

[A. P. Townsen]

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Range-lore

Elizabeth Doyle

San Angelo, Texas. [Tales?] - Riding the Range Interview

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RANGE-LORE

Carrol County, Tennessee, was the home of A. P. Townsen, long time Coleman resident, before coming to Lampasas, Texas, with his mother's family when a boy of six. At this age Mr. Townsen says he began the long ride on the range with his uncle and older brother which lasted through many years and was only discontinued because of failing eye sight, which the most skilled aid has failed to benefit. C12-[?????] 2 Comfortable but lonely in his elegant home in Coleman, Texas, Mr. Townsen wears away the monotony of each succeeding day with memories of the past, walking (very slowly) to town and back and reading only the largest headlines of the current newspapers.

"It seems to me I was almost born in the saddle," Mr. Townsen said with a smile, "because I was right out there with the other boys when only six years old, so you see I didn't have to learn to be a cowboy, I just growed up being one.

"My father died when I was a very small lad and my mother moved to Lampasas, Texas, where my uncle took charge of us boys so far as the ranch business went. He must have been pretty good for we were all considered first class cowboys. I was called the best rider on our range and down to my last day on the job I was never thrown. We had one old wall-eyed rascal we called Captain Jinks. He was what was known as a cold saddle

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horse. When the saddle went on him in the morning he had his usual warming up stunts to do and I believe he got worse instead of better. Each morning that saddle seemed a little colder to him and he would buck just a little harder. We always got the tenderfoot boys on him and it usually wound up with the kid (that's what they called me) having to warm up Captain Jinks. Sometimes I think that's why I was a good rider. Jinks gave me so much good practice. He had a way of sticking his old nose right down on the ground and bowing up in a knot as he let the new guys right off over his head.

“The tenderfoot was great fun but we always tried to be human with them and that is more than some outfits can say. We had one come straggling along once and ask for night's lodging in our camp. The poor fellow looked tired and hungry as he said he had been walking all day. We gave him a good supper of son-of-a-gun, corn bread, and black coffee and enough bedding out of our own to make him comfortable; so he was soon fast asleep and snoring. We tried to think of some harmless trick to play on him and finally decided to use some poles nearby and build a pen over him. We built it up about two feet high then covered it good and solid over the top with the some poles. The poor fellow was so tired until I don't think he turned over all night but next morning he awakened and started up very suddenly with the result that his head was almost busted. As soon as he saw what he was in for he was a good sport and lay back down saying, 'Boys, the joke is on me, I'm game; if you'll let me out of here and give me a little breakfast I will be on my way.' We all liked that spirit so much that we begged him to stay on with us after 4 we had let him out and eaten breakfast but he seemed to have urgent business ahead and went on but it just made me think that if all the new-comers had been as good a sport as he was they would have saved themselves a-many a-duckin' or ride on a pole.

“In 1877 I came through to Coleman County with a big herd and settled out on Jim Ned Creek about twenty-five miles northwest of the present town of Coleman. At that time there wasn't a school or church house in Coleman County and everything else was in the raw.

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“We went out one morning and saw seven [buffaloes?] on our ranch, six grown ones and one calf. We killed and butchered one of the grown ones, roped the calf and carried it to an adjoining ranch where it was kept five months. In September I carried it back to Lampasas to put it in my brother's pasture where I intended keeping it until I could sell it to some show. No such luck was mine, though, for the calf had been there only a short time when some hunters came along and their dogs ran and woolled the poor thing 'till it died.

“While I was at my brother's the Indians raided his ranch and stole all his horses. We followed them quite a ways but soon lost the trail and had to turn back. We never recovered the horses.

“My uncle and one of my brothers came out to 5 Fort Chadbourne in an early day and tried to establish a ranch but the Indians were so much worse here then than they were back there, that they were forced to break up and return to Lampasas. My brother was a great deal smaller man than I am and he always said his fear of Indians kept him from growing enough.

“I have cow hunted all over the western half of the state but the largest herd I ever saw was at a round-up between the Colorado and Concho Rivers down on Fuzzy Creek. There were some 30,000 head in that bunch and when the forty or fifty men got in among them, there was certainly some cutting going on. My little horse named Slick (I called him Boy) was the best all around cow horse I ever saw. I loved him like he was a human and he did have more sense than lots of people. I never knew him to fall down with any rider and I owned him from the time he was four years old until he was fourteen.

“I have sung all night a-many a-night and hardly sing the same song twice. All the boys sang “Sam Bass,” I believe, more than any other song. We sang to keep awake, to keep location and also to keep the cattle quiet. There's no denying that cattle have nerves to be quieted the same as the two legged animals.

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"I have put tobacco in my eyes to keep awake too, and often wonder if that could have injured them enough to have caused my present trouble. I am thankful though that I can see enough to get to town and back, for my daughter works down town, you see, and I would not get even more lonely if I couldn't find my way down there once in awhile; and I'm still living in hopes that somehow, someday, my sight will yet be restored to me." Range-lore

Elizabeth Doyle

San Angelo, Texas.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. P. Townsen, Coleman, Texas, interviewed, November 22, 1937.