

[Mrs. Helen Ketchum]

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Folk Stuff - Range Lore

Range-lore

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RANGE-LORE

Mrs. Helen Ketchum of San Angelo, Texas, wife of the late J. Van Ketchum, tells of Jim Ketchum (Van's father) being killed by the Indians. Eugene McCrohan, (now deceased) one of the early settlers of this country, gave the details of the story to Mrs. Ketchum. Jim Ketchum was a cousin of Tom Ketchum, the noted outlaw.

"In the spring of 1867, Jim Ketchum started with a large herd of cattle to Fort Sumner, New Mexico. The government had seven thousand Navajo Indians imprisoned at Fort Sumner and the range country supplied the beef for the prisoners. C12 - Texas

"Other herds gradually joined that of Ketchum, two of those known being [Eugene?] McCrohan and Sam Gholson. They traveled slowly, reaching the Hondo River in New 2 Mexico that fall, and finding plenty of water and grass, wintered there with their herds. This camp was about where Roswell now stands. They had no Indian trouble, although there were lots of Indians. A troop of cavalry was stationed at Camp Charlotte at the head of Kiowa Creek.

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“Having sold the cattle for a satisfactory price, these men prepared to return to their homes. Ketchum and two companions traveled “light” carrying their supplies on pack horses. They left before the others were ready. Mr. McCrohan purchased two Santa Fe or Murphey wagons, as they were known in those days, and to each of these wagons were hitched three yoke of oxen. Thus, they proceeded on their slow and tedious journey, but always kept within three or four days' travel of Mr. Ketchum.

“One morning one of their party was sent out to kill a buffalo. In a short time he came rushing back to the wagons yelling, “Indians! Indians!” but on being questioned, admitted that he had not seen any Indians but had found the body of a man riddled with bullets. Several men of the party went to investigate, finding the bodies of Ketchum and his two companions, a McDonald boy, and a Mr. Comperry, near what was called the Mustang Waterhole. One of the men rode rapidly to Camp Charlotte with the news, and a detachment of cavalry 3 was sent to the scene. The bodies of the men were buried by the soldiers, near the present day town of Tankersley. The graves are still recognizable.

“The ground and surroundings at the scene of the fight, gave evidence that the three men put up a gallant fight. They took refuge in a small arroyo where they were well protected on three sides. On the open side stood a hackberry tree and the Indians took advantage of the protection afforded by the tree. So fierce was the gun fire that the tree was cut down. How long the battle lasted will never be known, but the ground was covered with shells. Mr. Ketchum and his companions had a good supply of ammunition, fine guns, and there were never braver men than those behind the guns.

“After the men were killed, the Indians had thrown rocks until the bodies were almost covered. The “greenbacks” with which Mr. Ketchum had been paid for his cattle, were torn in pieces and scattered over the ground, the Indians evidently not realizing its value. The

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fragments of paper money were gathered up and brought to Mrs. Ketchum who sent them to the United States Treasury for redemption.”