

[W. F. Kellis]

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Folk Stuff - Range Lore

Range-lore

Elizabeth Doyle

San Angelo, Texas.

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RANGE-LORE

W. F. (Uncle Bill) Kellis, long time Editor of Sterling City's only surviving newspaper and jovial "Uncle" of the town tells the following story:

"I'm getting into my late 80's but I'm still able to freeze out every newspaper that comes to town. I tell them I just sit still and keep on raising turnips and taters until I starve them out.

"I will have to tell you my story which I've entitled, "Saved by Big Breeches". This incident took place about fifty years ago when I raised cattle on the K L S Ranch. C12 - Texas 2 I helped with round-ups on the Half Circle S and the U ranches and on one occasion when I was riding a pretty tough bronc on a round-up he ran away with me and left the shreds of my trousers hanging on the mesquites. I was certainly in a fix when I went home and the wife laughed at me. I had a suit but it was not fit to ride in, so I went to [??] Cooper's store at Montvale and invested in the only pair of pants he had in the store. I wore 31 waist size and the new purchase was a size 40. Next morning when I donned my new trousers the wife snickered again but I had no choice, I had to wear them. The seat of these breeches, after I was in them, had room for a negro family. Truly, they hung low and wide as I rode

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off to a round-up on Lacy Creek. I had to cross a mountain and as I started down on the other side I dismounted and led my horse, because it was so steep and rocky. I had just stepped off a ledge of rock when my horse shied and pulled back on the reins, suspending me for a moment with one foot on the rock and the other one stretched out over open space. A big six foot rattler which was coiled on the side of the rock struck just at this moment and hung his fangs in the spacious seat of my new breeches. Dropping my bridle reins, I went down that mountain at a rate that any modern speed fool might envy. I was yelling, 'Snake! Snake!' just as if I expected to be heard and I don't suppose there was a human being within five miles of me. I turned somersaults and rolled 3 and kicked and did all the maneuvers of the Big Apple, I'm sure, but that booger held right on. At last I leaped over a catelaw and dragged that snake loose on the thorns, but kept on running until I reached level ground. When I had regained consciousness and enough breath to start back I cautiously made my way back the trail and found that monster about as angry as I was scared. I threw a big rock at him and he coiled himself under a catelaw and declared war, without leaving it to a vote. After pounding him with many rocks, which only angered him the more, I chanced to remember my carbine on my saddle and made quick work of blowing off that rascal's head. I have often shuddered to think what might have happened had I not had on my big, baggy breeches. I hesitate to relate the story because it sounds so much like what could be classed as only a "snake story", but it is true, every word of it, and I have dreamed of that snake at least a hundred times, always awakening with a severe case of the jitters.

"Speaking of losing my breeches calls to mind a noted cowhand of Concholand, one Julius McKinney who like "Wimpy" was always hungry. It was common knowledge among the denizens of ranchland that Julius could eat more food than any four men. He was a good cowhand but always preferred the job of "coosie" at the chuck wagon because he could get plenty to eat 4 there. Being a good cook, Julius was always popular at the round-ups. One day as he was preparing the noon meal, he decided to wash his clothes, which consisted of a pair of ancient ducking pants and a hickory shirt. He was sure he could get

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them dried and back on before the boys got in off the range for dinner, so he proceeded to cut holes in some corn sacks for his neck, arms, and legs, and got into them while he washed his shirt and pants and hung them out on the fence to dry. He was “scaring up chuck” for the boys and had just finished a pan of biscuit dough when he thought to go see if his clothes had dried. To his dismay the shirt and pants were gone. Looking down toward the river he spied two old U cows standing under the shade of a big hackberry tree, complacently chewing on his pants and shirt. These two bovines were noted as the worst chewers on the ranch. Dismayed at his plight, Julius gave chase to those old cows, trying to recover his raiment because without them he could never face the boys, all dressed up in his corn sacks; they would razz him to death. After exhausting himself in the futile chase he gave up in despair and returned to camp. Knowing that he could never be seen in the corn sack suit he determined to get away somehow, so he mounted one of the wagon mules and rode for San Angelo, fifty miles away, the nearest place at which he could purchase shirt and pants. 5 Julius was in great distress, not wishing to be seen in this garb and he wondered how he would ever get into town. At the crossing on Dry Creek he met Bill Hiler, boss of the M S outfit. Bill was a great tease and thoroughly enjoyed the predicament in which Julius was placed but he remembered the many good meals he had eaten at the U chuck wagon where Julius presided as “coosie” and agreed to hide him away in the mesquites while he rode to town and bought him some clothes. He refused to let Julius go into town after he got all dressed up in his new shirt and pants, because he knew he would celebrate by getting drunk. Instead, he compromised by bringing him back a bottle in his saddle pockets. Julius stayed at the [?] S Ranch that night and rode into the U camp next day all dressed up like a negro preacher. His appearance greatly delighted the puncher who had drawn the red bean and was therefore forced to take Julius' place as “coosie.” Range-lore

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

W. F. Kellis, Sterling City, Texas, interviewed, November 23, 1937.