

## [William Whytock]

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Folkstuff

Range-lore

Nellie B. Cox

San Angelo, Texas. CONTINUITY

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RANGE-LORE

William (Billy) Whytock came from the capital of Scotland, as he proudly tells, but the fact that he is a Scotchman is apparent without his calling attention to it. After all these years in Texas, his speech still retains the Scottish accent and roll. Mrs. Whytock also is an 'old-timer'. They are a genuinely congenial couple, observing all the courtesies toward each other. Each year Mr. Whytock, with the help of the best singers, musicians and other artists of the city, prepare prepares and presents a program honoring Robert Burns, who is Mr. Whytock's dearly beloved poet. Mr. Whytock tells in detail:

"I was born in the city of Edinburgh, Scotland. I was apprenticed for seven years and learned the trade of carver, gilder and woodworker, but when the immigration agent talked to me and five other young fellows, he made the states sound so fine, so wonderful, that we were in a hurry to start.

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"The boat on which we came over was loaded with pig iron and as the boat rolled, the iron shifted from side to side, sometimes we were up and again we were `doon'. One night I

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remember was particularly rough. Some of the boys were in the beds, others were playing cards, when an extra hard lurch sent the ones in bed out on the floor, the ones on one side across to the other. There was pandemonium. We came in November, 1884. I was then 27 years old. The immigration agent took us to San Antonio, some went on to California. I had been accustomed to macadamized streets in my native city and those streets in San Antonio were so rough that we held on with both hands. All the vehicles were drawn by mules. The transportation was extremely crude.

“There was no work for us around San Antonio so when we found a man coming to Menard, each of us paid him five dollars to bring us that far toward San Angelo. The cook of the outfit stayed drunk nearly all the way so we took turns at the cooking. None of us knew anything about cooking but our appetites were such that we could eat anything.

“At Menard, while looking for work, we met a Scotchman who said he had no work for us but took us in because we were fellow countrymen. ‘I suppose,’ said our new friend, ‘that you all have guns.’ We proudly jerked our six-shooters out of our pockets. ‘Well,’ he continued, ‘take my advice. Go out to that fence and throw those guns as far as you can.’ He gave us quite a lecture, telling us how quickly a bad man could draw his gun and fill us full of holes. We took his advice and so far as I know those guns are still in that pasture where we threw them.

“We walked on in to Eden, a distance of about twenty-two miles. As we walked along after dark, we could see Eden but something puzzled us and that was long streaks of light about twelve inches apart. This was explained when we got there- the hotel was built of twelve inch boards with no stripping over the cracks. That hotel was one large room and it was lobby, bedrooms, dining room and kitchen. The kitchen was separated from the other part by a curtain. We were given a quilt or blanket and we picked our places on the floor to put down our bed. There was a doctor waiting around on a baby case and he told us that one of us could ride into San Angelo with him. We tossed a coin and I lost. I have always

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been able to sleep anywhere but that hotel almost finished me. Fellows stumbled over me all night, walked in my face and all over me.

“My friend came on with the doctor and got a 4 job keeping books for Mr. Millspaugh. After a few days, I rode the stage in. My friend at Menard had told us that we had better leave our valuables with him. I didn't have anything except a gold watch which I had brought from the home country but I was glad I had left it, for the stage was held up. It was night and two fellows stepped out into the road and ordered the driver to halt. None of us were very much excited and if none of them had any more than I, the robbers wasted much valuable time. When I reached San Angelo, my friend who had come in with the doctor, was ready to go home. He was disgusted with this wild, uncivilized country. But I was not much of the roving type and stayed on. There was very little work in the country; too early for lambing, but a Mr. Hill who ranched toward the head of South Concho said he would give me work if I could come out there, giving me directions. I started out walking. There were no roads and as Hill had told me, I followed the river. Walking on one side of the river, I'd think that the other side looked much better, so I would cross over. I must have crossed the river ten or twelve times. The day had been fine but just before I reached the place about where Christoval is now, a cold norther began to blow. I went up to a ranch house and asked to stay all night but the men were all away and the women looked on me with suspicion. I lay down under a tree and went to sleep and when I awoke, I was numb with cold and as 5 hungry as a young man could be. I went back to the ranch, (it was the W. C. Jones ranch), and by then the men were at home. I told my story and explained that I could understand the reason Mrs. Jones wouldn't take me in. 'Of all the blundering set of people,' said Mr. Jones. He took me in and gave me a good supper. It was the first time I remember eating a biscuit. After the meal we went in by the fireplace where there was a glowing fire of big logs. They asked me question after question. The children were all young. Will, the boy, Mrs. Weddell, Mrs. Shepperson and [Janet?], they all enjoyed hearing us talk.

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“The next morning, the children went with me a short distance to show me the way to the ranch for which I was bound and at which I arrived in a few hours.

“Mrs. Hill was trying to tack up a wagon sheet on one side of the kitchen to keep out the north wind. She turned over the job to me and that was my first job on a ranch. My work consisted of getting the horses up, hauling wood, crawling under the house for eggs, building fires in the early morn, cutting the bacon, grinding the coffee and all the other things an inexperienced person might do. Then, while this was a big cattle ranch, we had to milk, of all things, a goat. It was a wild creature and I had to hold the goat while Mrs. Hill did the milking. I had to hitch up a team of mules to haul wood. I had never handled mules but thought I must be kind to dumb brutes but my kindness went for naught, for 6 a mule kicked me as I stooped over to pick up a part of the harness.

“It was the custom to break in a newcomer. When the boys on the ranch asked me to ride an unbroke colt, I knew I must make the best of it. Then as a boy, I would never take a dare, so they put me on the colt without even so much as a string to hold to. Away I went. The horse would go up on his hind legs and then up on his front legs. The cowboys yelled and hit the colt with their hats. I held on to the colt with both hands around his neck and both legs around his belly. When he decided I couldn't be thrown off, the horse ran under the trees trying to pull me off with the limbs. My clothes were torn in strips and my back bleeding and the cowboys decided that 'Scottie' would do.

“In the early days they told many tales on the Englishmen who came over. One is of the fellow who rode all day along the river and was extremely thirsty but wouldn't drink without a goblet. Another is told of an Englishmen who sat somewhat withdrawn from the bunch eating at the chuck wagon. 'Come and get it,' called one of the boys. With uplifted eyebrows and a haughty tone, the Englishman said, 'In England I'm the son of a lord, and by jove, I'll not eat from tin plates with iron forks.' 'Well,' said the boys, 'You might be the

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son of a lord over there, but here you are the son 7 of a so-and-so,' and did they make him eat.

“Being out in the open air and in a new country gave me a big appetite. I am sure Mrs. Hill cut her biscuits with a thimble. It seemed that I was always asking that the biscuits be passed. One day at the table the little Hill boy said, 'Mama, Mr. Billy sure must be hungry. He has eaten 14 biscuits.' I was embarrassed and Mrs. Hill kicked the boy's foot to make him observe manners, but he insisted that he was right and I guess he was.

“My next job was herding sheep. A man went from place to place building rock houses or fireplaces and would take sheep as pay. I herded the sheep. We had quite a flock of them and I had such a time with those sheep. The Merino sheep would graze quietly on the grass but the Mexican sheep would go skipping and jumping over the country. My employer came one day and said to me that he would have to go to Lampasas as a witness and could I let him have some money. I did and I have never seen that man since, but I stayed on with the sheep. My camp was in an old rock house beyond Panther Bluff. The house had no roof and when it rained I would sit up in the chimney as there wasn't quite so much open space above me. The animals would come in and get my food, at last getting everything except the salt. I starved for several days until a ranchman happened to be passing and I told him of my 8 plight. He brought me food which I kept, but one morning my clothes were gone. I herded the sheep but when I would think any one was coming, I would hide in the brush. I was helped out of that predicament by the same man who brought some clothing from town.

“One day a Mexican herder was going along with his flock; and his flock and my flock became mixed. While we were running hither and thither trying to separate them, the owner of the other flock came riding up. When he took in the situation, he jerked out his gun, pointed it at me and said, 'Get those sheep separated or I'll shoot your head off.' That man on his horse towered high above me and the gun looked as big as a cannon but I said, 'Shoot, but in my country when we have grievances, we settle them like men.' The

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man stared a moment. 'Why Scottie, you plucky little devil,' he said. Then he ordered his Mexican to separate the sheep. That man was always my good friend.

“With winter coming on, I turned the sheep over to others and came to town. Mr. Nimitz gave me work in his hotel, washing dishes. At that I was nothing to brag about. Often the help would all get drunk and Mr. and Mrs. Nimitz and I would be left to do the work. Later, after saving some money, I went into the restaurant business with a partner. This restaurant was called by outsiders the “Fighting Restaurant” and it was rightly named. There was scarcely a night that a fight did not occur. Things were very quiet in the day, but at night the boys were looking for fun. In the restaurant for instance, one night they saw a mouse and immediately began to throw things- cups, saucers, plates, everything; but they paid the bills. My partner, Buck, was an Irishman and a bit of a fighter himself. One night he and a man by the name of Delano began a fight at the front door. They had both been drinking. They rolled and fought, turning over tables and chairs, smashing dishes and making a clear track through the dining room and back into the kitchen until they came in contact with the hot stove.

“In business, you never knew whether you would have the same partner in the morning that you had the night before or not. They would sell out their share or may be all of the business and be gone when you found out. It kept you guessing. I once knew of a fellow who sold [?] the same milk cow to several men. They were to go to a certain pasture and get her. The man moved, took the cow and the cash, too. Mr. Mott, the dairyman who brought milk to our restaurant was among those who bought the cow. He said that if he could find some one to take his dairy, he would follow that fellow plum to hell to give him a beating.

“I have looked down a gun barrel twice in my life, that I know of. I was running a short order eating place in the back of the Legal Tender Saloon. 10 Above, there was a gambling hall. One evening an overbearing fellow came down from the gambling joint and ordered six suppers. 'Bring them upstairs as quick as you can,' he said. I told him that I

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had no one to send them by and that he could come and get the suppers as I would have them ready in about twenty minutes. He threw his gun on me and ordered me to get those meals upstairs. Well, I stood and looked in that gun but I was determined I wouldn't do as I was ordered. Some men came in for a meal and the man with the gun backed off.

"Mrs. Whytock and I were married in 1889. In the early 90's we opened a variety or racket store. I painted a sign for my store and Fred Beck liked the sign so well that he got me to paint a large sign for his butcher shop. From then I have been painting signs of every kind. It has developed into an art with me and my work is said to be the very best of its kind.

"Of the other boys who came with me, I am the only one left in this country. Two went back soon after they got here, two drank themselves to death, one who went to California did not live many years." Range-lore

Nellie B. Cox

San Angelo, Texas.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Wm. Whytock, San Angelo, Texas, interviewed, February 4, 1938.