

## **“Last of the 5000” or “Waiting for a Chinook”, Russell**

In the winter of '86 and '87, the first cold front hit in November. More storms followed in December. A foot and a half of snow fell between Thanksgiving and Christmas. What little hay they had, most ranchers fed to their horses. In the meantime, the cattle drifted from the frozen high ranges to the bottom land and the sheltered coulees. There was no food there but willows. The first Chinook arrived in January, with just enough warming to melt the snow on top. Then it turned cold. On February 3 and 4 one of the worst blizzards in memory set in. The snow crusted. The Chinook had succeeded in sealing the ground with a layer of ice, which the cattle hooves could not penetrate. Before he died, Russell dictated to a stenographer this account of what happened.

“The winter of '86 and '87 all men will remember. It was the hardest winter the open range ever saw. An awful lot of cattle died. The cattle would go in the brush and hump up and die there. They wasn't rustlers. A horse will paw and get grass, but a cow won't. then the wolves fattened on the cattle.... Now I was living at the OH Ranch that winter. There were several men there, and among them was Jesse Phelps, the owner of the OH. One night, Jesse Phelps had gat a letter from Louie Kaufman, one of the biggest cattlemen in the country, who lived in Helena, and Louie wanted to know how the cattle was doing, and Jesse says to me, “I must write a letter to Louie and tell him how tough it is.” I was sitting at the table with him and I said, “I'll make a sketch to go with it.” So I made one, a small water color about the size of a postal card, and I said to Jesse, “Put that in your letter.” He looked at it and said, “Hell, he don't need a letter, this will be enough.”



**Original Postcard**



**Later Russel painted "Waiting for the Chinook", based on the original postcard.**