cold of the late winter made it impossible for the sheep to get to graze on the green wheat pasture, so my dad and I decided it would be easier to feed the 4,000 animals at the farm of my brother, John Gaskill, near Weston, Mo."

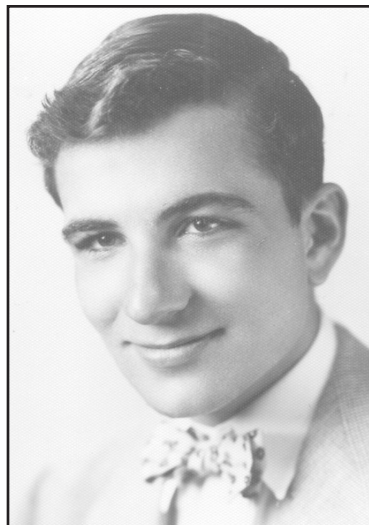
"We shipped to that town (by rail cars), then employed six or eight men to drive the sheep on foot to the farm. As an incentive for the hungry animals, men on two trucks pitched out hay to lead the sheep to the happy feeding grounds."

A photo of the thousands of sheep marching through downtown Weston made the front page of *The Kansas City Star* that week.

"My goal was to learn and be involved in all phases of the livestock business, so as part of that goal, I accepted a job in 1961 with City National Bank (now United Mis-



Young Kay



Young Bob

souri Bank) in Kansas City as their livestock loan officer. The bank had \$12 million in direct cattle loans."

When he and his father bought the bank in Winona, he said, it was a "troubled bank," and it took him 10 years to clean it up.

"The bank had totals of \$2 million when we purchased it from Oren W. Daniels," he recalled, "and the loan customers didn't know that they were required to apply proceeds of cattle sales and grain sales to their loans."

He and his wife, the former Kay Crumly of St. Francis, who had met at a dance in Goodland, were married in 1963. He was working at City National Bank and she at Hallmark Cards in Kansas City before they moved to Winona.

Her grandfather, Ike W. Crumly of Thomas County, had been president of the Brewster and Rexford State Banks, beginning in the 1900s. The family's involvement continued through his great-grandson, Bob and Kay's son Guy, who is manager for the family firm, The Bank, at Winona today.

In 1973, Mr. Gaskill said, he purchased the Jennings State Bank from the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. After reorganizing it, he sold it to Dick Spencer, who was president of a bank in Liberal.

"At that time," he said, "the banking economy began its downturn, and I was the only bidder on the Selden State Bank (also purchased from the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp.)."

In 1985, he said, he was the only bidder on the Decatur County National Bank in Oberlin and after buying it, he and his family moved here from Winona. At that time,



WITH THE HELP OF TWO DONKEYS and a wagon, Bob Gaskill (with gun) and others backed up to the new Farmers State Bank building in Winona when hauling the contents from the original structure.



THE WINONA BANK (above) as it looked in 1963 when Bob Gaskill and his father, Ira Gaskill, bought it from Oren W. Daniels. The building has since been replaced with a new structure.

— Photo collections of Bob Gaskill

Mr. Gaskill said, he moved the original charter from Winona to Oakley and "branched back" to Winona. He bought out the Gold Bank in Oberlin in May 2002, which included branches in Norcatour and Colby, and they were consolidated as branches of The Bank.

Then in 1988, he said, he was one of five bidders on the Jennings Bank when it failed again, probably being unique in purchasing the same bank twice from the FDIC.

In 1990, Mr. Gaskill bid on the Peoples Heritage Savings and Loan branch at Norton. On Dec. 31, 1990, he merged The Bank at Oberlin with branches Oakley, Winona, Norton, Jennings, Atwood, Herndon, Selden, Colby and Norcaur.

"Banking has been interesting and rewarding in many ways," he said. "I particularly enjoy restructuring loans to borrowers in order to cause a minimum of rise to the bank stockholders and depositors, but to allow the borrower to obtain

financing where other banks have declined credit. I have helped many young and middle-aged farmers to continue to prosper in agriculture."

"What keeps me excited about living today is the input I have with the bank's day-to-day operations and investments, but maybe a larger input with the bank's direction in the future."

"Though FDIC examination results are confidential, we enjoy sharing the nonconfidential rating of 'Outstanding in Community Development,' with only four banks receiving this designation out of the 346 banks in Kansas during 2007."

Of his varied life, he says, "My younger days of skiing, sailing and rafting on the Colorado River were high on the agenda. The last 25 years have been planning and working on my southeastern Colorado ranch, the Maverick."

"My major improvements were the increase in grass production

on the 38,000-acre range, accomplished by cell grazing and clearing of some 10,000 acres of cedar trees. I sold the ranch after 28 years of sole management, happy to have been instrumental in improving a prairie ecosystem when the buffalo were supreme."

Mr. Gaskill continues to be a collector of American Indian art and prehistoric pottery and enjoys traveling with his wife. Their family also includes two daughters, Lori Gaskill, who is married to Ray Kreigbaum, and their son, Max, of Lakewood, Colo., and Jody Gaskill Metcalf and her husband Shad of Colby, and their children, Bryson, 6, and Seanna, 4. Both Shad and Jody are graduates of Decatur Community High School.

The Bank employees honored Mr. Gaskill with a surprise luncheon recently in Selden to help him celebrate his 45 years of banking.