Nesbitt Memorial Library Journal

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Contents

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Editor
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About the Authors

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Reminiscences of the Past

by Dr. Jaquelin Smith Bruce

Dr. Jaquelin Smith Bruce graduated from medical school and took up the practice of medicine in 1857 in Virginia. Shortly thereafter, he came to Texas. He did not resume the practice of medicine until after the Civil War. He served in the Confederate States Army and was wounded at the Battle of Manassas.

He was connected to two other prominent Texans by marriage. He married the daughter of the well known attorney Robert Jones Rivers, and his daughter married the United States Representative from Texas, Joseph Jefferson Mansfield.

In 1923, he wrote a series of reminiscences for the local newspaper, the Eagle Lake Headlight. *They were published in six installments, in the editions of June 23, June 30, July 7, July 14, October 20, and November 24. He died in 1929 at the age of 93.*

Dr. Bruce had a tendency to write long, rambling sentences that lost their intelligibility before ending. In editing the articles, these "sentences" have been broken into two, three, and sometimes four new sentences. Words or clauses have been added to make the new sentences as grammatically correct and as readable as possible. Since Dr. Bruce's reminiscences were originally published in installments, he provided "bridges" at the beginning and end of each new installment. These have been omitted or altered to make the narrative continuous. In addition, several paragraphs within the narrative have been repositioned and sentences and clauses that were repetitious have been deleted.

As a man grows old, the tendency to revert to the scenes of his youth becomes more impressive; the desire to call up occurrences which took place during that period takes possession of his mental faculties and he imagines he

is in a sort of dreamland where meditation is a pleasure and a gratification.

Memory, though dulled and apparently obliterated for a time during the passage of years, often resumes its sway at the very moment of dissolution. As it passes over the vista of years there is to some extent a desire to avoid the remembrance of occurrences which may not have appealed to man's better nature and which he ignores as thorns in the path of rectitude and duty. Nevertheless, such thoughts will spring up in spite of the effort to keep them in abeyance.

To one who has passed far beyond the allotted three score years and ten, I am of the opinion that though physical vigor may have been greatly impaired, mental powers grow more and more active, occurrences, which took place during middle age are lost sight of, memory seems to be rejuvenated and affords an insight to the past.

Sixty-four years ago [that is, in 1859] the exodus from the old states to Texas was quite lively and popular. Men of all classes, most of whom had been successful farmers and the owners of large numbers of slaves, made the trip. They had observed the gradual impoverishment of the soil that had been cultivated for years. They sought to rebuild their fortunes by moving to a new country possessing the advantages of a mild climate, cheap lands, and virgin soil capable of producing large crops of cotton and corn, to the raising of which they had been accustomed. The rich river bottoms were the attraction to this class of men and in a short time lands were purchased, homes established, and a line of plantations along the river appeared, changing the face of what for years had been a wilderness. Though the work to bring the land into a tillable condition was arduous, perseverance accomplished their wishes. They were gladly and hospitably received by the few who had preceded them and added much to the social inclination of the community.

In their eagerness to buy lands and put them in their proper condition for planting, much valuable timber was sacrificed. Large pecan trees which had borne fruit

probably for centuries for animals of all kinds and which, if spared, would have yielded a revenue at present fully equal to the proceeds of the sale of the cotton raised on the same lands.

Unfortunately at this period, this section of the state was also the Mecca for many of the lawless and most undesirable citizens of the old states who left that country for their country's good and who imagined that in a new, comparatively wild country they could pursue their vocation with impunity. Many of them soon discovered their mistake and were disabused of the idea that they could continue their lawless course. Those guilty of thievery were quickly identified and punished or driven off. Any man who stole a horse worth not more than $15.00 was relentlessly followed and caught and his carcass was found hanging from a limb of the nearest tree.

In 1857, early in December, after a tiresome trip of nearly a month from Virginia, I, in company with a companion, arrived in Texas and landed at Eagle Lake. The trip was not a pleasant one as we traveled by water, by rail, and some of it on foot. We reached Eagle Lake safely however, and at once set to work to try to identify ourselves with the country, so different in every respect from what we had left. Eagle Lake at that time was but a station on the Buffalo Bayou, Brazos, and Colorado Railroad. About half a dozen shacks marked the site. A so-called hotel[1] was in process of erection but not yet in a condition to invite patronage. Having to look out for other quarters as night was approaching, we concluded to follow the crowd of railroad officials and their entourage. By such means we arrived at a house on the banks of the lake which advertised entertainment for man and beast. We made application for bed and board and were told that all beds were occupied, but we could get plenty to eat and fare during the night as best we could. When bed time came, we took our places on the floor

[1] The Good Hotel. For an interesting article about the hotel, see *A History of Eagle Lake Texas*, pages 378-383.

before a roaring fire, with nine other men, sardine fashion. I, having in a belt around me, $1200 in gold, was somewhat rattled. But I was greatly relieved in the morning at finding the money was still with me.

My companion and I, after a hearty breakfast, then set out on foot for the house of Dr. Lawrence Washington, who lived on the west side of the Colorado River about eight miles from Eagle Lake. As my companion was a relative of the doctor, we were most royally and hospitably met by the doctor and his family. Stopping there for a few days, we spent our time in making observations and getting acquainted with our environment. We soon began to feel at home and congratulated ourselves on having met with such kind and hospitable people.

To my disappointment and regret, my companion, after a few days, having completed the transaction of business for which he had made the trip, suddenly remembered that he had business interests in Virginia that required his presence. More especially, he was about to take as a bride a very attractive young lady to whom he had been engaged for some time. So in accordance therewith, he took leave of us, leaving me to decide for myself my future course.[2]

I had reached a point where it had become incumbent upon me to enter into some employment that would enable me to make an independent living and a disinclination to practice what I considered an imposition upon my friends urged me to go to work. Upon broaching

2 Dr. Bruce's traveling companion may have been Simon Shrewsbury. Both men are listed on the 1860 census as members of Lawrence Washington's household. Shrewsbury is listed as a 21 year old man who was born in Virginia. He meets one of Dr. Bruce's criteria. Since Washington's wife was the former Martha Shrewsbury, it is likely he was related to her. But, if Dr. Bruce remembered correctly that his traveling companion left within days of their arrival in 1857, he would not have been in Texas three years later. It seems unlikely that a man would undertake the long trip to Texas and leave a few days later. Though it is perhaps foolhardy to speculate that Dr. Bruce's memory is faulty, it does seem more likely that Dr. Bruce, who was 22 in 1857, came to Texas as an escort for the then 18 year old Shrewsbury.

the family it was insisted upon that I remain with them during the winter at least. Consenting thereto I set myself to work at anything that was to their interest such as looking after the stock, or riding around the country on different errands. But I spent most of the time in the house and playing cards with the doctor.

Being very fond of hunting, much of my time was spent in that sport. There was a great abundance of game of all varieties. The river bottoms, covered with a thick growth of timber and canebrakes so dense that they were almost impenetrable, were the abode of numbers of deer, wild turkey, and other game. The corn fields were literally lavish with geese, sandhill cranes, and ducks. In the pastures were prairie chickens and quail. The country was a hunter's paradise. I was so expert and so infatuated with the sport that it was not long before everybody was tired of such fare and so much slaughter became repugnant to me. I discontinued it; especially as I knew that in case of emergency a fat calf, a fat pig, or a kid could be obtained in a very short time.

As spring was rapidly approaching I determined to try my luck at cattle raising. That seemed to be the most popular and most remunerative occupation with many of my neighbors. With that view I purchased about 200 head of stock at six dollars a head and launched into the business with the intention of prosecuting it with all the energy I possessed. The broad expanse of prairie, intersected here and there with half dry so-called creeks skirted with scattered timber, was dotted with cattle and horses (some of the latter partly domesticated) and mustangs or wild horses, all allowed to roam at will with no fence anywhere except along the rows where the planter had his crops. It presented an inviting field to the man who had a taste for a half wild life and who wished to have occupied only a portion of his time.

It was the custom of men engaged in the business of driving cattle to assemble about the first of April in companies of twelve to fifteen. Each man was provided with three or four horses as relays, as the work was very arduous

for both man and beast. A wagon loaded with bacon, flour, corn meal, coffee, and the blankets belonging to the men, was driven by the cook. He was supposed to have meals ready in camp at specific places, at short notice. Every day was ready for a grand round-up.

The month of April having arrived, I united with a party of stockmen made up from the neighborhood, men of all ages from youth to middle age. Many of them were experts at the business of cow driving, having followed it from the time they were able to ride a horse. It was quite embarrassing to me to begin a career with such men, some of whom seemed to have as wild a disposition as the animals they had to deal with. But their rough exterior covered many noble qualities. I was most agreeably surprised when I received a most cordial reception. I took it as an indication that I would be treated with all the courtesy and consideration they were able to give.

They had taken up the idea that being a novice in the business, I was an interloper who had no intention of devoting his energies to the work required. I soon disabused their minds of such a suspicion and went to work with a will which met with their approval. With my mind and anticipation much relieved, we proceeded to the farthest limits of the territory assigned, such territory involving a radius of some thirty or forty miles.

We began the drive. Cattle in all directions were gathered into a common herd. Some from the timber as well as the prairie were brought together in a run accompanied by the cracking of whips and the yells of the driver. It was a novel and exciting sight to me. But I soon became accustomed to it and, though being not an expert rider, I found that I could render much assistance.

The cattle, probably one or two thousand head, were kept in a compact herd by some of the men. Others who were the most expert on their well trained horses, rode through the herd cutting out all cows and calves belonging to members of the crowd. These cows and calves were then driven to the nearest pen (which was generally convenient),

the calves branded and turned to wander at their will.

There were some amusing and somewhat dangerous episodes connected with bringing animals out of the timber. Some of them were veritable outlaws, having spent their lives there, never showing themselves on the prairie except at night. These outlaws (more for the sake of sport than anything else) were frequently roped by two or three men, dragged to the prairie, thrown down, tied with their own tails and left for a few hours to meditate as to their unfortunate condition. After a sufficient time had elapsed to get them in a more submissive mood they would be released. If they were still recalcitrant and inclined to charge at anything in sight, they were killed to prevent their influence being exerted upon cattle that were more manageable.

This routine was continued day after day until all cattle in a certain section had been overhauled and examined. Gradually approaching home, we were in a rather dilapidated condition, glad to avail ourselves of a good rest and the necessary sanitary measures. After a few days, all hands were again summoned to gather together at a place designated and prepare for another drive of a week or two. This work was kept up for more than two or three months until the whole territory had been scoured.

Then came a season of rest during the hot summer months until the fall drive. It did not last so long as that in the spring.

Though a rough life, the life of a cowboy was a healthy one. With plenty of food, including bacon, corn bread, and coffee, reinforced by a fat calf (belonging to someone not represented in the crowd), killed and barbecued every evening, the menu was greatly appreciated and almost ravenously disposed of.

Many episodes occurred to enliven the spirits of the men. Some were amusing, some exhibited foolhardiness, and others partook of a dangerous nature. These were related around the camp fire at night after a hearty meal.

The planters who settled along the river bottom also owned cattle which roamed with the common herd and

they, therefore, contributed hands to assist in the round-up. Stock raising at that time was quite a different occupation from what it is now. All cattle then were of the old Spanish stock; long, lanky, gaunt form with horns from one to two feet long and wild as the deer which frequently herded with them, ready to break for timber at the sight of a man on horseback. It required skill and perseverance to bring them to submission. They were particularly defiant and averse to being restrained of the liberty to which they had been accustomed. To give an idea of their uncontrollable nature they were liable to stampede at any time and put us to much trouble to get them together again. We had occasion at one time to round up a lot of beef cattle for market. After several days' riding and roping we succeeded in rounding up about 500 head of all ages, from four to eight years. The latter were raised in the timber, the density of which was sufficient to keep them in hiding.

After the roundup of these cattle, it was a question with us to know how to manage them during the rapidly approaching night. As it would be a risky business to attempt to herd them on the prairie, we decided to pen them and trust to luck. There was a pen nearby built of pine logs fifteen feet long and six inches in diameter with heavy stakes driven in the ground at each corner. We thought everything would be perfectly secure.

Cattle, when brought together and confined in a pen, present some curious anomalies. Under such a condition they become exceedingly nervous and frequently panic stricken, resulting in what is called a stampede. Such a state is more likely developed when they are restrained of their liberty. A piece of white paper floating along the ground, the jumping of a rabbit through the fence, or a nest of yellow jackets is sufficient to cause them to leap to their feet, make a mad rush in compact form, and regardless of all obstacles, to pursue a certain course.

We had established a camp near this pen and were preparing ourselves for protection from rain, which was threatening. An occasional flash of lightning and the

distant reverberation of thunder warned us of the approaching storm. After a brilliant flash of lightning accompanied by a crash of thunder, we felt a trembling of the ground and heard a roar in the direction of the pen that told us that a stampede had occurred.

With a cry "All to your horses", all who could find their horses were quickly mounted (some not taking time to get their saddles) and dashing in the direction the cattle had taken. Some took one flank, and others the other, keeping alongside the herd, one or two well up to the front but not daring to get ahead. The constant flashes of lightning playing on the horns of the cattle, the frequent peals of thunder and the torrents of rain falling, presented the weirdest and most awe striking scene I had ever witnessed. It seemed that pandemonium had turned loose and considerably terrified, I thought my hair would be gray in the morning.

After a desperate ride for about four miles the herd was somewhat checked and began milling, an indicator that the panic was over. It was a great relief to us for everything to be quieted and likely to remain so until morning, though it involved the necessity of herding all night. Some of the men returning to camp found several dead animals, many others maimed, and a good many horses knocked off. One side of the pen had been torn down, some of the logs having been carried at least twenty feet on the backs of the animals.

This was the most hair raising experience I encountered during my career as a cowboy and made an impression I shall never forget.

The Colorado River at the time of which I write was regarded as the boundary between what was called East and West Texas. Whilst the East portion had been settled to some extent by immigrants from the old states, men who had made farming their principal occupation, the broad expanse of unoccupied prairie on the west side of the river attracted those who preferred a free and adventurous

life. It, being more thinly settled and constituting the home of the longhorn, the deer, and the wolf, offered the occupant the sport necessary to guarantee sufficient recreation and at the same time to pursue an occupation which would provide an economical existence.

Eagle Lake at this time was a mere railroad station, being the terminal of the BBB&C Railroad, built from Harrisburg and projected to Austin. Upon reaching La Grange, however, the route to Austin was abandoned and a branch from Alleyton to Columbus was built.[3] Afterwards, it was extended to San Antonio and constituted the main line from Harrisburg to San Antonio of the renamed Galveston, Harrisburg & San Antonio Railway.

Eagle Lake at that time was the headquarters for the railroad officials and employees, and was gradually increasing in size and number of inhabitants. It was the rendezvous for the people in the surrounding country who came to hobnob with each other, to get their mail, and to encourage financially the keeper of the inevitable saloon. These gatherings were fraught with much pleasure. They were instrumental in exchanging ideas and passing current news throughout the country. Newspapers being scarce and not very reliable as to the time of their reception, such news could not be obtained in any other way.

Everything was progressing smoothly. The rich river bottom lands were being rapidly settled, virgin timber and cane cleared away, and land in small tracts prepared for cotton and corn. Many farmers from the old states had come with numbers of slaves and in a few years, those who had applied their energies in this direction were rewarded with large crops.

Whilst the owners of the different plantations spent their time at home attending to duties requiring their presence, it was not to be expected that the younger male members of their families should fail to avail themselves of

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3 Dr. Bruce is mistaken. The railroad did not actually reach La Grange until 1881, and the branch from Alleyton to Columbus was built in 1867.

the opportunities afforded for amusement and recreation. It became the custom for them to assemble in the town every Saturday evening, ostensibly to get the mail, but really to have a jolly time, ready for such fun and amusement as would be present. The first step made would be to take possession of the saloon, get rid of the barkeeper, and install a member of the crowd to act in his place. Consequently a carousal was initiated, participated in by all hands. Everything was conducted in good humor. Various amusements were indulged in, including horse racing, foot racing against time, especially if a tenderfoot could be obtained, badger fights, and athletic sports of various kinds. When the hotel, which I earlier mentioned as being in the process of construction, was completed, it was not considered a building possessing much architectural beauty. It was of planks long enough to make a second story, placed upright and, probably for sanitary reasons (to allow free ventilation and to give exit to the fleas, flies, and mosquitoes that had hibernated there during the early winter), nailed to a frame without regard to close fitting. The building was at last made ready for patronage and to celebrate its opening it was decided to give a grand ball. It was norated[4] around that everybody was invited and expected to attend, said event being fixed to come off at a certain date in the near future.

The day arrived for the jollification and everybody for miles around laid aside all cares and in all sorts of costumes and by all sorts of conveyances made their appearance. Unfortunately, a bitter cold norther was blowing. However, it did not cool the ardor of those anticipating a night of unalloyed pleasure. All parties assembled in quite a large room (that is, all who could get in) in the upper story of the building. The men already tanked up to some extent by occasional visits to the saloon, the ladies in a state of radiant expectancy, the negro fiddlers occupying a place set

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4 This word appears within quotation marks in the original publication in the *Eagle Lake Headlight.* Since it was a perfectly good word during the time of which Dr. Bruce writes, the quotes have been removed.

apart for them, the prompter with stentorian voice taking his stand, the dance began.

As the night wore on things became more animated. With the howling of the wind, the swaying of the walls of the building, the shuffling of feet, and the frequent repetition by the fiddlers of the improvised refrain from the words, "Give the fiddler a dram", the dance went merrily on until the night was far spent. The younger men seemed to vie with each other as to who could display the greater agility. Older ones, handicapped as they were by too frequent resorts to the saloon nevertheless preserved an assumed dignity. Their countenances expressed the conviction that they were there for an express purpose which they were determined to carry out or die. Their pacing up and down one side of the room to the other regardless of all obstacles, asserting their independence, and indicating an intention to see that the festivities were in accordance with their ideas of propriety went greatly against the desires and notions of those who did not agree with them. However, everything continued to progress without friction. Time was rapidly passing. The ladies, standing aghast at the general mixings, which was gradually assuming the character of a milling (probably suggested by some of the men who were accustomed to cattle stampedes), began to get dissatisfied and expressed a desire to quit. Everything being in a turmoil, the fiddlers who had fallen into such a condition as to be unable to tell a fiddle from a wheelbarrow, were landed at the foot of the stairway by a few well delivered kicks. The voice of the prompter demanded quiet and announced that the ball was at an end. All began to prepare for departure.

The ladies were put under the escort of men who had some of their wits left. The other men set out without any correct idea of proper direction, some of them reaching home safely, others lodging wherever they could find shelter. Overcome by overwhelming immoderate bursts of laughter and having fallen from my perch of observation, I got down the steps without accident and, after an exposure of a few minutes in the cold wind, regained my composure

and was able to mount my horse. Having to ride eight miles besides fording the Colorado River, I was thankful to reach home safely. It was not long before I was in bed and warming up. I was soon in a state of meditation, congratulating myself that I had been well paid for my trip, having gained much experience and learned how the citizens of the frontier managed to amuse themselves during the long winter nights.

The reader will please excuse me for not writing a more accurate account of the affair. It is impossible to transfer the serio-comic aspect of it and the ludicrous incidents and episodes with which was interspersed to paper. Such a scene must be witnessed to be appreciated. Could it be reenacted or thrown on the screen, it would arouse the risibilities of a deaf mute.

It is a difficult matter for a mere amateur to portray the many little incidents which served to make the event so attractive as to merit the approval of those who were so fortunate as to be present on such a memorable occasion. It would challenge the ability of a professional writer or a good caricaturist to depict the comic and ludicrous features with which the occasion was accompanied.

Suffice it to say that the opening of the first hotel in Eagle Lake constituted an epoch in the lives of the people of this community and was regarded with as much importance as to be considered a nucleus from which all events worthy of note, such as births, marriages, deaths, and others, were dated. It constituted a topic of conversation for a considerable time. Whenever a group was gathered, that was the subject discussed. It served to bring the people together, to form acquaintances with each other, to renew old attachments, and in general to arouse them from the monotonous and inert life they had been leading. A way had been discovered by which some of the pleasures of recreation could reconcile them to their situation.

Congeniality and sociability were more and more manifest, impromptu gatherings at private houses, where various amusements, such as dancing, etc., were indulged

in and people became more contented and reconciled to the rough life.

However, this condition of things was destined to be cut short after the passage of a year or two by rumors of war which spread around and caused a feeling of gloom and despondency to prevail. Such feelings were increased by the actual declaration of war accompanied with the demand for all men of military age to enlist for service. This, of course, demanded the country of its main support, the bone and sinew, without which it was impossible to make much progress in the development of the country, and caused a feeling of apprehension as to the result of such hostilities.

After four years of strife, resulting in the defeat of the Southern Army by an overwhelming display of men and resources drawn from the whole world by the North, those who survived the privation, danger, and horrors to which they had been exposed, returned to their homes, worn out and exhausted. In consequence of the utter ruin and desolation resulting from the unequaled conflict and the outlawing practiced by the carpetbaggers and scum of the Northern cities who invaded the South in search of plunder, many of the citizens of the old states began to look for a haven of refuge. Many concluded that Texas, having been free from invasion, would likely be the haven sought.

The influx of the better class of people into this section was hailed with much pleasure and satisfaction by all the old settlers. They were most hospitably received and entertained. All homes were opened for the reception and in a comparatively short time, they became thoroughly identified with the country and its people. The mode of living practiced by them in the old states had their influence upon those who had been accustomed to ways peculiar to the frontier. Much improvement in the direction of comfort and sociability was acquired. The newcomers who were able to save something from the wreck had brought with them many things which were new to the country, such as household furniture and farm machinery. Most important of all

they managed to bring improved breeds of cattle and horses badly needed to assist in eliminating the herds of longhorns roaming the boundless prairies and valued only for their hides and horns.

The old citizens of the country, for amusement, were fond of playing practical jokes upon the tenderfoot. Whilst generally of an innocent nature, they were sometimes a little rough. These jokes, however, were not confined to the strangers. Many of the older men were sometimes the victims. Hunting parties would be formed and, camping out on one of the creeks, fake Indian fights and fights with imaginary outlaws were engaged in which sometimes struck terror into the hearts of the uninitiated. Occasionally, a man would be lost in the timber and though, as night came on, he might approach within a few yards of the camp and yell until his throat would crack, his companions would sit around the camp fire, eating and drinking, perfectly quiet, and chuckling with each other over the predicament of the lost one. They would leave him out all night, expressing much regret in the morning at not hearing him.

One of the most amusing pranks which was played upon an old settler made such an impression upon me, that I remember it as vividly as if it occurred but yesterday. An old farmer who lived a few miles from town and who was the owner of a small bunch of cattle, carried away by the evidences of progress since the advent of the strangers, concluded that he would make an effort to improve his little herd by the introduction of some better blood. In pursuit of this idea he let it be known that he was in the market for a good Jersey male. It so happened that a man by the name of Davis, who had located on the Bernard and had some very superior animals of that breed to sell, heard of the old farmer's wishes and came over to see him. Upon Mr. Davis representing the superiority of his stock, it was not long before a trade was made and the money paid by the farmer for fear of being out bid by some one anxious to buy. To lose no time he at once told two young men living with him to start next morning to Mr. Davis', who lived some

ten or twelve miles away, to get the animal and bring him home. He cautioned them to be careful, as the weather was hot, and to drive along slowly in the cool of the evening. Well, the next morning early, the boys started.

After they got off, the farmer, remembering that it was election day and always a day of jollification, went to town. The boys found Mr. Davis' home without any trouble, and, waiting until the cool of the evening, started home with a fine thoroughbred Jersey bull. On the way home they found the skeleton of an old steer, and nearby a pair of immense horns. Chuckling with each other over the opportunity to play a joke on the old farmer, they carried them home. It was getting dark when they arrived. Slipping the horns over the horns of the Jersey and wiring them on securely, they turned the animal in the lot. Coming out and locking the gate, he was left in there alone. Everything completed, they went to the house and it was not long before the farmer came staggering in.

"Well boys, did you get the bull?"

"Yes sir, a fine animal too. You'll be pleased with him."

"What did you do with him."

"We put him in the lot by himself so he couldn't get out."

"I'll walk down and see him if I can get there."

So, off he went. Getting to the lot fence, he was confronted by an animal a few feet off with immense horns.

"How did this thing get in here?"

The boys said there was nothing in there except the Jersey. He must have broken the fence down and gotten out. He went back to the house to tell the boys to go and look for the Jersey.

"There is no Jersey in the lot. How in the hell did that longhorn get in there?"

"There is nothing in the lot but the Jersey", the boys replied.

"If that animal I saw is the kind of Jersey that man is raising he had better send them to the comb factory

as they would be more appreciated there than they would by anyone for dairy purposes. I have no use for such an animal, and if it was not night, it shouldn't stand here ten minutes."

With this he started off to bed, telling the boys to make an early start in the morning and take that damned old longhorn back to that infernal scoundrel Davis and tell him if he didn't return the money he would prosecute him for swindling. The old man was soon sound asleep and snoring, so the boys slipped down to the lot, took the horns off, and hid them. In the morning, the boys roused up early and went to get the horses. Coming to the lot they met the old man standing at the gate looking at the bull.

"Where did that animal come from?"

"That is the animal we brought home last night", they replied.

"Where is the darned longhorn I saw in there?"

"This is the animal you saw. Your eyesight is bad." the boys told him "You must have taken too much crosseyed whiskey in town and it made you partly blind."

"Do you think that was the matter with me?"

"Sure" the boys told him.

"Well boys, I must have been blind drunk. Don't say anything about this. Turn your horses loose. I will keep the bull." And the farmer started to the house, congratulating himself on having narrowly escaped going blind.

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Looking Backward

by Letitia Madeleine McCarty

Letitia Madeleine McCarty was the daughter of Williamson Simpson Oldham, a Confederate States Senator from Texas. She married James William McCarty, who became a prominent Eagle Lake business man and who served the town as mayor from 1888-1889 and 1900-1902. Mrs. McCarty died in 1922 at the age of 78.

Her short reminiscence was originally published in the Eagle Lake Headlight *of June 24, 1905. Though the author is unidentified, it is now generally believed to have been written by Mrs. McCarty. As originally published, the reminiscence contained but three paragraph breaks. In re-publishing it here, her rather long original paragraphs are broken into several smaller ones.*

"Borne on the stream of time,
Sweet thoughts of former days
Come thronging with harmonious chime."

Retrospection is among the 20th century fads. The Texas newspapers are running columns from files twenty, thirty, and even fifty years ago. Old settlers are publishing reminiscences of early days recalling from the dim past former scenes ere they fade from memory. Following their example, I send to the *Headlight* some recollections of Eagle Lake life in the early seventies.

Thirty-five years ago, I came from Houston to spend the summer with Mrs. Scott Anderson who lived very near the waters of the lake. The house was afterward moved to town and occupied the site on which the Episcopal church now stands. She was a woman of great beauty, reared in affluence which was swept away by the result of the war, of charming manners, cultured and intelligent and in the fifties was a reigning belle from Austin to the coast. I can remember but nine families that lived in the town of Eagle

Lake in 1870. ... Beard, an old ... Mrs. Van, the ...cklin, Joe Schiller ... Mrs. Lee Ayars.) Captain ... (father of Mrs. V. V. Da...)[1] D. W. [Daniel W.] Stockbridge, his father-in-law, Mr. [William T. M.] Smithson. Dr. [Jaquelin Smith] Bruce was a handsome widower at that time, and with his little daughter Annie (Mrs. [Joseph Jefferson] Mansfield) lived with his mother-in-law, Mrs. [Robert Jones] Rivers. The present Mrs. Bruce [Susie Rivers] was in Virginia at school. The Frazars, Herberts, Lotts, Thatchers, Montgomerys, Matthews, Harberts, and Battles lived on their plantations.

There were three stores. Beard & McCarty's was in the middle of the square, Joe Schiller's in the building now owned by Mrs. [Georgia] Dallas, corner McCarty Avenue and Railroad Street, and Stockbridge's, about where the old bakery was. The dwellings were box houses and one or two of them of logs. There was no regular preaching. Occasionally a traveling preacher would have service in an old room about where [Christopher and John] Tatters' tin shop

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1 These several lines are truncated by damage to the copy of the relevant newspaper that was microfilmed. Gaps have been filled in where the missing text seems obvious. The remaining gaps are indicated by ellipses. The original reads: "Austin to the coast. I can rem- ... ut nine families that lived ... of Eagle Lake in ... Beard, an old ... Mrs. Van, the ... cklin, Joe Schiller ... rs. Lee Ayars.) Capt. ... (father of Mrs. V. V. Da- ..."

"Beard" probably is William Beard, who was postmaster of Eagle Lake in 1870.

"Mrs. Van" may have been Julia Van Houten, the wife of George Van Houten and the daughter of James B. Good and Mattie Ellen Ivy. In the original, though, there is a comma after the word Van.

"...cklin" probably is John F. Ficklin, who is listed on page 149 of *A History of Eagle Lake Texas* as a Confederate veteran. This is likely to be the same Ficklin whose store is said to have burned between 1875 and 1880 on page 316 of the same book. The destruction of Ficklin's store is coupled with that of the Masonic Hall in Eagle Lake. According to the *Colorado Citizen* of November 15, 1883, the hall burned on November 8, 1883. Though the article relates the names of several stores that burned, there is no mention of one belonging to Ficklin.

"Mrs. Lee Ayars" was, in all likelihood, the daughter of Joe Schiller. Beulah Schiller and her husband, Lee C. Ayars, moved to Houston in 1906.

"Mrs. V. V. Da-" may be Hallie Wynn, who, in the pamphlet entitled "Colly Memorial United Methodist Church Centennial Celebration" is parenthetically called Mrs. Virge Damon. "Captain..." thus, may have been her father, probably William L. Wynn, who is buried in the Eagle Lake Masonic Cemetery.

now is. The Good Hotel[2] was the most imposing building in the town. Before the extension of the railroad it was the stage stand and Mr. [William S.] Good, first husband of Mrs. [Phoebe Jane] Clower, was the stage driver. It was the only stopping place for the public between Alleyton and Richmond. Captain [William] Dunovant, my husband, and I were fellow boarders there in 1871. Forty years ago, the Goods owned about all the land Eagle Lake is now built on.

The dances were held in the upper story of a building owned by Colonel [Armistead Thompson Mason] McCarty, where the [Henry] Nussbaum store now is. Young people came from Columbus and from the country round about and "Professor" Wash Bowers, and old colored fiddler, was the orchestra.

During the summer, I visited Columbus, the guest of Mrs. Fannie Darden. In those days it took just what it takes now to make a girl's good time and she had the room full of beaux the first night of my arrival. There were Editor Ben Baker, Judge [George] McCormick, Judge Wells Thompson, and others I do not remember. In those days, the more young men callers a girl could entertain at once, the greater her social triumph. In these days (in Eagle Lake) when a young man wants to call on a girl he makes what is called "a date" and while that "date" is on, no other young man is expected to be within sight or hearing.

A year later, I came, a bride, to live in Eagle Lake. During the year, Mr. Stockbridge had remodeled his house and was the owner of the first carpet in town.[3] I used to hear it spoken of as the "carpeted room". We bought three acres from the Goods at $15 per acre and established our home for the rest of our lives. I remember a party at Mr. Jim Harbert's farm about thirty-three years ago. There was an elaborate and elegant supper, not one of these latter day affairs where "delicious fruit punch" is expected to satisfy

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2 For an interesting article about the Good Hotel, see *A History of Eagle Lake Texas*, pages 378-383.

3 The house is still standing, at the corner of McCarty and Stockbridge Streets, in Eagle Lake.

all gastronomic desire, but ham, turkey, chicken, salads, custards, cakes, and no good thing left out. The night was dark and rainy and we danced till daylight. About three o'clock we were again invited into the dining room and found a second spread as fine as the first. We used to have fine times down at Mrs. Frazar's. Suppers, weddings, dances were frequent. I remember an amateur theatrical performance there in which a young man named [John C.] Habermacher[4] was a brilliant star. He now edits the *Shiner Gazette.*

Of the adult white population of Eagle Lake in 1870, there remain at this day, Dr. Bruce, E. P. [Eaton Pugh] Newsom and wife[5] (then a girl of fifteen), and myself. Of the negroes, Alsie Thomas, Alsie McGee, and Uncle Hamp. "All, all are gone, the old familiar faces."

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4 *The History of Wharton County*, on page 214, states that Habermacher at one time acted in Edwin Booth's company.

5 Mrs. Newsom's maiden name was Ann Smithson.

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The Texas Beaver: Described From Colorado County

by Rollin H. Baker

Clinton Hart Merriam, an upstate New York physician, nurtured by his overpowering interest in natural history, left his practice in the late nineteenth century for a career in biological politics in Washington. There he did remarkably well. In fact, almost single-handedly he persuaded Congress to establish a federally supported agency to inventory and determine the economic importance of the then largely unknown mammals, birds, and other native creatures. He especially requested that field studies be made in western states which were being rapidly settled by farmers and ranchers.

He felt that homesteaders in the west needed to know which kinds of wildlife might destroy corn and other cultivated plants, compete with domestic animals for forage, and prey on young livestock. At the same time he wanted to be sure to recognize and conserve beneficial species such as insect eating birds and predators which could curb high populations of rodents destructive of field crops and range grasses. His pioneering efforts helped establish the U. S. Bureau of Biological Survey, later to join the U. S. Bureau of Fisheries to become the present U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

In the 1890s Merriam sent a team of collectors to survey the megafauna of Texas. This group included ornithologist Harry C. Oberholser and mammalogist Vernon Bailey. The field men obtained representative specimens of wildlife for description, identification, and preservation in Washington's Smithsonian Institution. They also gained distributional and ecological data through field observations. The results of the investigations were summarized in two major works, Bailey's *Biological Survey of Texas* and Oberholser and editor Edgar B. Kincaid's *The Bird Life of Texas.*

These men did little field work in the Colorado

County area. Instead, they relied on assistance from Henry P. Attwater, a thoroughly competent "amateur" naturalist from Houston. Attwater was already well known as a collector for Smithsonian and other Washington based biologists. One of them, Charles E. Bendire, had honored him in 1894 by naming the Gulf Coastal population of the greater prairie chicken *Tympanuchus cupido attwateri*. Attwater, a long time employee of the Southern Pacific Railroad, travelled widely by rail in seeking new or unusual animal records in south and central Texas for his grateful Washington associates.

Although the large semiaquatic rodent known as the beaver occurred naturally in primeval times along most Texas stream systems, its population in eastern Texas was nearing extirpation at the turn of the century. Thus, it was indeed fortunate that Attwater, through his acquaintances in Colorado County, was able to get a specimen for Vernon Bailey. Bailey, in 1905, chose it as the basis for his description of the Texas beaver, using its scientific name, *Castor canadensis texensis*, for the first time in his book. The type specimen was captured on December 25, 1900 by Florenz A. Brune on Cummins Creek about seven miles north of Columbus. The animal, an unsexed adult, was kept alive until January 10, 1901. Following its death, it was mounted by a taxidermist identified by Bailey as A. Hambold[1] of New Ulm. The mount was subsequently purchased, presumably by Attwater, from the taxidermist and now is preserved in the collections of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington.

Johann Frederick "Fritz" Leyendecker, in a letter to Attwater written on June 6, 1904, gives further details about Colorado County beaver:

> I have your favor of the third instant and will cheerfully give you all the information at my command in regard to beavers in this section of Texas. I have heard of beavers

1 The taxidermist was probably Alvin Haubold, who was about forty years old and a prominent citizen of New Ulm at the time the beaver was stuffed. Haubold apparently moved to Waco in the 1920s.

and seen them in the Colorado River and Cummins Creek, a tributary of the Colorado River, which has its source near Giddings, Lee County, and empties into the Colorado River in the big bend about two miles nearly north of the town of Columbus. It is quite a large stream, with many deep water holes or pools, sometimes over half a mile long and from a few to ten or twelve feet deep.

The first beaver I ever saw was a very large male, weighing over forty pounds, killed by my brother in said creek, in February or March, 1866. But few were noticed until after the big overflow of the Colorado River in 1869 and 1870, after which they were more numerous, especially where the creek passed through Mr. F. A. Brune's plantation, about seven miles nearly north of Columbus. In this place there was quite a colony of beavers, in fact so many that they did considerable damage to Mr. Brune's growing corn crop by cutting off the stalks, and I suppose using the ears as food. About six or seven years ago they constructed a dam across the creek, forty to fifty feet long, in Mr. Brune's field, using blood weeds mostly and some other material for that purpose. This dam was perhaps a foot to fifteen inches high, and strong and compact, but of course the first rise washed it away.

Mr. Emil Brune, a son of F. A. Brune, was here yesterday and, after questioning him in regard to beavers, he said that he trapped six or seven, among these the one sent to San Antonio in January or February two years ago. He did not recollect the exact date. He also stated that while fishing he broke through into a beaver cave and there found four young beavers, which he carried home, but they soon died. I have been informed that there are still some beavers in Cummins Creek, near Mr. Justin Stein's place, a few miles nearly west of Frelsburg. It is also said that there are still some beavers in the Colorado River, near Mr. William Schulenburg's place, about four miles above the town of Columbus.[2]

Shortly after scientific prominence was given to Colorado County's resident beaver population, it and the population in the rest of eastern Texas was eradicated by persistent hunting and trapping. Beaver pelts were marketable and baked beaver was a delicacy fit to grace any

2 Reproduced as printed in Bailey's *Biological Survey of Texas*, pp 123-124.

pioneer's table. It was, however, the beaver's pesky habits which really spelled its doom. Irate citizens were most unwilling to tolerate either the beaver's dam building skills or its tree felling abilities. Beaver became totally unwelcome when they caused stream side cultivated fields to be flooded, sometimes overnight, when water backed up behind their dams. These sharp toothed rodents were also unpardonably guilty of clipping corn stalks, felling prized fruit trees, and even clogging roadside drainage systems.

Even so, the Texas beaver was able to persist in the early years of this century in remote sectors of the Llano River drainage. Surplus animals trapped alive from that stream system, beginning in the early 1940s by conservation officials, were liberated in formerly occupied range along other waterways of eastern Texas. Progeny of these stock have thrived and the Texas beaver, named from Colorado County, is on its way to recovery. After being absent for almost fifty years, it has even made its way back into Colorado County in the decades since World War II.[3]

However, the industrious animal is still making no attempt to give up its provoking habits of altering the riparian environment to suit its own purposes. Nevertheless, there remain numerous wetland areas sufficiently remote from human habitations so as to allow the Texas beaver to exercise its remarkable engineering abilities without fear of being arrested. There, its dams, impounded fish filled ponds, and picturesque lodges enhance the beauty and serenity of the outdoor community.

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3 On August 21, 1939, officials of the Texas Game, Fish, and Oyster Commission (now the Texas Parks & Wildlife Commission) liberated three female and one male beaver on Scull Creek in Colorado County. That population left or died out, but on May 2, 1956 state game warden Tom Waddell reported, in a field note, that a beaver weighing 21 and a half pounds was killed on a "Bridge on a slough off the Colorado River" near the Colorado-Wharton County line 14 miles southeast of Eagle Lake.

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The Wild Man of Colorado County

by Bill Stein

In 1898, citizens living south of Columbus were plagued by night time raids by an unidentifed man. The man, who quickly became known as "the wild man", lived alone in the woods and avoided all human contact. He was seen several times during the day, but always ran into the woods when he caught sight of anyone else.

On his raids, he stole a watermelon here, a little corn there, just enough to eat. One night in October, Oscar Schultz was sleeping in Sandmeyer's pasture when he suddenly awoke to find the wild man in his camp. To Schultz' relief, the man immediately fled. But Schultz had gotten the best look yet at him and described him as having a long beard, no shoes, and tattered clothing.

Finally, on November 6, 1898, Harry Walker, C. L. Cole, C. Hintz, Oscar Heller, and Gus Weller organized into a posse and went after the wild man. Using bloodhounds, they picked up his trail near Scull Creek and ran him down later that same day. He had a knife but showed no inclination to use it. To be sure that he did not, Heller seized him and the others tied him up. They placed him on a horse, rode to Walker's house in Altair, then brought him to Columbus.

At Columbus he was given new clothes, thrown in jail, and interrogated. He gave his name as William Turner and said that he was French Canadian. He claimed to have been living in the woods for about five years, but only in Colorado County for the last year. For the last several months he had been living in an abandoned building on Tom Byars ranch. He had been subsisting on the crops he could steal and on squirrels, herbs, and birds. Though provisions were sparse, he never worried about food. His only fear was being shot, for he had been shot at three times since moving into Colorado County. The week after he was captured, he began selling tickets to people who wanted to see him at a formal exhibition.

New At The Nesbitt

For two years the library has been engaged in cataloging Colorado County's cemeteries. Recently, we have made substantial progress. Heath Moore, a Columbus High School junior, assisted library staff in auditing and updating the catalog of the huge Odd Fellows Rest Cemetery in Columbus. Dorothy Albrecht and Bill Stein were led to the Tanner family cemetery south of Columbus by Barrett Orsak, and, with an assist from Orsak and Amber Burris, catalogued it. Two local boy scouts, Travis Martinek and Clint Ratliff, assisted library staff in cataloging St. Peter and Paul Cemetery, Trinity Lutheran Cemetery, and the Weishuhn Cemetery. Ernest Mae Seaholm spearheaded an expedition to Reel's Bend Cemetery. Harrison Walker, Robert Davis, and Bill Stein accompanied her to the site. The party discovered several previously uncatalogued graves in the dense underbrush.

Recent Additions to the Texas Room

Donations:

Advance and Retreat: Personal Experiences in the United States and Confederate Armies by John B. Hood (1880) Donated by the Shropshire-Upton Chapter, U. D. C.

Cynthia Ann Parker: The Story of Her Capture by James T. DeShields (1934 reprint) Donated by Lucille Lawrence.

Texas County Sheriffs by Sammy Tise (1989) Donated by Sammy Tise.

Books on Austin County a bibliography compiled by David Ebert (1989) Donated by David Ebert

Christmas in Troubled Times by William A. Trenckmann, translated by Anders Saustrup (1976) Donated by Anders Saustrup

Terry's Texas Rangers by Lester N. Fitzhugh (1958) Donated by Laura Ann Rau

The Presidents of Mexican Texas, 1824-1836 by Jenkins Garrett and Kenneth Yeilding (1971) Donated by Laura Ann Rau

History of Old Coronal by Willie Williamson Rogers. Donated by Laura Ann Rau

Hood's Brigade Bryan Centennial, 1862-1962, containing "The Early History of Bryan" by Joseph Milton Nance (1962) Donated by Laura Ann Rau

Fort Worth in the Civil War by James Farber (1960) Donated by Laura Ann Rau

19th Century Austin published by the Austin Heritage Foundation (1970) Donated by Laura Ann Rau

Treasure, People, Ships, and Dreams by John L. Davis (1977) Donated by Laura Ann Rau

Son, Remember... compiled by R. Henderson Shuffler (1951) Donated by Laura Ann Rau

The Atascosita Census of 1826 edited by Mary McMillan Osburn (reprint from 1963 *Texana* magazine) Donated by Laura Ann Rau

Defenders of the Republic of Texas, Volume I, Texas Army 1836-1841 edited by Karen R. Thompson (1989) Donated by Dilue Rose Harris Chapter, D. R. T.

Purchases:

Friedrich Ernst of Industry by Miriam Korff York (1989)

Czech Immigration Passenger Lists, Volume III by Leo Baca (1989)

The Houston Police: 1878-1948 by Louis J. Marchiafava (1977)

The Life of Sam Houston by Charles E. Lester (1867)

Historic Sketches of the Cattle Trade of the West and Southwest by Joseph G. McCoy (1985 reprint)

Journal of the Secession Convention of Texas 1861 edited by Ernest William Winkler (1912)

Heel Fly Time in Texas by John Warren Hunter (1931)

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