

[Booger Red]

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San Angelo, Texas.

RANGE-LORE "It is admitted by all that the movies have produced some wonderful horsemen but the master of them all was never filmed," so says the old timer in any crowd of rodeo fans. They hold one name over all others as the greatest bronc rider that America Has ever produced. Few people ever knew his real name which was Samuel Thomas Privett, but his nickname, "Booger Red" was famous and for a quarter of a century he was known to thousands as the greatest master of outlaw horses in America. He was born on a ranch near Dublin, Erath County, Texas, December 29, 1864 and as a youth seemed to possess all the vim, vigor, and vitality that makes the red-head outstanding. At the age of 10 he began riding wild calves on his father's ranch and by the time he was 12 years of age he was widely known as the Red-Headed Kid Bronc Rider and was already on the road to fame. He was the youngest of a large family and was always trying to imitate some stunt of his older brothers. In attempting to make his own fireworks on his 13th Christmas as he had seen others do, he and a pal crammed a lot of 2 gun powder into a hole bored into an old tree stump and when it exploded it killed his friend and blew him about twenty feet. His face was hopelessly burned and for six months he did not see daylight. His eyes were cut open three times and his mouth and nose twice. As he was being carried to the hospital in a farm wagon, a small boy friend hopped on the side of the wagon, looked over at Red and thoughtlessly remarked, 'Gee, but Red is sure a booger now, ain't he?' Thus, the famous "Booger Red" nickname which went with him to his grave. His parents died

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when he was 15 years old and he started out in the world to make his own way at the job which he loved most, that of breaking wild horses. None were too bad for him to tackle and he made a name for himself in a country where there were plenty of bronc scratchers. By the time he was grown he had saved enough to buy and stock a small ranch near Sabinal, Texas, but he soon sold that and purchased the wagon yard in San Angelo, Texas. He married Mollie Webb at the little west Texas town of Bronte, in 1895. She and their six children who became famous in show life were great assets to the show business which he established later. He died of Bright's disease at Miami, Oklahoma, in 1924. His widow Mrs. Mollie Webb Privett who lives with her aged mother in San Angelo, Texas, relates the following:

“While we were running the wagon yard in San Angelo, people from all over the southwest would bring wild horses to Mr. Privett to ride. e had never been thrown and of course there were those who were envious and wanted to see his laurels hauled down. One man even brought along a camera with his outlaw horse, so sure was he that no one could ride him; he was going to take a picture of Booger Red as he was thrown. The picture was not taken and during 3 the ride the man himself became so excited that he threw away his camera and joined in the applause. Booger Red had the utmost confidence in his ability to ride and he wasn't afraid to back it up with cash. One year during a San Angelo Fair a man imported an famous young horse from Montana and bet his whole bank roll that Booger Red could not ride him. Other bets were piled up and excitement ran high. he horse was a dun color with a black stripe right down his back and the same black stripes encircled his legs. He was sixteen hands high and altogether a magnificent looking creature. As Booger Red mounted him he was very cautious not to excite him and the horse actually stood dead still for a moment, then Booger Red yelled to the crowd, 'Folks, he's coma all the way down here from Montana to get a booger on his back and here we go.' With that he thumbed him in the neck and the battle was on. So was Booger at the end of the ride but I'll have to admit that there were times I believe that I had as much confidence in his ability to ride as he did himself but this was the toughest number I had ever seen him tackle. The

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money won was used to buy the horse and we called him Montana Gyp. This was only one of the many battles between Booger Red and Montana Gyp, as each ride was only a temporary conquering and the spirit of Montana Gyp was never conquered. For twenty-three years almost daily, some times ten or fifteen times 4 daily this battle was renewed. Old Montana never threw Booger Red but he tried, just as hard the last time as he did the first. I often think of when he rode him here once at a San Angelo Fair. He bucked all over the grounds then broke through the fence and out through a bunch of horses which were tied on the outside. One horse became so frightened that he reared up and fell on his head and broke his neck. Booger was with him when he stopped, though, and rode him back on the tracks. As he rode by the grandstand he said, 'Ladies and Gentlemen, I knew I was ugly but I never knew before that I was ugly enough to scare a horse to death.' They tried to pay the man for his horse but he wanted an exorbitant price and refused any reasonable offer, saying that he had rather have nothing at all than less than he asked.

“Another time at the Fair here he rode a big old white steer that was said to be ride proof. Many bronc busters had tried him but had been thrown. e was so wild that the rider had to climb up on the gate and drop on his as he came through. Booger Red hit on him backwards, so he grabbed him by the tail and pulled it up over his shoulder with one hand and used the other to fan himself with his big white hat, as he came by the grandstand. He really got a hand on that ride.

“I used to have to exercise the show horses around the tracks when we were not showing. Ella and Roy were 5 little shavers then but I usually left Roy at the grandstand with Ella but not without a squall. He would cry to ride in the little two-wheeled carriage i drove. 'Stick him down in the foot of that thing and let the horses out,' his daddy said to me one morning, 'one time will do him.' I stuck his feet through the slats in the bottom of the thing and put the horses out at their best. When we got back to the grandstand you couldn't tell what that kid was. His eyes, nose, and mouth were filled with dirt and as his daddy predicted he was cured of wanting to ride.

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“The children were already as fond of horses as their father was. We got them a little paint horse when he was 2 years old and kept him until he was 25. All six of the children learned to ride on little Prince. He was the smartest horse I ever saw. One of his many intelligent acts was to stop at a railroad crossing if he heard a train blow, and no amount of whipping could force him to cross until he saw the train go by. The children could ride just as long as one could stick on anywhere. We kept him twenty-three years and when he died at Miami, Oklahoma, we buried him with much grief and ceremony.

“After we bought old Gyp and he and Mr. Privett became the attraction at every show, the idea of a Wild West Show of our own was born in our minds, so we got our small possessions together and started out with two bucking 6 horses, a covered wagon, and two buggies. The teams and little Prince were just family equipment.

“Mr. Privett originated the act of riding with his thumbs in his suspenders and looking back at the crowd. It had always been the custom up to then for the bronc rider to keep his eye directly on the mount in an effort to anticipate his next movement but Booger Red would tuck his thumbs in his suspenders and look all about, talking to his audience as he rode.

“We started off showing in ball parks with a 25¢ admission charge and did well from the beginning. Our success always out-balanced the usual knocks and bumps encountered.

“Booger was a proud, clean fellow, always so jovial and witty that he made every one, including himself, either forget his misfortune or regard it only as an asset to his business. His announcements were always wound up with, 'Come and see him ride, the ugliest man dead or alive, Booger Red.'

“We had lots of fun and many good times. We put on a show once at a church in Midlothian, Texas. The “old man” (Booger Red) was always donating our exhibitions to some charitable cause and on this particular occasion a woman rider was needed and I could not fill the place, so Booger put on my skirt and hat and a good wig and would have

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fooled every one, I believe, if he had not failed to 7 fasten them on rights; but when the horse made two or three rounds, off came his entire disguise. The crowd went wild when they saw that it was Booger Red himself.

“Our camp life was our most fun while we traveled in wagons, camping on streams and in the most beautiful places we could find. We always had a general clean-up, even to washing the harness at such times.

“Each Saturday night we would have Kangaroo Court. There were regular rules to be obeyed and when they were broken the victim was put on trial in regular cowboy style. On one occasion the “old man” (Booger Red) was the offender. He had gotten about half sore one morning when the boys were late to breakfast and had rung a third bell after the first for rising, and the second for breakfast had been rung. He was tried, found guilty and sentenced to ten licks with the chaps as he was bent over a wagon tongue. He was a good sport and started off taking his medicine like a man, when Jack Lewis who loved him like a daddy ran into the guy, caught his arm and stopped the punishment. This created the great excitement and Jack was then tried for contempt of court and sentenced to double punishment. The usual punishment was to have to buy candy for the ladies or cigars for the men.

“Many people try to say that show people are no good, etc., but I've seen more honesty and true principle shown by show people than many so-called higher-ups. I was just talking the other day about a boy we had with us 8 down in East Texas. We called him Texas Kid and loved him like one of the family. He took sick down there and Mr. Privett sent him to the hospital in Little Rock, Arkansas. We continued with our shows but one night when we had a nice crowd, we all kept feeling so depressed that we couldn't seem to get going. Even the band couldn't play right and just before we were to start everything the “old man” received a telegram stating that Texas id was dead. We all just went to pieces and Mr. Privett went out and read the message to the crowd, offering them a free pass the next night if they would excuse us and come back. They removed their hats and

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filed out of the tent in respectful order. He next night the crowd was almost double and not one would accept the free pass. 'Use the extra money to defray funeral expenses,' they would say, and that was what what was done.

"Many were the kind deeds I have seen the "old man" perform. He was a fun loving, witty man and carried on a lot in a joking way but when it came right down to principle and honesty he couldn't be beat. I have seen him go out to a little bunch of ragged children and say, 'Boys, aren't you coming in the show?' 'We'd sure love to, Mr. Red,' they would reply, 'but we ain't got no money.' 'Come on in,' he would say, 'and bring me some money next year when I come back here.' It was surprising how many little shavers would walk up to him at different 9 towns and offer him money, long after he had forgotten all about them. He always gave the money back to them but that was his lesson in honesty for them. The same was true of old or trampy people who could not pay their way into the show and many times I have seen him call back the customers for change, which in their excitement they would leave at the ticket window.

"Booger Red was not a drinking man but he was broadminded and lenient with his boys. On Christmas eve, one year, he told all the boys that if they would perform good that night they could have four days for celebration, with the lid off. That was the funniest four days I ever spent. The "old man" (Booger Red) set a keg of beer on the Christmas table and every fellow had his own cup. It seemed each one had an extra stunt all his own to pull off.

"The boys all called me Mother and they took a notion for hot biscuits one day. I cooked their biscuits in a dutch oven over an open camp fire. 'Why, I can't cook biscuits today, boys.' I said, 'it is raining and will put out the fire.' 'Make 'em, Mother, make 'em,' they all shouted, 'we will get out there and hold our slickers over you and the fire while you cook them.' That was too much and I made up the dough while they built the fire under the canopy of slickers and we cooked and ate biscuits like that until every one was filled. 10
"At one time we were at Mill Creek, Oklahoma, during a big picnic and the crowd insisted that we put on a morning as well as an afternoon show. We tried it but somehow the usual

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time of day for the performances threw us off balance and every thing went wrong. Several riders were thrown and the whole thing was a flop. We felt sure that we would have no audience that afternoon but I guess our reputation was bigger than our blunders for the crowd very soon out-grew the tent and Mr. Privett raised the side walls and told them to stack up, all out-siders free. Pretty soon all the trees around the tent were filled and I believe we put on one of the best shows we ever produced.

“Booger Red always advertised ahead of his appearances for people to bring in anything they could lead, drive, drag, or ship, and he would ride it or pay the standing forfeit of \$100.00. He never had to pay off and there were plenty of bad horses brought in. He won twenty-three first prizes in all and rode at the World's Fair at T. Louis forty years ago when Will Rogers and Tom Mix made their first public appearance.

“His bronc riding saddle was merely a frame or tree, certainly no fancy affair but almost as famous as the “old man” himself.

“In a rodeo contest in Fort Worth once he won \$500.00 and a fine saddle. When he went to the hotel 11 with the rest of the crowd he took both his old and new saddle with him and hastily checked the new saddle as his buddies were rushing him to come on and eat. He pitched the old one in as he rushed after the boys. 'Come back,' yelled the clerk, 'you haven't checked your other saddle.' 'That's all right,' Booger shouted back, 'if any one uglier than I comes along just give it to him.'

“Our show was growing all the time. e now had twenty-two broncos, twelve saddle horses and thirty-two wagons and had become known as the best Wild West Show on the road. It was then that the circus sought us out. e sold everything except our best bucking horses and went with the circus. We traveled by rail then and our good old wagon days were over. At different times we were with Al G. Barnes, Hagenbeck-Wallace, Buffalo Bill, and others.

“I have to laugh every time I think of an incident which took place while we were with the Barnes Circus. Booger had twenty-five or thirty bucking horses, all good performers and

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with them and our crew we put on the wild west part of the show. He wanted a strong line in the parade so we dressed up every thing available and put them on horses. Old Frog Horn Clancy was our announcer and when he came out to tell them of the fame of Booger Red's wife it was pitiful how he spread it on. In 12 truth I was not much of a rider but the way Frog Horn Clancy told them of the loving cups and handsome prizes I had won would have convinced the most skeptical. His blarney extended into "time" and my horse became very restless, so when he finally did close his speel with, 'Behold the famous Mrs.Privett in action,' my horse lurched forward with an impatient gesture which sent me right off on my head. Wonder of wonders that I was not killed but I was hardly hurt. Tickled at my plight, but shamed to tears, I gathered myself up with all possible haste and ran from the tent as the applause died upon the lips of my spectators.

"In show life there is sadness as well as gladness; lots of fun and some sorrow, like when we were to show in Wichita Falls once. We were approaching the town and were met out on the highway by Pat Flynn's brother who knew we were coming in and who had come on out to meet his brother in an effort to persuade him to quit the bronco riding business. Booger Red had taught little Pat to ride and he was good, also crazy about riding, much to the objection of his family. We were all crazy about Pat and hated to see him leave us but he had already promised his brother that he would go home with him the next day. A few hours before the show we all began to feel some of our old signs of depressed feelings returning. We couldn't account for 13 this but it was so noticeable that we all commented on it. Pat's brother begged him not to ride that night. 'Ah, just this last time.' begged Pat, 'you know we are going home tomorrow and I want to ride for the last time.' 'O.K.,' said his brother, 'if you will let me hold the horse.' Mr. Privett knew he did not know how to stub a horse and he insisted that he keep out of it. Nothing else would do him however, and in getting off to an awkward start the horse became excited and broke away in a wild run, tangling himself in the rope and falling. his slung little Pat's head against a tent pole and crushed his skull. Feeling the sense of depression that I had before the show began, I had remained at the wagon. When I noticed the awful stillness, the hushed exclamations,

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and then the agonized groans of the audience, I knew the thing had happened but who the victim was I was not to know until Thomas, my son, came running out to the wagon and said, 'Oh! Mama, little Pat is killed.' He was not really dead right then but he never regained consciousness and died about two hours later. Mr. Privett rushed to him and held his bleeding head on his lap until the inquest was held. No means of cleaning ever removed that dying blood from the "old man's" chaps and jacket. The body was sent to the boy's home town in Oklahoma and we all felt that we had lost one of our best boys.

14 "While we were with the Barnes Circus, Mr. Privett had Alexander here in San Angelo make him a fine silver mounted saddle and ship it to him. Of course it had "Booger Red" and our address, all over the big wooden box. When it arrived at the station and was being unloaded the children all gathered around and began saying to each other, 'Booger Red has arrived, he's in that box.' Excitement grew until I really believe some of the grown-ups believed it too. Booger Red enjoyed the joke so much that he would walk around the box and tell the children that they should have Booger Red some thing there to eat when he came out, that he would be hungry. By the time the box was opened the kids had enough peanuts, candy, milk, and sandwiches there to feed several people. When the box was opened and the saddle taken out, the look of disappointment on the poor little kiddies' faces was pitiful. He "old man" enjoyed the joke so much that he repeated it in several towns where he showed.

"Booger had many wonderful horses and riders in his different shows but always it took Montana Gyp and Booger Red to produce the star act in any show. We kept the old horse over twenty years and when he died we had another funeral and the family grief was no far different from our experience when little Prince died.

"Some of our famous horses were: Flaxy, Moon, Texas Boy, Rocky Mountain Steve, Black Diamond, Grey 15 Wolf, Hell Set, and old Pay Day. Texas Boy was the one that never pitched twice the same way and Booger Red maintained a standing offer of \$50.00 per minute to any one who stayed on him but he was the only one ever to win the money. They were all bad horses but none ever equalled old Montana Gyp with the "old man". He

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held one grudge against the horse though, until his dying day. In 1915 he won the world's championship at the San Francisco World's air and received a \$750.00 silver mounted saddle and one day after he had ridden his old horse down and thought he was conquered for that once, he made an extra lunge just as the "old man" was dismounting, causing the rowell of his spur to make an ugly scratch across the seat of his beautiful saddle. He often remarked that he would never forgive the horse for this one deed.

"Booger Red's last performance was at the Fat Stock Show at Fort Worth in 1924 just a short time before he died. He had retired and went to Fort Worth just to see the show. To keep from being recognized he wore a cap instead of his big white hat, and low quarters instead of boots and slipped in on the top seat of the grandstand. He was enjoying the performances when trouble arose in the arena with an outlaw horse. The rider was thrown and the crowd yelled, 'Give us Booger Red.' He sat as still as a mouse until 16 an old lady at his elbow recognized him and shrieked, 'Here he is!' The crowd went wild and would not be put off. He made his way calmly down through the audience until he reached the bottom step where he was hoisted on the shoulders of the cheering throng and carried to the arena. He rode the old horse to a finish and many said it was the prettiest riding they ever saw. He was at that time probably the oldest man on record to make such a ride.

"He had lots of trouble during the last years of his performances with Movie Companies trying to steal pictures of him. Many were the times he would start into the arena and see a machine set up in some obscure place, but they never tricked him. If he had lived until the picture business became more prominent he would have been as famous in the Movie world as he was in the show life of his day.

"He always thought of his family first and was a kind husband and father, doing all the good he could wherever he was.

"He died in March 1924, at Miami, Oklahoma, with these words on his lips, 'Boys, I'm leaving it with you. Take good care of mama and little Bill. Always be honest, for it pays in

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the long run. Have all the fun you can while you live, for when you are dead you are along time dead.' 17 "After his death the children and I went back to the Buchanan Shows and tried to carry on but it was never the same any more. Ella, the eldest girl who had done a beautiful riding and roping act with her father for sometime, rushed from the arena in tears the first time she attempted to put on the act without her father.

"All the children were taught the riding and roping acts and were called famous by many.

"We are all pretty well scattered now though, Ella married one of her father's performers by the name of Linton and they are with the Tom Mix Circus in California. Roy never went back to the show after the World War. He has a nice family and is in the oil business in Electra, Texas. Thomas is with the Ringland Circus in New York. Luther is in California. Alta, who suffered a broken leg in the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, married a Mr. Fuch and lives in San Angelo; and Little Bill as we all call the baby who weighs only 115 pounds, trains race stock on the Santa Anita track at Arcada, California.

"Thomas and a bunch of boys went to Belgium in 1937 and put on a Wild West Show in answer to a request from there and when they were through showing they wouldn't pay them. They had to sell all of their saddles and equipment to live until relatives could send for them. 18 It cost over \$100.00 to get Thomas back across the "pond."

"They then attempted to pull the same stunt with Tom Mix but before he started he asked them to put up a forfeit. When they refused he broke up the plans and never went.

"I've never learned to drive an automobile. I didn't take any hat off to any man when it came to handling a team but I tell them when they start making cars without fenders so I can see where my wheels are going I will learn to drive then."

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Mrs. Mollie Privett, San Angelo, Texas, interviewed, February 8, 1938.