

## [Nath F. Watkins]

FOLKSTUFF - RANGE LORE

[?] words

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by

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From F. C. by

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Range Lore and Cowboy Reminiscences UVALDE COUNTY, DISTRICT #10

NATH F. WATKINS

UVALDE, TEXAS

Nath Watkins who came to Uvalde in 1896, served this city as a barber for forty years. He is 72 years old but has retired from the barber business on account of ill health. He was born in Bexar County in 1865, moving to Kaufman County with his parents, a little later. When he was seventeen his father died and Nath went to his uncle's Ranch where he lived about a year and a half, doing all kinds of ranch work.

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“After leaving my uncle, I wandered around for several years going from one ranch to another, and occasionally going back to Wilson County to see my mother. Just a transient boy , a wonderer.

“I went up the trail in 1885 with the Clemmens and Johnson outfit. They would buy horses out in this western country for fifteen dollars per head and take them to Kansas and sell them for a good profit. I used to do all the brone riding for the outfit, and when we got to Dodge City, Kansas, I would have to ride each horse as he was sold. One day I rode one of these horses and he threw me off and kicked me in the breast with both feet. No , it didn't hurt me badly, I was like a rubber ball. I got up and got on him again and rode him till he quit pitching. My boss use used to call me Ned. He said to me one day, 'Ned, I believe you are the best ride I ever saw to be the ugliest one?' That was one day after I had just ridden a horse that pitched awfully hard. I was a reckless kind of a boy and it was all fun to me.

“The reason I got my job with Johnson and Clemmens , a party came along one day begging for something to eat. C12 - 2/11/41 - Texas

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Some of the men told me if he would ride a certain horse in the pen, they would give him a dollar to buy something to eat. He said alright allright and he tried but the horse threw him. Me being well dressed and they thinking me a tenderfoot , they bet me ten dollars I couldn't ride him. Well, I got on that horse and pulled the bridle off and whipped him with the bridle. He really did pitch but I rode him till he quit pitching. The crowd cheered me and the boss came around and asked me if I wanted to go up the trail. Well, I had won my ten dollars but I was glad to get the job, for the work just suited me.

“It was near Obedie, Oklahoma, then the Indian territory. Now just across the line in Oklahoma I roped, a wild horse and the rope caught around my left hand in a half hitch. The animal begin to charge and plunge and almost jerked my left arm off. Jerked the horse

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I was riding down, when finally I did get loose from him, my hand was badly burned by the rope. I suffered quite a bit with this hand but I kept on going, for there were no residences in that country then. I still have the scars from the rope on my hand which you can see very plainly today.

“There were no wild Indians in those days, but in passing through their territory they would stop us and demand a premium. We usually cut out an old pony and gave it to them and that would satisfy them. But if we didn't they would sometimes stampede the herd. The Indians would come to camp and get into our chuck wagon, principally the bucks, but occasionally the squaws also. I remember one morning some horses had got out of the remuda and I was horse hunting. So two indians came up to me — one talked good English - but I was scared to death at the very sight of them. They had their guns and amunition, so while I was talking to the one who talked English, the other one shot at a prairie chicken right in front of me. Was I scared? Why , every hair on my head stood straight up for a I thought sure I was already 3 shot. They asked me for some tobacco but I didn't use tobacco so I couldn't give it to them. Then they left me and went on which was a great relief to me, for I was ready to savor relations with them.

“In going up through the Indian Territory, the Commanche reservation in Greer County, Oklahoma, one morning before we broke camp, we had about three hundred and eighty head of horses grazing around camp. An old man, an old ruffian and a typical old westerner; in fact, he looked more like a cave man then anything else— and really that is what he was for he lived in a dugout — came into camp and demanded to see the boss. When the boss came out, the old nester begin reprmanding him for grazing his horses on his range, when the country was all open and barren and belonged really to no one. About that time he looked down and seeing the boss had a few wild plums in his hand, the old nester stormed. 'God Almighty, man, what do you mean pulling my plums?' This boss being a very calm man said, 'Won't you sit down and have a cup of coffee?' Which the old ruffian accepted. Then the boss cleverly entertained him till the horses were filled. So before leaving, the old fellow becameoffriendly and told the boss he extended him

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a cordial invitation to return and use his land when he wanted to; The old nester was a friend of General Sam Houston and also a great historian.

"I went up the trail with the Blocker and Driskell herd in 1886 and a man named Johnson was my boss. This was the last year of trail driving - after that year the cattle was all shipped by train to market. No, we had no runs on that trip, for the boss had learned how to bed his cattle to avoid the stampedes. He always bedded them on high ground as wolves and panthers and such-like animals most always travel in a flat country, and they usually caused the stampedes. There were 2,800 head in this herd. This was a very dry year and it was hard to get through as the ranchers along the way did not want trail drivers to utilize their grass.

"It took us about two months to make the trip. We usually traveled about 4 about six miles a day and never over twelve. But the cattle stayed in fine shape due to the fact of the slow driving. We crossed the river at Doan's store (Dean's store is where the Indians used to come across and buy their supplies) on the Red River. After we crossed the Red River, grass was much better. We were on what they called the 'Western Trail.'

"Sometimes getting water was a hard proposition in this northwestern country. There were lakes of water there but it was alkali and we couldn't let the cattle drink that as it would kill them. So our instructions were to keep the cattle out of this water.

"I have come in contact with lots of bad horses, some brought across from Mexico. About the meanest horse I ever saw was a fine, black horse from Mexico. When the Mexicans found a horse that was too bad for them to do any thing with, they general brought him across the border and sold him to some American. This big, black horse was spoiled and no one could ride him. He was beautiful and I bought him. I was working at that time on the Catarina Ranch southeast of Carrizo Springs. So I saddled him one day and when I got on him he pitched for a quarter quarter of a mile. And when he saw he couldn't pitch me off he tried to bite and pull me off. I finally made a gentle horse out of him. He was as good a

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horse as I ever owned, but later he got into wire fence and cut himself to pieces. I sold him later for a little or nothing. I usually rode any horse that pitched. Like many foolish boys, I wanted to do something no one else could do. I liked to ride and was a very good rider. But I have seen some men I was a little jealous of.

“Yes, horses are very hard to handle when they stampede , especially at night. You can't do anything with them until daylight. They are much crazier than cattle when they once stampede. On one occasion one night right above old Fort Griffin, one of the boys was on watch and the herd became frightened and they went any and every direction. Some alone and some in bunches but there was no 5 doing anything with them that night. We rode all night and managed to keep them in between two mountains, but we couldn't do any thing with them until daylight. but the next day we got them all. Its It's something strange about a horse no matter how far he may be away from his old home, if he gets lost from the heard , he will always drift back toward where he come from.

“Adolph Topperwein was an old friend of mine and about the best pistol and rifle shot I ever saw. I was present in San Antonio and saw him shooting with a .22 rifle. He was shooting at clay rocks thrown in the air and about the size of a hen egg. Out of one thousand rocks pitched in the air he broke 995 of them. He is still living and when he comes to Uvalde now he always comes to see me.

“I have seen some awful good roping. I was considered a good roper but I wasn't an expert like some I have seen. I has a cousin, Lew Blackaller, whose father had a big ranch on the Frio River, about four miles from Frio Town. His father was about seventy years old but he was still a fine roper. One day we were branding cattle and one of the steers broke away from the herd and my uncle came running up on a fine, black horse and slinging his rope, threw it on the animal and said, 'That's the way to take it away from the boys.' Doing ranch work you find many expert ropers and you find many who cant rope at all. This cousin always roped contests, and in different kinds of roping. On one occasion in San Antonio , he made nineteen throws without a miss.

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“Yes, in going up the trail or in other cow camps we would have kangaroo court. When part of the boys were on guard at night and the rest were in camp idle, we would start a joke on some one and he was always convicted, no matter how hard he tried to prove himself innocent. And always much the worse if he got mad for we always put the leggings on him.

“I have seen plenty of cattle stampedes. One time we were moving a herd of cattle out from San Antonio, and just this side of Sobinal they stampeded.

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The train was coming up the Seco Hill. We were eating supper and the cattle were bedded, but as the train came closer, the cattle begin to get up. I made second boss in the outfit and I said, 'Saddle your horses , boys , we are going to have to run.' The boys were tired and didn't much want to go back to work. Suddenly the cattle broke out, running over wire fences and every thing that came in their way. We stayed with what we could that night and rounded up [?] of the herd the next day. But we lost quite a few that we never got back.

“I can remember sixty-five years ago when the country in below [??] was full of wild animals. One night a panther came near our house and scared us. His name was Bill Irvin and I remember him saying if that panther came back there that night he was going to get out and kill it, for he had two six-shooters. Sure enough the panther came back in two-hundred yards of the house and begin to scream, and all the dogs came running into the house. [?] Mr. Irvin stayed in the house too for he didn't bother to get to kill it. The country was also full of lobo wolves. I have heard cattle bawling and [?] cattle running to their rescue. Then later we would see grown cattle with [?] hindquarters eaten almost off by these wolves and the cow would still be alive.

“I knew Old Man Leakey. One time I was up in the Frio Canyon visiting a cousin of mine. I gathered some corn for them while I was there and we got Old Man Leaky to haul the corn

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out for us. He always stuck his lips out before he went to speak. So he said to me, 'What is your name?'

"I said, 'Watkins.'

"Was your father B. Watkins?'

'Yes.'

'Was your mother's name Lawiny?'

"Yes.'

'Well, by God, I was engaged to your mother once back in Louisiana, and I got on abig drunk and she wouldn't have me.'

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"I quit the cow business in '91 and went to San Antonio and a man named K.P. [Tischirhart?] took me in and taught me the barber trade. I stayed there a couple of years and went to Boerne and stayed there two years, and then went back to San Antonio and worked there two more years for Mr. [Tischirhart?]. I moved to Uvalde in '96 and I barbered here for forty years. But had to retire a few years ago on account of ill health.

"I was married in '98 to Miss Mattie Maloney. We have five children all living, who are: Bert and George of Nisby, Arizona; Fred of Uvelde and Vete and Lurline of Sea Antonio.

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