

Floyd Elgin Dominy raises beef cattle in the Shenandoah Valley. Observed there, hand on a fence, his eyes surveying his pastures, he does not look particularly Virginian. Of middle height, thickset, somewhat bandy-legged, he appears to have been lifted off a horse with block and tackle. He wears bluejeans, a white-and-black striped shirt, and leather boots with heels tow inches high. His belt buckle is silver and could not be covered over with a playing card. He wears a string tie that is secured with a piece of petrified dinosaur bone. On his head is a white Stetson.

Thirty-five years ago, Dominy was a county agent in the rangelands of northeastern Wyoming. He could not have come to his job there at a worse time. The Great Drought and the Great Depression had coincided, and the people of the county were destitute. They were not hungry-they could shoot antelope and deer-but they were destitute. Their livestock, with black tongues and protruding ribs, were dying because of lack of water. Dominy, as the agent not only of Campbell County but of the federal government, was empowered to pay eight dollars a head for these cattle-many thousands of them-that were all but decaying where they stood. He paid the eight dollars and shot the cattle.