

[John S. Davis]

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[??] Lore TALES - WHOPPER. SONG & RHYMES - SQUARE DANCE CALLS

[Gauthier. Sheldon?] [?].

Rangelore.

[Tarrant?], Co., [Dist.# 7?]

Page # 1

FC 240 [61?] [?]

John S. Davis, 45, living at 1637 Westmorland Dr, Fort Worth, Texas, was born in Giles County, Tennessee in 1892. The Davis family moved to Texas in 1893, and Located in the town of [Hubbard?], Hill County[,?]

When old enough to sit on a horse, he began to learn riding and commenced his career as a cowboy, at the age of 11, by handling milk cows for citizens of Hubbard. Later he established a herd of his own. When 20 years old, he secured work with the S. F. Singleton Ranch, and also worked for the 'J A' Ranch[/.?]]

His story of/ ranch life follows:

"I was born in Giles County, Tennessee, in 1892 and was brought to Texas in [?] 1892 at which time my parents migrated to Texas.

"My family located in the town of Hubbard, Hill County, Texas and there is where I spent the early days of my life. At that time there existed in Hill and [?] is Counties, large [?] cattle ranches, but the open range had given way to the fence. It was sparsely settled and

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a wild country with a great number of wild animals and wild game in abundance. I have listened to the yelp of the wolf many nights and will never forget the spooky effect their mournful howl had on me as a child.

"I earned my first money herding cattle. Riding a hoss was about the first thing I learned to do and could ride when I was five years old. I rode a pony that my grandfather [Daviss?] gave me and with that hoss I started my cowhand career.

"In the 90's, practically every family living in Hubbard owned a family cow. When I was 11 years old I decided to earn some money and conceived the idea of gathering the family cows and herd the cattle on a range during the day. C12 - Texas

"I made an arrangement with the owner of a large piece of grazing land and a [?] on a piece of [?] ahead for the 2 Guse of his range. I called on the owner of cowa cows and made them a proposition to call for their caws cows each morning herd the cattle during the day and deliver the cows to the owners each night for the sum of [\$1.50?] a month. I secured about 50 customers. Those cattle were all gentle critters and gave me very little trouble, except an occasional obstinate cow that decided to go in some other direction, then all [lmhad?] to do was to head her off and back to the herd. For the most part the cows would drag themselves home and soon learned to go to the pasture. The work provided me with an opportunity to practise throwing the loop, using the tame cows as my object. I soon became handy with the rope.

"I spent several years thus herding ca ws cows and saved a little [mony?]. With the money saved, and some assistance rendered by a friend, I started a ranch of my [owen?]. I went to East and Southeast Texas, to buy my cattle and drove them to Hill County. My real [expeience?] with wild cattle began at that time.

"Most of the cattle I secured in East Texas, were grazing on a brush range. It was necessary to cut the critters out of the herd and we had to go into the brush to do it. To work cattle in the brush required a well trained hoss, a good rider and roper, also

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a man could not be stingy with his [hide?], because one could depend upon [leving?] considerable of his hide on the brush. The cowhands used to say, "It was cheaper to grow skin than to buy gloves". However, the reason was when you put a critter down for the purpose of [hogtiing?] [?] you have no time to 3 stop to remove gloves. So we just grew hide to replace that which we lost.

"A cowhand, able to work in the prairie country, possibly would be worthless in the brush, [on?] the other hand a bushwacker can work the prairie. The reason is, because the bushwacker [?] dodge tree limbs, brush and stay [?] his hoss running a critter. A brush rider is [?] to swing to the one side, or the other and do it quickly. If he fails he surly will be knocked off his hoss. The roping is more difficult. To loop a critter in the brush, one must be able to swing over-hand, under-hand and from the side. In fact, he must be able to swim from every angle.

"What I have [chinned?] about working cattle in the brush will give you some idea of the job an [?] [lad?] working on a brush range. The legend that, 'to make a cowhand it required a hoss, a man with guts', is very appropriate when applied to the bushwacker.

"Driving the critters back to the ranch was not a difficult job after the first day. The first day we would [?] it in their backs [?] the herd as far away from their home range as possible and tired, so they would enjoy bedding down.

"There was only one time that I had any accident worth while to mention. My range was adjacent to the town of Hubbard and I had arrived at Hubbard and was driving the critter through the town on a back street a block from the main stem. Suddenly, a crazy steer made a break, due to being scared by something, and he he [header?] for the main street. I took after him but 4 before I could turn him he had arrived at the main stem, there I started to turn him. He turned only half way and then headed towards the stores. There was a tailor shop, operated by a negro, right in front of him, but the steer never stopped and headed, with a plung, through the glass. There were about six negroes chaps in the

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shop, at the time and between the colored chaps coming out and the steer going in the door became slightly crowded. It was hard to tell which was the wildest. However, the boys all made a safe landing out into the street and left the steer in charge of the shop.

“That steer [wase?] wild as they get. When you see a critter prancing on his toes and the flesh quivering you may be sure that he is riled and will fight a buzz saw. After a spell I got a loop on him and draged him out, but I had a job to extract that fellow.

“When I was [19?] I had considerable cows and was offered a good price for the herd and sold. After that I went to work for S. F. Singleton outfit. His brand was a 'dash [S?]' and was located in the Southeastern part of Lynn County, between [Tahoka?] and O'Bonnell. My first job on the outfit was to ride the range and hunt for mother cows to nurse a extra calves.

“There were always more, [orlless?], calves showing up with out a mother, and sometimes it run too [?] the more calves. It was supposed that the mother died, when a [dogie?] showed up. I had an idea how it was taking place, but said nothing. The ramrod often cursed the rustlers so I was not sure where the blame stood. Then one day a relative of the ramrod was indicted 5 for rustling [?]. The ramrod proved his sincerity as to his attitude regarding rustlers. He refused to go on the bond of his relative. He said, 'I have fought rustlers all my life and I'll be dam if I [?] on one of the [?] bond.

“The method used to force a cow to nurse a extra calf was to poke the two dogies together. When she allowed her own calf to nurse she was compeled to allow the extra calf to also nurse. After a couple days the calves could be released.

“From hunting mother cows I went to busting hosses. Busting hosses is a tough job but one that I enjoyed. I had a likeing for hosses and it gives plenty to study about, if a person applies himself properly to the work.

“There are many different characters and [peculaitites?] in hosses as there are in humans.

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“The hoss used by the cowman were the hoss breed from the original wild hoss of the Southwest, which weighed from 700 to 1000 pounds. They were the off-spring from the Spanish hoss brought from Spain that escaped from various owners, Spanish explorers. They breed in the wild and the law of the, 'survival of the fittest' produced a tough, speedy and compact hoss and the best kind of an animal for cowhoss.

“The busting of hosses is a tough, but interesting job. The first step is to rope him and then tie him. I used a sack of rock, because it would give when the hoss reared back and the [?] of injure to his neck was reduced. After he would discover that he could not get loose and would stand tied, [saddling?] would take place. After the saddle was placed on [itand?] turned loose in the [pen?]. There would be plenty of [pitching?] until 6 it discovered the saddle was on to stay, then the pitching would stop. When that happened the hoss was ready to straddle.

“Now, I have had hosses that never pitched after the saddle lesson. However, I went from the non-pitcher to the hell-bent fence-rower. One of the secrets of staying with a hoss is to know his style. Keeping your eyeballed on him while trying to [spell?] the saddle will give you the critter's style. So when the rider gets straddled of the hoss, it is just a matter of going with the movements of the hoss. I was [seldom?] spilled and had to [pullleather?] only [accasionally?].

“There were some mustangs that never were successfully busted and a rider could expect any of those animals to suddenly start bucking, even if they had been rode for years. If they were tired and hit some soft sand you could expect the elevation to start.

“The ramrod of the 'dash S' pulled one over on me one day by giving me a fool hoss and because of /his style that fact the hoss was never used for cow work. A properly trained hoss will peg as soon as the cow turns. That [?] hoss will sit on it's hind legs and [?]. I mounted the hoss and started after a cow, and when I headed her and she turned, I set myself for the peg, but that hoss did not peg. I circled instead and when I say circled I

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mean it was a circle no bigger across than twice the length of the [?]. We circled to the right and there was no letup in speed. I was compelled to raise my right foot to keep it from dragging on the ground, that hoss was leaning that much. Well, that was one of the times that I had to grab leather. 7 “I decided to change that hoss to a pegger. The usual method is simple. After a hoss has been busted to ride it is [?] after cattle. The rawhide will loop a cow and then, with the rope tied to the nub of the saddle, the hoss is given an awful jolt and thrown to the ground, because the cow is putting speed and her weight into that rope. There is a sudden stoppage when the slack is taken out of the rope and the two animals go over. Well, that hoss soon learn to sit for the jolt and naturally [?] by bracing himself by going down on it's haunches when it see the rope go over the cow. That is natural protection and the animal is using just common hoss sense and it soon learns to keep that rope tight.

“Getting back to that circling hoss, I had it flopped 25 times, but no roping would that animal do. It was one of the unusual cases.

“I have been often asked about how the cowhand escaped being injured more often when the hoss hit a hole, [ar?] bog and went down. I shall explain how that is. Of course until a greener becomes a hossman he is in danger of injure. The wise rider knows that if a hoss goes down, that animal is going in the direction of the leg that went into the hole. The rider does not need to jump, because the movement of the hoss will put the rider traveling in space, providing the rider allows his body to go freely and does not have his feet caught in the steerups, and a real rider will not be caught in that shape. When the rider lands, he hits feet first, if he handles his body right, and then goes to this hands. He does not try to brace himself, but allows his body to roll and make an effort to do so. By that means the rider breaks his fall and rolls free of the hoss.

“The days that I put in on the range were after the time of the Indian and the wholesale cattle rustling. Therefore, I missed that experience, but the old customs and habits were [?]

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followed. The Cattlemens Association had the rustlers quite well under control, but there were an occassionally a steal.

“Our chuck was good and we had a good cook on the ' dash Dash S' ranch. He was very proud of his record of 30 years [whith?] the chuck wagon. He was fond of saying, 'I have been a camp cook for 30 years and have never lost a man'. The chuck consisted of meat as the main item, with all the wild game we [?] for[?]. beans came next to meat, which were called whistle berries by the boys. Our vegetables was out of the can, then there was the good sourdough bread and the camp soda biscuits.

“The cowhands nightmare was night [riding?] and stampeds. To stay out six hours, or longer when necessary, in sleet with [?] a [?], took what it calls for to be a [cow-handguts?].

“I put in several nights when I felt where I would freeze [to?] the saddle. I have often heard folks say that a [slicker?] was warm, but my experience is that they [??] for a warm garment.

“I recall one night, which was my worst night of work on the range. It was freezing and rain going to ice as fast as it hit the ground. The cattle were trying to drift with the storm and they kept us busy trying to hold together. My relief came [at?] 12 o'clock and I returned to camp. I was so stiff 9 with cold I had to be helped out of the saddle. I had on a slicker and If [?] on two I am sure that I would have frozen.

“The worst stampeds are sure to happen in the worst kind of weather. It is the bad thunder storms with sky-fire, as the boys called it. I have had my time with stampeds in [?] that kind of weather. The worst stampede I ever witnessed was a month before I quit the 'Dash S' ranch. A old rain hit with plenty of sky-fire and thunder. We all knew that [?] trouble was ahead and hour before it came. We could always get the information by the way the hosses and critters acted. The animals would get restless

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“Well, when that storm hit, sky-fire was dancing from tip to tip of the cattle horns and flashing off of our spurs. I never seen anything like it before, or since. It is claimed that a large herd of cattle will draw lightning to itself and I believe it will. Taht That night I rode the [hardest?], like all the boys, that I had ever rode, at least it seemed to be the hardest. We failed to hold the cattle, we would get the animals to milling and then away they would go again. I am no songbird, but that night I sang like I was trying to win the heart of some gall. It is claimed that cattle enjoy singing, but I think it is just a matter of conter attraction.

“That night the hosses went down and each broke their leg, it was luck that kept some of the riders from being [?] branded for the eternal [range?]. We lost about 23 head, due to [?] stopped to [?]. If a critter happens to go down in a stampede it sure is made into buzzard meat. 10 “With the hard part, we had some fun. Our time in the camp was made up of [???] hoss play and the boys telling of the great times they seen and [did?] and [?] of the old rawhides told things were easy to listen to.

“There was a [prank played?] on a rawhide that came to the outfit, [?] to tell you about, that fellow and what we did. We thought at first that he did not want to work, but was a line rider. A line rider was the fellow that just rode from one outfit to another and live on the hospitality of the ranchers. A stranger never was refused a bunk and chuck and there was no limit to the time. When a stranger came the first thing I said was, 'Cool your [saddle?] and [feed your tape worm?]', or words of like nature. Well this fellow drove [??] after the first [?] to be taken on and the ramrod took him into the outfit. He proved to be a [?] hand, but [???] thing that [caused?] us to talk [??] several times. What he did was to stake [??], [?], every night. That went on for for nearly two months. We decided that he was a little loose in [??], but [???] it was cautious. Anyway we job him. [?????] County, at [?] time. One of the boys drove up at night and hollered, 'I am sheriff edwine and I am looking for a cowhand', then described this fellow. Well, the cowhand [???] spoke the word edwine till that stranger was out and on his hoss going across the range. [?] a about a months [pay?] due, so we expected him to return for it, but he never draged back.

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"I quit the 'dash S' ranch in 1912, and joined the 'JA' LL outfit for the purpose of busting some hosses. It was the old Goodnight and Adair ranch, but at that time belong to Mrs C. Adair. I met Mrs Adair while there and she enjoyed watching me bust those snak-blood mustangs. She was a good hosswoman and could do some good riding. It took me about a month to do the job, then I quit ranch work and thereafter engaged in buying and selling cattle.

"My experience on the range bought me real life and which I shall never forget. I still have my old saddle that cost me \$80. and a pair of spurs that I paid \$15. for. [One?] the whole the waddie was a square up-right man, a little rough, but did not want to harm anyone unless forced to. The rustler was the exception and was not a cowman at heart, but a theif.

[""]Sitting in the dog-house at night spinning yarns brought out the true character of the waddie. He was proud of his work, felt that he was better than the ordinary worker, and in fact, he was because he was an [?]. Throwing the rope, riding the hoss and handling the cattle required the skill of an artist. For instant, the bushwacker riding in the rough at full speed dodging tree limbs and tailing a critter. The tailing of a critter is [donw?] by riding along side of a running critter then reach down and grab its tail and veer the hoss and by so doing pull the animal down. It is the [?] of pulling the critter off balance while running and that will always cause it to go down. That was done a great deal instead of looping working in the brush.

"I have heard some tall yarns about handling cattle. I 12 want to repeat one that was told by Smith, that was the fellow who was scared off by the boys imitating the sheriff.

"I was working for an outfit in Montana', he said, 'The weather became real cold, and it gets cold in that state going far below zero, just how much, at times, is a [question?] because the ordinary [thremoeter?] will not register the temperature. Now, to handle cattle there requires different methods. It is not the stampede that causes the [cowhnad's?] joy meter to go down, but the need to keep the critters moving when one of those cold spells

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hits. I recall to mind one night when a cold spell hit after a three day rain. The [?] mud was real soft and the cattle was sinking in to it about six inches with each step. We kept those critters milling all night, but it was a he-man job. About mid-night we noticed that they were slowing down and crowding up as though something was interfering with their movement. Finally it was hardly possible to keep the herd going. We looked into the matter and found that a [?] number of the critters were held fast because their feet were frozen in the mud. Yes sir, it was freezing so fast that some of the weaker critters, which were a little slow of movement, could not pull their feet out of the mud fast enough to keep from being frozen in and there they stood and that was what interfered with the speed of the herd and [ofccourse?] endangered the whole herd.'

“What did you fellows do?, He was asked. He answered by saying, 'We all, carried an ax, and when we found critters frozen like that, all we did was to cut it's leg off even with the ground, and released it, and the critter would [?] join the 13 the milling cattle. The only damage caused, would be a slight reduction in the critter value because it had lost its glue material.

“You asked me to sing the song that I sang to the cattle when they were on the stomp. Well I give you the words that I tried to sing. “Throw and loop an' jerk the slack An' meet yo' honey an' turn right back Hand the dog an' kill the cats, An' double yo' dos' whith rough on rats Swing the cow an' now the calf Now yo' partner once an' half”

“Those are words that I learned by listening to the prompters at the hoe-downs.