

Nesbitt Memorial Library Journal

*A journal of
Colorado County History*

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A Sketch of My Life

by Henry Calhoun Thomas

Henry Calhoun Thomas died on February 23, 1947, having lived in Sally Cone's boarding house in Columbus for the last few years of his life. He had spent the better part of his life as a clerk in various stores, notably those of W. A. Baar in Weimar and Altair. He had also served a single term as County Commissioner (1902-1904) and, off and on for years, written a column for the Weimar Mercury under the pen name "Oom Paul". But it was his early years, when he worked as a drover for the Stafford family in and around Columbus, that defined his character and made his reputation.

Robert Earl "Bob" Stafford, the patriarch of the family in Colorado County, and his brother William Henry Stafford, arrived in Texas in 1859. Four other brothers, Benjamin Franklin, John, Joseph Wiggins, and Francis Marion "Doc", Stafford, and five sisters, Mary Amanda, Martha Ann, Jane Blair, Susan Sarah, and Harriet Barbara, followed after the Civil War. Late in his life, Thomas wrote his recollections of his days in the saddle with the Staffords.

I was born July 21, 1857 in the little town of Staunton, Virginia. My father was R. B. [Reuben Boston] Thomas and my mother was Mary Ann Slonicker.¹ My father was Welch. My mother was Holland Dutch. They were married in 1851 at Harper's Ferry.

¹ This name appears in the transcript of the manuscript as "Slonicker", but there are many spellings of it in print. Harold Simpson, in his *Hood's Texas Brigade: A Compendium*, spells it "Sloneker". In the *Colorado County Chronicles* it appears in three different places, spelled "Sloneker", "Stoneker" and "Sloanecker". It appears in the 1880 Colorado County census, but it is written in such a way as to make it unclear whether the second letter is a "t" or an "l". Assuming the second letter is an "l", it is spelled "Slonicker" in the census. Colorado County marriage records spell the name five different ways: "Slonaker", "Stoniker", "Sloniker", "Sleniker", and "Sloneker". No other official record containing the name has been found.

When the war broke out between the states, my father thought best to send his family to New Orleans, thinking all the battles would be fought in and around Virginia. This was sometime in 1861. I never saw my father again until sometime in 1864 or 1865 as he shouldered his old musket and followed [Robert E.] Lee to the end of the war. Of course, I know nothing of his ups and downs and shall only tell or attempt to tell of my life.

The family consisted of my mother, my brother who was two years older than myself, but later a sister was born.² We lived right near Carlton Station just up the river from the French Market. Of course, I was too young to realize anything of the horrors of war, but often wondered why my mother would cry at times, and when we would ask her, she would tell us that we would never see father again.

We lived near a man by the name of Daniel Young and I remember one day he came over and told mother that he had heard that the Battle of Gettysburg had been fought and two of his sons had been killed. Of course, my mother knew that my father must have been killed in the same battle so all hopes of ever seeing him again were given up. So things rocked along for some time.

My brother was hired out to a man to herd a small bunch of sheep over near Lake Ponchartrain [Pontchartrain]. My mother did sewing for the wealthy French and I was supposed to herd that baby sister. So we were getting along kinder so so and of course once in awhile we would cuss the Yankees for killing our father.

But one night a new picture appeared on the screen. I shall never forget it if I should live a thousand years, and I don't believe any other child would forget that ever remembered having a father. Mother was washing the supper dishes when my brother came in to spend Sunday with us. It was Saturday night. We was glad to see him and to hear him tell us all about the sheep. He was relating one of these

² His brother was also named Reuben Boston Thomas, but went by the nickname "Buck". His sister was Ida V. Thomas, and was three years younger than Henry.

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sheep stories when there was a knock at the door. My brother opened the door but slammed it shut and squalled out, "Beggar", but the beggar would not stand for a door to shut in his face so he pushed the door open and rushed in. Mother yelled that you could have heard for two blocks, "It's your father!" In a few minutes, all the neighbors had gathered and there was no sleeping at our house that night.

My father only lived a short time and died with yellow fever. My mother married again in about one year, thus giving us kids a step-father (Eli McNatt). Soon after that we took boat for Texas, my mother having three sisters and four brothers living in and around Columbus.

We left New Orleans sometime in August and landed in Galveston. We stayed in Galveston until the middle of October then started for Columbus via GH&SA [Galveston, Harrisburg & San Antonio Railroad]. We was about four hours getting to Harrisburg - the road, the trains did not pass through Houston. We finally got to Richmond about night. Arriving at Richmond we found the railroad bridge gone so we tied up there until the first of December when the bridge was rebuilt and we started to Columbus, leaving Richmond about daylight, arriving in Alleyton at night. Alleyton was the terminus of the road.

We stayed all night at the only hotel in the town (The Estes). Next morning we took the stage for Columbus, stopping at my uncle's (Owen Slonicker). We kids was happy but had some fear of meeting a lot of Texas kids with horns or a bunch of long haired Indians.

After spending a few days in Columbus, we moved out to Skull Creek as (Sam Slonicker) another uncle lived out there. Uncle Sam had married Malissa Walker, she being a sister of Quinn Walker. Quinn was then cow driving for Tup Townsend. We all wanted to see Quinn as we had never seen a live cowboy so one day Quinn came home and we kids were entertained by telling us about wild cows and bucking ponies. Right then I made up my mind to be a cowboy.

After spending a few days at Uncle Sam's, we

took the stage for Gonzales where mother's sister lived (Aunt Lizzie Stulting). While there I got to be a chum of the Glover boys. One of them was later sheriff of Gonzales County and was killed by Cortise, a Mexican outlaw.³

We spent about a month out there and then came back to Columbus. This was in the spring of 1867. That fall my brother and myself was hired out to a man by the name of Bridge to drive a horse gin. Mr. Bridge had two boys and one girl, Gus, Dick, and Kittie. Kittie married that winter to Bill Guynn and she still lives in Columbus and must say a better girl never lived or at least I thought so.⁴

Well, we ginned all winter and up to sometime in March of the next year, 1868, and now I started on my long look for cow drive and it came about in this way. It was Sunday morning and my brother had gone to Columbus to see mother and I had stayed out at Mr. Bridge's as I did not like my step-father and only went home when I had to. Of course, I was lonesome and I had walked out to the Pinbick Road⁵ and had climbed up a big live oak gate post and sitting on top of same when I saw a bunch of horses coming. There was a covered wagon and several men. The men was driving the pony. Some of the men were white men, some Negroes, and two Mexicans. I shall never forget the two Mexicans. One was named Jesus and one named Leander, two of the best Mexicans I ever saw alive. The negro driving the cook wagon was Bob Jackson who now lives at Altair. One of the white men was Quinn Walker. I never was as glad

3 Sheriff Robert M. Glover was at the head of a posse searching for the fugitive Gregorio Cortez when he was killed in a wild shootout on June 14, 1901.

4 "Bridge" was William E. Bridge, a prosperous farmer. "Gus" was William August Bridge. "Dick" was Walter Eldridge Bridge, who was later sheriff of Colorado County. "Kittie" should be "Kiddie", a nickname derived from her diminutive stature. Her given name was Mary A. Bridge. "Bill Guynn" was James William Guynn.

5 There is no modern road known by this name. There is, however, a road known informally as "Pinchback Road". That road, situated just west of Garwood, runs along a rice canal and parallel to Ed Frnka Road, between F. M. 1693 and Daisy Schilling Road. It is officially a part of the Rock Island-Nada First Class Road and is designated on some maps as a part of County Road 116.

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to see anyone as I was to see Quinn so I hollered at him. In the bunch of ponies was one with saddle and bridle on. He was a red roan Spanish pony. I asked Quinn if I could go cow driving with him, but he told me all about the wolves, bear and the danger of wild cows, but I was determined to become a cowboy.

Finally Quinn said I could go with him and for me to run down to Mr. Bridge's and get my clothes and he would overtake the bunch of ponies and catch the little roan and come back and get me. Well, it only took me about a minute to jump off the gate post and get to the house. I rushed in and told Miss Kittie to get my clothes that I was going to drive cows. She laughed at me and told me that Quinn was just fooling me and had gone on with the ponies but I was sure Quinn would do as he said. She got my clothes, put them in one of the old time wallets and away I went. When I got back to the gate, there was Quinn with the pony. He was taking up the stirrups to fit my short legs. He picked me up and sat me on that little roan horse and we rode away. I could not describe my feeling if I were to try so will leave that for you to guess my feelings.

We overtook the horses out about where Mrs. Grace Byars now lives⁶ and my wallet was put in the cook wagon. They began to talk about cows as the prairie was covered with cattle. I asked Quinn a thousand questions about the cattle and who owned them and he told me that the biggest part of them belonged to Bob Stafford and Jim Wright.⁷ Quinn had quit Townsend and was now working for Stafford & Wright.

We ate dinner at Sandy Ford on Skull Creek. That night we went to the Drob Ranch.⁸ Now this was

⁶ Mrs. Byars was the widow of John Stafford and lived in the house he built about three miles south of Columbus.

⁷ A stockraiser by the name of James Wright first appears on the Colorado County census in 1860, when he was 24 years old. At that time he was quite a bit wealthier than Bob Stafford, who had arrived in the county less than a year earlier. A James F. Wright, who was born September 7, 1835 and died on August 3, 1874, is buried in Colorado County.

⁸ This name, spelled incorrectly throughout, should be Draub.

March, 1868. That night I was tired as this was the longest ride I had ever made horseback but I was happy and felt as big as Teddy Roosevelt. That night I slept with Quinn as I had no bedding. Next morning I was up before it was daylight and as it was quite cool I sat around the fire while Bob Jackson (the negro cook) fixed breakfast. Some of the boys was getting up the horses. Finally we were called to chuck, as it was called, by old Bob beating on a tin pan. We stayed at the Drobe Ranch about a week getting the crowd together.

One day Quinn told me that I could be the horse herder and he would pay me \$6.00 per month and if I made good, the next spring I could work with hands and drive cows. The trail was closed at once and I was to have charge of the horses. There was twelve men in the outfit and each man had eight horses to his mount. I had four horses to my mount. Finally the day came for us to leave the ranch and work all cattle to the coast so we started out. Old Bob the cook started out in the cook wagon with instructions to go to Rancho Grande⁹ and get dinner. I was to follow with the horses.

It only took us about two hours to get to the ranch. The horses were unhitched from the wagon and turned loose and I would drive them out to where the bunch of houses were grazing then I came back to the camp and Bob and I had quite a time talking about the trip. Bob told me where they would camp each night on that trip which would end about the first of July. Bob knew the country as he had made the round year after year for the past several years. Finally the boys came in with a bunch of cows and calves.

After dinner everybody caught fresh horses. The cows were penned and the calves were branded and all let loose to ramble where they pleased. Stayed there that night and next day moved to Kinchlow's [Kincheloe's] Pen and so on from day to day.

⁹ That is, the headquarters of the Stafford Ranch.

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There was nobody lived in that part of the country only along the river. Starting at the Pinchback Ranch there was Suggs, Bratton, Jones, Ables, Roben Drob, Kinchlow, Schultz, Bundick, Spores, Jennings, Dordy, Robins, then came Matagorda Bay.¹⁰ We would work down the Colorado River to the bay then across to the Palacios, then up the Palacios on the east side to the head timbers then down the west side to Hamilton Point (where the little town Palacios now stands). Then over to the Karankaway then back up the country to where we started. No one could understand how much territory we covered unless they knew the country.

In those days there was cattle everywhere. I will give you a few of the names of the stock men. Stafford & Wright, Townsend, Words, Yorks, Pool & Allen, W. B. Grimes. These were the big stock men and later on Shanghai Pierce was one among the big fish.¹¹

As I said, we got back to the Drob Ranch about the first of July and disbanded until the first of September. All the hands went where they pleased as the ponies were turned loose in the pasture. I went to Bob Stafford's and made that my home and did just as I pleased. Bob Stafford has three children, two girls and one boy, Gussie, Myra, and Warren. Warren and I were great chums and was into

¹⁰ Suggs is probably John A. Suggs, a wealthy Colorado County farmer. By 1880, he had a son-in-law named John Bratton, and this man, or his father, may be the second man Thomas lists. Jones, and Ables are otherwise unknown. There is a possibility that Ables should be Abell, for there was a Colorado County family by that name in the late 1800s. Robin Drob surely ought to be Robin Draub, though no member of the Draub family with that given name has been found. Kinchlow is probably a reference to one or all of the sons of William Kincheloe by his second wife, namely Lawrence, Daniel, and Augustus. Schultz and Bundick are unknown. Spores may have been John Phillip Spoor. Jennings and Dordy, which probably ought to be Daugherty, are also unidentified. Robins is very likely meant to be Frederick W. Robbins of Matagorda County.

¹¹ "Townsend" was Asa Townsend of Columbus, "Words" were Robert Emmett and Charles T. Word of Gonzales, "Yorks" were John York and his kinsmen of Austin County, "Pool & Allen" is the firm of Allen & Poole who were the primary shippers of cattle from Galveston (the Allen was Sam Allen), "W. B. Grimes" was William Bradford Grimes of Matagorda County, and "Shanghai Pierce" was Abel Head Pierce of Matagorda and Wharton Counties.

everything that any two boys could get into.¹² Mr. Bob Stafford lived three miles west of Columbus and unless the weather was very bad, Warren and I went to town every night. We would go to bed early and wait until Mr. S. went to bed then we would get up, get a horse and go to Columbus, getting back before daylight. We had nothing to do so we would sleep next day a few hours.

This we kept up until the time came then I would be sent to Rancho Grande thirty-five miles south of Columbus about the 15th of March. We would start on our spring drive and would not get back to the ranch again until about the middle of July and start out again about the first of September.

In the fall of 1869 I did not go on the fall drive as had got hurt by a horse falling on me so I went out on Harvey's Creek and picked cotton for Mr. A. P. Lowrey. That year the Colorado River was higher than ever known, flooding everything and in 1870 it overflowed again.

My stepfather found out I was out there and sent me word to come home and saying if I failed to come, he was coming after me, giving me until Christmas to show up in Columbus, but I never went back but pulled my freight to Mr. Bob Stafford's knowing he would never come there after me as he was like lots of others as afraid of Mr. S. as he was of Satan. So I was on hand when the spring drive started.

This was the spring of 1870. Cattle everywhere and cheap yearlings - sold at 550, cows 600. No market for beef cattle only when drove to the northern markets.

I was now twelve years old and was a pretty good cow driver. I called Mr. Stafford "Dad" and thought anything he said was all right and it was with me. My mother lived in Columbus but I never went home. Dad's was my home and the best home a boy ever had to fit him for a cow puncher, but not much in the way of training one for that Home from whence no traveler ever returns.

Quinn Walker married Miss Gussie in 1872 (I'm not sure) and John Stafford became our boss and a better

¹² Warren Stafford was about six months younger than Thomas.

boss was never on the range.¹³ In 1875 we had a four days' storm. This is the storm that swept Indianola off the map.¹⁴ We were at Johnson's timber pen in Matagorda County and went through the storm. We were wet for four nights and days and nothing to eat only a little dough and raw calf meat.

In 1877 the two Lunn brothers were hanged to the crosspiece over the gate of the mule mat pens in Calhoun County and things began to get hot.¹⁵ The Townsends and Staffords had a falling out and the Staffords bought their own brand of cattle from the Townsends. Pierce got to spreading out and stuck up notices telling the Staffords to move their cattle west of the West Mustang. This didn't work, however, and only made matters worse.¹⁶

Mr. Stafford had 500 copies of the *Colorado Citizen* printed with a column telling the stockmen of the coast country just where to head in, and a man by the name of Daniels and myself was set to distribute these papers.¹⁷

13 Quinn Walker married Julia Augusta Stafford on January 29, 1874. Both Walker and the new trail boss, John Stafford, were twenty-five years old at the time, but Stafford was still unmarried. He married Walker's sister, Grace Ann, on December 23, 1874.

14 Indianola was a major port city on Matagorda Bay. It was first stricken by a hurricane on September 15, 1875, then, after being rebuilt to some degree, demolished by a second hurricane on August 19, 1886.

15 The Lunn brothers and two other men were hanged by Shanghai Pierce and a group of his ranch hands for stealing cattle. Thomas has the date wrong; the hanging was actually in July, 1870. There were three Lunn brothers, one of whom is identified as W. W. Lunn and one of whom is called Ed. The third brother's name is not known. One of the two other men was unidentified and the other was named Smith and was called "All Jaw" Smith because of his tendency to boast about his past.

16 The notice Thomas attributes to Pierce is apparently that drawn up by the "Committee of 25 Navidad" which warned all stock men not to work for or with either Sam Allen or Bob Stafford. A copy of the notice was printed in the August 9, 1877 issue of the *Colorado Citizen*. It reads "Notice to All Stock Men. You are hereby notified not work with or for Allen and Stafford under the penalty of intire destruction of the grass as we are determed they never raise any moor cattle in the State of Texas no man in the lower counrty will be permitted to have any business transaction with them moove your cattle south of Mustang this is warning in time bare in mind --Comitee of 25 Navidad, Organized Aug 4, 1876"

17 This may be a reference to the column published by Sam Allen and Bob Stafford in the August 9, 1877 issue of the *Colorado Citizen* which replied to the notice drafted by the "Committee of the 25 Navidad". Their reply read "This notice could not have emanated from any but a cowardly

We were loaded for bear as the cowboy says and we went where we pleased and was never molested. We were gone on this trip about ten days and had a big time. I shall never forget, on our way home out near old Texana there was a negro tournament¹⁸ in full blast so we decided to take that in. We watched them make a few runs and finally a big black negro rode out in front of the judges stand all dressed in blue, yellow and green. The judge called out "Now the Knight of the Crimson Lance will run" and when he started, we started after him shooting our pistols and yelling. The negro looked back and missed the first ring, dropped his lance and took for the woods. We followed as he was going our way and we put him in the timber. We came on home and just how the tournament came out we never knew.

This broke up the friendship between Stafford, Pierce, and Grimes. I am not sure, but in the spring of 77 or 78, we delivered to Eleson¹⁹ several thousand head of beef cattle and they were drove through to Dodge City, Kansas. Here I saw my first big stampede. No man can describe a stampeded herd of cattle that never saw one and

and dishonest hand. It is doubtless the work of some parties who have been prevented from following their nefarious avocation of killing and skinning other people's cattle, and who are chagrined because they have been prevented in their business of robbery. We have no idea it was done by a committee, as alleged; and the manner of branding good citizens with a presumed crime; over an anonymous signature, is *prima facie* evidence of the cowardly spirit that prompted it. The threat of burning the prairies and inflicting a hardship upon hundreds of innocent citizens of the county shows that no gentlemen were engaged in it. If we commit any wrong, our residence is known and we are amenable to the laws of the country; but we do not propose to be driven from the pursuit of a legitimate business by the threats of a set of cowardly cattle-skinners and thieves who have not the manliness to confront us with any charge of wrong dealing face to face, but use the weapons of the poltroon (an anonymous posting in a public place,) to injure our good names. We ask pardon of our friends for noticing this pusillanimous and miserable subterfuge in this public manner, and do so only at the instance of friends who have counseled us to this course.

Very respectfully,

S. W. Allen

R. E. Stafford

Columbus, July 14, 1877

¹⁸ Recreations of medieval jousting tournaments were popular entertainments of the time.

¹⁹ Meaning, evidently, James F. Ellison of Caldwell County.

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no man can believe what a bunch of stampeded cattle can do and will do.

During the gathering of these cattle we were penned at the Drob Ranch, had about 1500 steers. We had orders to keep our horses saddled and sleep around the pen. My brother, who had come to us and was now with us, was sleeping with a young man (John Green). I was near them. Any noise would wake me as I had heard so much about stampeded cattle. Everything was quiet and everybody in bed but about midnight the big show came off. There was a lumbering and a crush at the back of the pen. I jumped up, ran to my brother and called him, ran to my pony and was on him in a second when the crush came to my side of the pen. I turned my horse and started off. Just what to do or where to go I knew not, but I went and the cattle right behind me. I could hear nothing only a noise like a West Texas cyclone. Finally one of the men ran by me and hollered "Get out of ahead of them cattle." I just turned to the left and followed the man. It was a negro, old Bob Jackson, who is yet living.

The cattle were passing me to my right. Finally some of the men came running by and I followed. We could not tell just which way we were going as it was dark. John Stafford was our boss at this time and had told us in case of a stampede for everybody to get on one side of the herd and by turning the cattle we would finally run the front cattle in to the rear of the herd and get them to running in a circle. (This the cow man calls milling.)

Well, we finally got them to milling and everybody was singing trying to get the attention of the cattle. Finally we got them quiet and we rode around them until daylight. Then we found out that everybody was there but John Green. Part of us went in to camp for breakfast and found John dead, also his horse. I don't suppose he ever waked up as his horse was still tied to a post with his neck broke. John was as black as a negro and mashed into a jelly.

Once cattle stampede, they keep it up and as our herd got bigger every day, we never penned them again.

These cattle were driven to Kansas and I went with them. A man by the name of Jackman²⁰ was boss of the outfit and he was a fine fellow. Everything went well with us until we crossed Red River and got out into the Indian nation. We stopped for a few days' rest on the Canadian River. I think we stayed there about ten days.

A man, Lacket by name,²¹ was on the trail too with a big herd and was resting there on the river when we got there. We were about two miles up the river from where Lacket was camped. One night it began to lightning in the northwest and Jackman told us there would be no sleeping that night as we would all have to go on herd duty. The night was a starlight night up until sometime after midnight when the clouds came up, thundering and lightning. (I will say here which every old cow poke knows, when it lightnings you can see every black cow in the herd. The black cattle glitter and look like silver.)

It began raining and finally one of them claps of thunder came that will make anybody set up and take notice and the cattle was gone like a covey of quail. It was dark and all you could do was to follow the roar of the cattle. We knew the cattle was going down the river. Finally the crush came and things came to a halt. When it would lightning we could see the cattle and now we noticed the cattle were confused as some was going one way and some another. We knew something had happened that turned them and when day came we found out that our cattle and Lacket's cattle had run together and where they hit looked like a battle had been fought. Dead cattle, crippled cattle, some with one horn gone and some with both horns gone. The killed and wounded were about two hundred. It took us several days to gather them all as they were scattered everywhether. We

20 W. T. "Bill" Jackman was James F. Ellison's trail boss for about twenty years.

21 No cattleman by the name of "Lacket" could be found. Without access to the original, there is no way of telling it this was the name Thomas genuinely wrote or if it is a transcription error. An A. B. "Arch" Lockhart is mentioned in *The Trail Drivers of Texas*, and he may be the man to whom Thomas is referring.

had to cut out our cattle from Lacket's and get things in shape.

We had several runs before we got to Dodge City and as I said no man can describe a stampede as I have seen many of them and will say I never saw a pen built that can hold a stampeded bunch of cattle. I once saw a stampede at Harrisburg at the old Sam Allen Ranch. This pen was built with railroad iron, covered about one and one half acres of land. We had about 500 steers in the pen. It was about sunrise when one of the ponies shook himself and the rattle of the saddle scared the cattle and here is where I found out how cattle break a pen. When they start, they all go the same direction. The first cattle to reach the fence, of course, stop. The others keep crowding on until the first cattle are down then they just keep piling up until lots of them climb over and fall out of the pen. The pressure is so great that the pen careens over. All or nearly all the cattle that get to the fence first are killed. In a stampede out in the open, when a cow falls down, she is not only killed but others fall over and so on until you have a bunch of crippled cattle.

In '78 I went back up the trail with a bunch of cattle for Hunter Evans and Hunter Vanripper was our boss. He was a brother of Vanripper who was once Chief of Police of San Antonio. He has a sister living there now (Mrs. John Slutter). We had a good trip, had a few runs, but as our cattle were young cattle, two and three year olds, the runs did not amount to much.

I will tell you something about a cow that you may not know and the way we learned this was by being on herd so much at night. Seldom any of us had a watch outside of the boss. you would go on herd about sundown and was supposed to be relieved about twelve o'clock, but of course, the other fellow would put off coming to relieve you just as long as he could or that is the way it seems to be to the fellow that has rode around a herd of cattle singing all the time just to pacify an old crazy cow.

Well, we learned to tell the time of night by the action of the cattle, or at least we could tell it was about

midnight. You can have a herd of cattle, matter not how many, and as a rule they will all or nearly all will be laying down by eight o'clock and between eleven o'clock and one o'clock every cow will get up and turn around and lay down on the other side. So when we saw them getting up and changing, we knew we were soon to be relieved. (Watch your old cow some night. See how she is laying when you go to bed and then beat her up next morning and see if she has not changed.)

And another thing about a cow, if you will keep her under herd and drive a few miles each day, you will notice she will be the same place in the herd every day and you will get so you will miss an old cow if something happens to her so she fails to show up. All one-eyed cows stay on the outside of the herd with her good eye next to the herd. She does this to keep from getting punched in the ribs by another cow.

All the big stockmen knew Bob Stafford as he was called the cattle king of the southwest and as this was my home, I met and knew a good many of the cow men as they visited Bob Stafford. Old General Baylor of Uvalde, Sam Allen of Harrisburg, Mark Childers, Chas. Goodnight, Sam Maverick, Kind and Canady, Rick Coffee, Sam Pettitts, the Houston of Gonzales - as we called him Tea Forty-One as he branded his cattle "T41", Hobmaker, George Little, Anderson Causey, and many others.²²

In the fall of '77²³ we had a little round with the negroes in the Eagle Lake bottom. The old negroes yet living refer to it as the "Stafford War". We were camped at Rack Guynn's pen on west bank of Skull Creek when one night

22 General Baylor was John A. Baylor. George Little had a ranch inside the bend of the river north of Columbus. Sam Allen was a Harris County rancher. All three were close friends of Bob Stafford. Charles Goodnight and Sam Maverick are well known. "Kind and Canady" may be meant to be Richard King and Mifflin Kenedy, the progenitors of the King Ranch. "Mark Childers" may be H. M. Childress, who is discussed by Joseph G. McCoy at the end of chapter 3 in his book *Historic Sketches of the Cattle Trade of the West and Southwest*. The others mentioned are otherwise unidentified.

23 These incidents actually occurred in July and August of 1876.

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Dock Stafford rode into our camp. His horse was wet with sweat and pawing and Dock was all blowed up (as cowboys say). Dock was not long in telling us the trouble. He said a runner had come from Eagle Lake and said the negroes was rising in the bottom and was killing all the white men and taking and was going to take the white women for their wives. Well, everybody was up and getting ready. It was a starlight night and all the horses were loose on the prairie. We only had two staked. They were soon saddled and two men out getting the ponies together. It was not long until the two men came back with a few ponies. We got our ropes and caught just any horse we could. All of us had pistols and three of the boys had Winchester rifles so we were soon on our way. We crossed the river at the Minter ford²⁴ and went through the bottom to Frazier's Store,²⁵ getting there about daylight. We found about thirty negroes around the store, all on horses, some with pistols, shotguns. Well, those that were able to get away was not long in doing so, but some of them had to be hauled away and will never return. We went to Uncle John Thatcher's²⁶ for breakfast. Some of the Eagle Lake people had joined us and we had quite a crowd - about twenty in number. After we had breakfast, one of the boys was sent out to bring in a fat calf. Uncle John T had a long pit dug and a wash pot put in shape to make coffee so this place was our headquarters. Mrs. Thatcher and two of the girls baked the bread so we had barbecued meat, coffee and bread.

We stayed in the bottom eleven days and nights and when we left to go back to our camp there was a few less negroes and better negroes. Bony Cotton, the negro that started the riot, was one of the last to take that trip from whence no traveler ever returns. Where the Frazier Store stood is now a sidetrack on the GC&SF [Gulf Colorado & Santa Fe] known as McDow. There is a few of the old

24 Probably a ford on Mentor Northington's ranch on the river south of Eagle Lake.

25 This name, which Thomas consistently misspells, ought to be Frazar's Store.

26 John Thatcher had a plantation near Mathews.

negroes living that often tell about the Stafford War and but two of the Stafford scouts living that I know of - one is Faber now with the Stowers Furniture Company of San Antonio and yours truly.

It is strange to say there was but one man wounded in the eleven days as we were told it was easier to care for the dead than for the wounded and I will state here how this came about. On our way back just as rode into the water on the east side of the river, we saw two negroes riding up the bank on the west side of the river. When the negroes saw us, they pulled out as fast as their horses could go and as you know a horse cannot make much time in water. About belly deep by this time, we crossed to the west side. The negroes was several hundred yards away but we opened up on them and they left their horses and took to the bottom but we found out after several days that one of the horses was shot in the hip and one of the negroes was shot in the leg. The shot negro was Wiley Balock and after that he became a preacher and is now living at Columbus. The other negro was Coope Swineck and died a few years ago and was conceded a good negro. So Balock was the only man wounded, the others that came up missing and are missing yet.²⁷

We were always ready at all time and to answer any and all calls. I remember one night that I was at Ben Stafford's and he came in and told us that some one had stolen Dick Jarmon's horse at Weimar. Next day I was sent to Uncle Dick Ratcliff's²⁸ on some kind of an errand and on

²⁷ The last "battle" in the Stafford War was on August 10, 1876. As Bob Stafford and his men were returning home, five armed black men ambushed them on the road. The Stafford party returned the fire. The ambushers suffered the only damage. One of them was wounded and one of their horses was killed. In all, eight black men, including Bony Cotton, are known to have been killed in the conflict, six in Wharton County and two in Colorado County. Apparently, no white men were either killed or wounded. This incident is completely distinct from an earlier, similar incident in 1873.

²⁸ Bob Stafford's mother's maiden name was Martha Ann Ratcliff, introducing the possibility that Dick Ratcliff was genuinely his, though not Thomas', uncle. Martha Ann Ratcliff had a brother named Richard Robert Redding Ratcliff (born February 20, 1818) who is buried in

A Sketch of My Life

my way I overtook a man riding along the road leading a sorry bald face mare. At a glance, I knew it was the Jarmon mare. I went on the Uncle Dick's and told him about the mare being stolen from Jarmon and that the man was coming along the road leading the mare. Uncle Dick said for me to go back at once and when I met the man to stop him and ask him what he paid Jarmon for the mare and if his explanation did not suit me just to take the mare back to the ranch with me. I took the mare back with me and Jarmon got his mare. A day or two later an old negro named Colman found a horse grazing around with a saddle and bridle on and a little later there was a man found at the Double Branche. It was always thought the horse had run away with the man and killed him against a tree and I am sure that is about the way it all happened. The old negro kept the horse as no one ever called for him.

Just before this a man by the name of Panka was killed by Suggs. Panka was on the dodge and there was a reward offered for him and Suggs killed him but never claimed the reward and it was well for him (Suggs) that he did not as Stafford was a friend of Panka's and if Suggs had owned to the killing, business would have picked up.

Now as I knew the range and all the brands of the cowmen and knew all the cowmen I was at home at any ranch and went where I please and if I got in trouble I would get out without any cost to myself so I had a big time. One summer I was sent out on the Salon near San Antonio to get a bunch of ponies. We bought these ponies from a woman named Hooper. While gathering these ponies I saw the only Bigfoot Wallis.²⁹ I drove the ponies back to the Ben Stafford Ranch on Crasco [Creek] near where the little town of Rock Island now stands and the next spring there was some excitement about me, and it all came about like this. All ponies brought in from the hills will try to go back to the western range in the spring. Now the ponies I had brought

Colorado County. One of his sons, Richard E. Ratcliff, is buried in the same cemetery.

²⁹ William "Big Foot" Wallace, a Texas soldier, Indian fighter, and Texas Ranger.

in that summer was divided up so to one ranch and to others, so Ben Stafford got several.

So, in the spring I was with Ben Stafford. One morning I went to hunt the horses, found them all but two so I struck out to find them. After going out as far as Sublime I found out the ponies had been seen going west. Sublime was about eighteen miles from the ranch and thinking I would overtake them just kept going until I got to Hallettsville. I had no money and my horse tired, I stopped for a rest. It was along in the evening, I had no breakfast, no dinner and was feeling hungry. I knew no one in the town so I was up against it. I had decided to rest awhile and start back to the ranch. I had tied my pony to a tree near a store. There was a sign on the side of the store (L. S. Pepper). When I saw the sign I remember of Dad speaking of L. S. Pepper and saying he was the Jew in the world so I went into the store and asked for Mr. Pepper. The man I spoke to was Mr. Pepper himself. I told him what I was doing. He gave me some cheese, crackers and sardines and had my horse fed and fixed a place for me to stay all night.

Next morning, he gave me \$3.00 and told me to try and overtake the ponies. I went from there to String Town, there I found one of the ponies in a man's lot. I left him there and went on to Cuero that night. When I had paid my stable bill and my lodging bill I was out of money and further from him, but when I led my horse out of the stable I told him what I was doing and he told me he had seen the horse I was after standing at the toll bridge at the river. I told him I was out of money but was a Stafford hand and if he would help me I would have Mr. Stafford send the money back to him. He not only gave me \$5.00 but sent a Mexican with me. We got to the river and the bridge tender said the pony had gone off down the river so I and my Mexican started down the river to what is known as the Clinton Bend. We not only found the pony I was hunting but found 34 others that had run off from time to time. I spent two days getting the ponies together then started for home. The Mexican came back with me as far as Hallettsville.

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Now there was no phones and all the mail was carried by stage and I could not write. Of course, the folks at the ranch did not know what had become of me. They had sent up to Dad's to see if I was there and the big hunt came off to find my carcass in some branch or hanging to a tree and as Dave Quick had been found dead, Panka found dead and the man that got Jarmon's mare found dead, they knew I was dead too. But the day I got back to Hallettsville, Mr. Pepper had written Dad that I had been there and sent him (Dad) the amount of money he had let me have. Then they knew if I was killed at all it was done farther off than they had been hunting but decided that I would show up at any time with the pony so one evening about sundown, I drove in with the two ponies and 34 others. I was noted for being the best horse hunter on the range and while could never spin a rope, I wore the spurs and leggings for the best roper on the range and when I quit the range in 1880, don't believe there was a horse living or ever lived that could throw me.

When I got back to the ranch, there I met Jeff Black - it was this Jeff Black and Andrew J. Walker that was accused of killing Green Butler. Butler was killed near Houston. Black and Walker was kept in jail at Galveston for several years and finally got bond and finally acquitted. Sam Allen, Sr., spent a great sum of money defending them. Jeff stayed around the ranch a long time but never amounted to much as he was afraid of every stranger and thought everybody wanted to kill him.

Ben Stafford moved from Crasco Ranch to the Pinchback Ranch and then I made that my home. It was there Ben Stafford and West Ratcliff was tried for the killing of Bill Guynn.³⁰ John Stafford, his home just at the edge of the timber three miles south of Columbus where his *illeg-*

³⁰ This was a different Bill Guynn from the one who married Kiddie Bridge. He was killed in a hunting accident in the summer of 1882. This other Bill Guynn was seen leaving Columbus in the company of Ben Stafford and Silas Wesley Ratcliff, another son of Richard Robert Reading Ratcliff, on the night of February 19, 1880. Guynn was found, shot to death, the next morning. Neither Stafford or Ratcliff was convicted of the murder.

ible) now lives (Mrs. Grace Byars) it here Warren Stafford was shot by a camper and the same night the camper was hanged to a tree near the road.³¹

John Stafford and Will Townsend left the country and went into Mexico and stayed about three years and came back, was tried and acquitted.³² Warren got well and lived for several years. Killed himself drinking and was the cause of his father's and uncle's death, both of whom was killed by the Hope brothers. None of the Staffords are left now, only the following: Mrs. Ike T. Pryor of San Antonio, daughter of Bob Stafford; Bill Stafford, son of Will Stafford; John and Charles Stafford and Whitt, Ben Stafford, Joe Stafford and Mrs. J. A. Harbert, son and daughter of John Stafford, Frank Stafford and Mrs. Iva McLoud, son and daughter of Dock Stafford. Dock Stafford's twin brother was killed by Milton Allen.³³ I lived with the Staffords from 1868 to 1880 and never paid for anything in the way of a saloon bill, barber bills or fines. Dad always paid the bill, big or little. I was taught never take any abuse off of anybody, never to run. I was taught how to use a six shooter and I was a pretty good shot. The last three years on the range, I spent with Ben Stafford and a better man I never know. When sober, he was a gentleman, when drinking very

31 On the night of December 27, 1882, Warren Stafford was shot in the shoulder while traveling to John Stafford's house for a party. Though seriously wounded, he managed to arrive at his uncle's house. His relatives were enraged by the attack and set out to avenge it. John and Will Stafford and a friend named Will Townsend cornered a man named J. W. Stidman and shot him as he tried to run. They then hung him and shot him several more times.

32 This does not seem to have been the case. Both John Stafford and Will Townsend were arrested for Stidman's murder shortly after the crime, but each posted a bond and was released. There is no evidence that they ever went to Mexico but if they did, they certainly did not stay three years. They dutifully reported to court at each of the several times they were arraigned over the next few years. After several continuances, the charges were dismissed in March, 1886.

33 Mrs. Ike T. Pryor's maiden name was Myra E. Stafford. John, Charles, and Whit Stafford were sons of Ben Stafford. Mrs. J. A. Harbert's maiden name was Carrie Stafford. "Iva McLoud" should be Ivy McLeod. Her maiden name was Martha Mabel Stafford. Doc Stafford's twin brother, Joseph Wiggins Stafford, died on May 29, 1870 near Oakland, Texas. He was twenty years old. No other account of his death has been found.

A Sketch of My Life

dangerous. Ben Stafford would have bet his last cent on my riding, roping, and shooting.

Sketch of Carlton's Negro Colony

Jim Carlton colonized a bunch of negroes out on Skull Creek about ten families. Carlton sold them the land and gave them all the time they wanted to pay for it. The land was very poor. This colony was just north of our Crasco Ranch. The negroes were a trifling set and would steal cattle and anything else to eat. Sy Harvy was one of the leaders. He had one son, Sy, Jr., and stepson, Peter Mitter. Peter was a very biggity negro.

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Cow Man of the Old School

Reminiscences of Charlie Hillboldt

In 1939, eighty-one year old cattleman Charles S. Hillboldt of Sealy visited Bruce McCarty, the editor of the Eagle Lake Headlight, in his business offices. McCarty extracted a few reminiscences from the old man and ran them, with a few interjections of his own, in his edition of March 3, 1939. They are reproduced here without the interjections.

I was twelve years old the first time I rode horseback into Eagle Lake, a barefoot boy. There wasn't much Eagle Lake then, just a house or two, for that was seventy years ago [about 1870]. There wasn't a fence from the Millheim community to the bottom farming section south of Eagle Lake. Down in the bottoms they had board fences around their farm lands.

All cattle were on free range and spring round ups were big events. Naturally, these round ups covered a wide territory, but the stockmen usually maintained the same meeting or centralizing point from year to year. After a few round ups, most of this stock would eventually, sooner or later, come back to this centralizing point of the round up, after having wandered for miles and miles and in all directions. With so much open range it was queer why they did it, but they did. An old range cow, you know, has got some mighty queer traits.

Winters were hard and cold back in the old days. We just don't have those sudden blue whistler northers, freezing almost by the time they hit, like we did back forty, fifty, sixty years ago.

When those cold, freezing winds struck, cattle started milling - drifting with the wind - drifting all the way from the Millheim range in Austin County to what we knew then as Montgomery's Bend on the Colorado River, ten or

twelve miles south of Eagle Lake in Colorado County. There, in the thick woods, they found protection from the weather and thousands of head - probably because they couldn't go any further on account of the river. Even the old milk cows would join with the range herd and make this long trek, with their tails to the wind, always. Just as long as an old cow can keep moving, she won't freeze. When the blizzard broke and the weather began to moderate, this stock gradually worked back to the grazing grounds.

Then came a new day, for this country was becoming more thickly settled. Homes were being built here and there, and wire fences were enclosing many of the pastures, pasture land with water, that had always been free range. So, cow men had to arrange for their own grazing lands. But we still had a few extremely cold winters after the fences had been built and when the old blue whistler hit with its icy blasts, cattle drifted as far as they could. Fences stopped them and along these fence lines would be great heaps of dead stock, frozen to death. Of course, stockmen then had begun to feed their cattle through the cold, wet weather, but just the same we don't have as cold northers to sweep across the South Texas prairies like we did back in the old days.

Pioneer Days When Sturdy Men Laid Strong Foundations

Recollections of Dr. Benjamin Harris Neal

Dr. Benjamin Harris Neal, who was born in England and died in Texas in 1923 at the age of 95, lived in Frelsburg and served that community as a physician for more than fifty years. He came to America in 1855 in search of a long lost uncle. His uncle had left for California during the great gold rush of 1849 in hopes of finding a fortune. Dr. Neal intended to go to California after him, but never got there. In 1917, he told the story of his early days in Texas to a Galveston Daily News reporter named S. M. Lesesne. Lesesne ran the story in the June 25, 1917 edition of that newspaper.

Landing in Galveston I called upon the British consul and related to him the facts and purpose of my visit to America. He took me and introduced me to Dr. Ashbel Smith, whom the consul said could tell me more about California than any other man in Texas. I made known to Dr. Smith the object of my mission and he was quick to manifest an interest in it and tendered me any assistance he could render me in the matter.

I told him it was my intention to go to San Francisco to learn, if possible, if my uncle had ever reached California and where he was or what had been his fate. He said I was entirely too young and green to go out there among the rough outlaws and lawless people that were flocking there in search of gold; that he knew parties to whom he would write and get them to gather the information I desired, if it could be had. I took his advice and he wrote many letters, but we never did hear of my uncle after he sailed from England. At that time it took fully three weeks for a letter and the reply to pass between Galveston and San Francisco. This correspondence lasted some time, and

between letters I made frequent short visits to inland towns and communities. I fell in love with Texas and when we abandoned all hope of getting any trace of my uncle's whereabouts or his fate, I decided to make my home in Texas.

When I left England, I had no just conception of Texas, nor of the people and the conditions that would greet me on my arrival. I expected to see well dressed people and find a thoroughly organized city, with fine streets and handsome homes and elegant public buildings, such as I had been accustomed to seeing in my mother country. The Gulf of Mexico was not yet rid of pirates and a large part of the population of Galveston was made up of Cubans. The city was a mere spot on a low, sandy island, with streets of deep sand, no sidewalks, and the houses made largely of flotsam and jetsam. I thought it was the most desolate place I had ever seen. If you could have seen the style in which I was dressed, you would readily understand why Dr. Smith thought I was too "green" to go to California. I was rigged out in the finest of toggery and when I would make my appearance upon the street, in an office, or other place of business, I was an object of curiosity, if not of bewilderment. Take a mental picture of my habiliments and contrast them with those of the rough and rugged but honest, generous and kind-hearted Texans among whom I had to mingle and you will understand how my appearance upon the streets attracted the attention of men, women, and children. I wore a silk beaver, sixteen inches high, a fine broadcloth Prince Albert suit, fine calfskin boots, a snow- white collar, and a silk necktie. My dress was as common in England as the coonskin cap, hickory shirt, buckskin pants, and yellow moccasins in Texas. I gave that old silk beaver to an old darky preacher who lives in Colorado County and he still wears it.

The Tremont Hotel, at which I boarded, was an old frame building with two rooms above and two below, and was run by a Cuban lady. When I went there to secure board she met me at the stair steps and she was smoking a

very large and long cigar that was as black as my hat.

After a sojourn of three months in Galveston, I went to Brazoria County to visit my wife's uncle, William Lee. I made my home there until the outbreak of the Civil War, practicing medicine and teaching private school. At that time, Anthony Winston, who was state senator, and other planters, employed me to teach and prepare their children for entering the high school at Independence. As I remember, this was the only high school in Texas.

When I went to Brazoria there were more English, Irish, and Scotch than any other people. The English came as teachers and scattered among the planters. The Irish were employed as ditchers and the Scotch and Welsh as mechanics. The wages of mechanics was \$5 per day. A blacksmith would go from plantation to plantation, doing such work as he could find. There was not a buggy in Texas when I came. The ladies rode on horseback or on home made cane carts. The wheels were sawed from large cottonwood trees. These vehicles were generally pulled by mules.

While staying in Galveston, I became acquainted with General [Sam] Houston in the home of A. Smith and we remained fast friends until his death. I also met Governor [Elisha M.] Pease and many of the other noted Texans shortly after my arrival. I found them to be great men who could be easily approached. When I established my home in Brazoria County the country lying beyond Independence was regarded as a vast wilderness.

I went from Galveston to West Columbia and rented for my dwelling the old building which the government of the Republic of Texas had used for its capitol. I lived in it three years, paying as rent \$5 per month. While this now seems to be a remarkably cheap rent to pay for the use of a state capitol, this fact is not without interest in that it also recalls the simplicity of democracy and the facility with which it can meet, face, and overcome dangers and emergencies with an empty treasury and no national credit, while menaced with domestic dissensions and foreign foes. One of my children was born in this old capitol building and two

died in it. The two that died were laid to rest under the grand old live oaks under whose friendly shades the congress of the Republic sometimes held its sessions. Many of the Texas soldiers were also buried under these oaks.

On a log on a bank of the Brazos River I have often sat with Gail Borden of "condensed milk" fame, and discussed the future of Texas. He favored annexation and I contended that it should remain a republic under the protection of England. I used to discuss and argue the same question with A. Smith and also with General Houston sometimes. The three were always against my contentions on this subject. Gail Borden and myself used to be partners in subscribing for *The Galveston News*. The price was \$5 a year and each of us paid \$2.50.

Texas was then full of meat and the old settlers could frequently kill deer and turkeys from their yards and galleries. They never sold beef when one was killed. They divided it among the neighbors, only selling the hide and using the tallow for making candles. The business houses of R. & D. G. Mills of Galveston and T. W. House of Houston were the two great financial and mercantile establishments of Texas - one of these cities was then a sand mound and the other a mud hole. When I came to Texas lots on Market Street in Galveston were staked out in water. Many of the ladies were wearing russet shoes made out of dressed deer skins. Many of the big planters along the Brazos and "Old Caney" [Creek] - Colonel [John L.] Thorp, Captains [John] Rugeley and [John] Duncan, Major [George John] Bowie and others - used to take their wagons and go on a camp hunt in the bottoms along these streams on Friday afternoons. Saturday night they would return, bringing large supplies of deer and bear meat for feeding their slaves. I guess I have seen as many as a thousand wild hogs in one day in the cane brakes and bottoms along Caney Creek. I once stood in the old capitol at Columbia and killed seven sandhill cranes at one shot. In those eventful years our daily menu consisted very largely of corn bread, beef, and game.

The community nearly always celebrated the

historic fourth of July with a fish fry or by starting a camp meeting either of which was regarded as an important and highly enjoyable neighborhood function. They were usually held at either Cedar Lake, between the Brazos and Bernard Rivers, or at Live Oak Lake on Caney. Everybody attended and the camp meeting would last several days. While those old-timers had their trials and tribulations, they always managed to find some time for getting some real pleasure and enjoyment out of life. The moss hung from the branches of the large trees on the banks and around the margins of these lakes in such great folds that, whether riding or walking, you had to push it out of your way before you could pass through these jungles. It was in these places where the deer, bear, and wild hogs sought safety when they were being chased and it was not a difficult matter for skilled hunters to keep the campers abundantly supplied with the meat of one or of all three of these animals. Texas was more democratic then than now and everybody who was upright and honorable in conduct was given a welcome at these meetings.

I went from my home in the old statehouse as a private in the army of the confederacy. I became a member of the company of which John A. Wharton was elected captain and Clint Terry first lieutenant. Afterward I was transferred to the medical department and assigned to duty in the regiment of which Joseph Bates was colonel. After the close of the war I removed to Colorado County. I found our institutions upturned and conditions oppressively demoralized and distressing. The provost marshal disfranchised me because I had not been reconstructed to suit him.

For many years I was very much dissatisfied with the misrule to which we had to submit, but there was no escaping the inevitable and by degrees I became satisfied. Knowing the country in pioneer days and seeing it pass through wars and trials and privations of various kinds with its unsurpassed recuperative endowments, my fascination for it has never waned, but has grown with the coming and going of the years.

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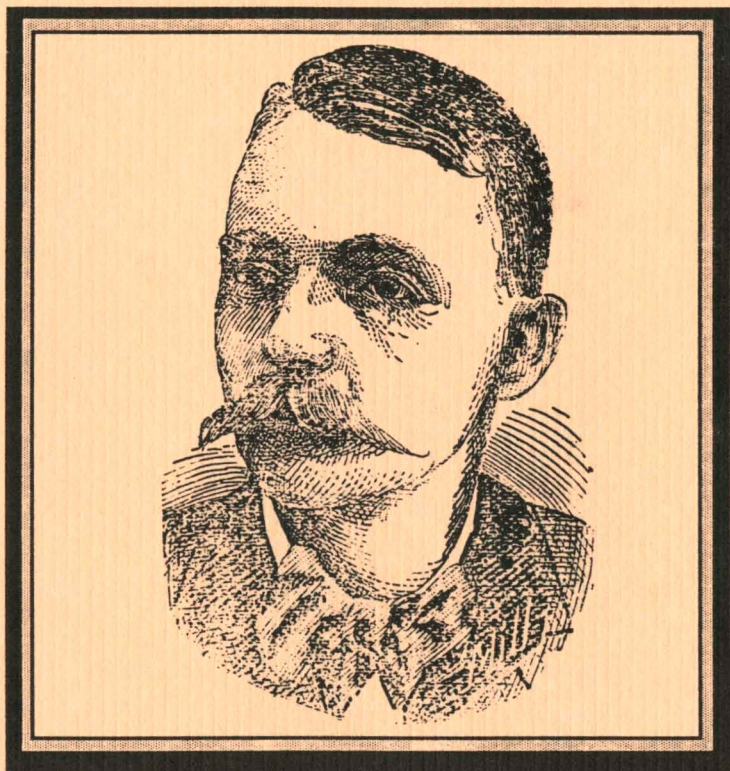
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