

[Mrs. Cicero Russell]

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Range Lore

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Nellie B. Cox

San Angelo, Texas.

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RANGE-LORE

Mrs. Cicero Russell, of San Angelo, Texas, relates the following story of pioneer days:

“My father, John Burleson, came from Alabama to the San Saba Country. There he accumulated a small bunch of cattle and then for some reason, he went to Williamson County. There he married my mother, Katy Williams. C12- Texas

“Grandfather Williams had been killed by the Indians before the Civil War. He and a man by the name of Freeman had started a herd of cattle to New Mexico. After arming all their men and mounting them 2 on good horses it left grandfather and Freeman unarmed and grandfather riding a mule. After they got the cattle strung out and driving well on the trail, grandfather and Freeman started back home intending to get other horses and guns. On the way home in the late afternoon Freeman got off his horse to go down to a spring for a drink of water. The Indians evidently surrounded him. Grandfather tried to go to his aid but both were hacked to pieces by tomahawks. These Indians were trailing the herd of cattle but when they tried to stampede the herd, the cowboys drove them off.

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“My mother used to tell that when she was a small child each child had to pick the seed from cotton every night. The task set for them was that there should be enough seed to fill the child's shoes. This made enough cotton for grandmother to card, spin and weave the next day. Indians would prowl around at night. They would whistle through a crack by the chimney and would shake the door. All the children would be just as quiet, hardly breathe and grandmother would have the fire covered and the Indians would go away.

“My mother's brother had a paint pony which they kept in a log crib and then chained to a stout log so it wouldn't be so easy for the Indians to get him. Grandmother would often give the Indians corn bread and they liked it.

“I can remember seeing my grandmother standing by the wagon wheel crying when father and mother started moving to Brown County. Grandfather, Jim Burleson, had been living in Brown County for several years, I think. We lived in a new log house on Jim Ned Creek. For a long time we didn't have a door, just a blanket hung over the opening. Father was away much of the time. Late one afternoon mother saw a big black bear walking down to the creek near the house. The dogs barked but didn't go after it. When the old bear got through drinking, he came back up the trail and stood straight up, daring the dogs, then he went back to the creek and bathed. It was nearly night and mother thought that bear would surely come and crawl in under that blanket. There were some kind of boards or logs across the inside of the roof where the sides of the house joined the roof, and she put the children up there and climbed up herself and stayed there all night. Mother laughs yet when she tells how she made father build a log door and she fastened it with a crowbar.

“Mother told of another time in Brown County that grandfather, his brother, a man named Mosley, and father were working cattle away from home. The Indians came around the house in the brush and called like coyotes and owls. There didn't seem to be many of them but this time mother got ready. She took an old musket, put in everything like bolts she could find and tamped them down. She sat waiting all night but the Indians didn't show up. The next day however, they surrounded father and the other men and in the

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fight, father received two slight wounds. The Indians got the horses but long years after, father was paid for them. We called it "entering Indian claim" when we sent in the number of horses stolen. Father took that gun mother had loaded, tied it up in the forks of a tree, with a long wire to the trigger. When he pulled the wire, the whole gun exploded. He said that would surely have killed something.

"Another time at night mother heard an unusual noise outside. It sounded to her like it might be Indians sharpening their knives or rubbing them together. This kept up for a long time, then everything was quiet. The next morning, there were two deer (bucks) with their horns locked together in the small clear space in front of the house.

"My family moved to this country in 1875. We lived just below the town of Ben Ficklin. We ran a dairy for awhile. During the Ben Ficklin flood, father rescued a boy, Cliff Gill. Cliff was about eight or nine years old, I think. He lived with us until he married.

"While we had the dairy, a man by the name of Taylor worked for us. He had been taken by the Indians when he was a baby about two years old and had lived with the Indians until he was nine or ten. He never wanted to live with his people, always said that the Indians had been good to him, that they lived happier than the whites and even as a grown man his one idea was to live with the Indians again.

"Frank Norfleet's father used to have a place north of father's. Frank was almost a young man then. Anyhow, he used to go to parties with us.

"Tom Ketchum has eaten at our table many times. He wasn't as bad as he was said to be. I tell you everything in this country stole cattle. Even my father has stolen nice heifer calves and nobody, even the big cattle men, ate their own cattle. When they wanted beef, they found a fat beef animal belonging to somebody else." Range-lore

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Mrs. Cicero Russell, San Angelo, Texas, interviewed, February 2, 1938.