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Wyoming Folklore

COLLECTED BY THE FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT

*Reminiscences,
Folktales, Beliefs,
Customs, and
Folk Speech*

*Edited by James R. Dow,
Roger L. Welsch,
and Susan D. Dow*

*Introduction by James R. Dow
and Roger L. Welsch*

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS • LINCOLN & LONDON

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Introduction

Folklore is not history, but a good deal of folklore is historical, and only the most self-assured sophomore is able to draw without question the line between the two disciplines and between the two bodies of information. This volume contains a good bit of historical fact, included by the editors to provide a matrix for the folkloric data which is of main concern. We will start by briefly surveying the panorama of Wyoming history in order to set the scene for all of the state's folklore.

The state's history begins with the rich culture of the Native Americans, although there is some speculation, best expressed in Henriette Mertz's book, *Pale Ink* [Chicago: Swallow Press, 1972], that in the dim past the east slope of the Rockies in Wyoming was explored by the Chinese! But the bulk of that history has been lost or destroyed to the white man's shame and to the sorrow of us all.

In 1743 the Verendryes and their party were the first white visitors to travel as far as the Big Horn Mountains, and in 1803 that same virtually unexplored country became the pig-in-the-poke of the Louisiana Purchase. It is hard to imagine the mountains of Wyoming as a peripheral bargain tossed in along with New Orleans, but that was indeed the case.

In 1806 John Colter was the first native-born American, other than the Native Americans, to enter the present boundaries of Wyoming. It was during this or the next year that he tried to describe the land to his cronies in St. Louis, and failed so miserably that they thought him mad. Once his discovery was proven to be real, it was called "Colter's Hell," and then later "Yellowstone Park."

The first resident of the Big Horn Basin, Edward Rose, moved in 1807, and by 1809 eastern Wyoming was under heavy exploitation by fur trappers, who sought especially the heavy beaver furs of the higher altitudes. As a part of that same interest in furs John Jacob Astor sent Wilson Price Hunt across the state in 1812.

1812 saw Robert Stuart and his party discover the South Pass, and ten years later General William Ashley established his trading post on the Yellowstone River. Perhaps Ashley's greatest contribution to Wyoming's history and folklore was that he brought with him the legendary Jim Bridger, whose biography rivals his own tall tales.

In 1827 ironically and symbolically, the first wheeled vehicle to cross through the South Pass was a four-pound cannon (the first wagon didn't enter the state until 1829, a mere twenty years before the Oregon Trail guided thousands of wheeled vehicles through that same pass).

Kit Carson, a living legend of the West, visited Wyoming in 1830, and in 1842 John C. Fremont passed through Wyoming while surveying the West for a chain of military posts designed to open the area for expansion. Fort Bridger was established that same year. In 1843 Fort Bridger was opened for trade and Fremont crossed the Laramie Plains on his second expedition.

In 1846 President Polk approved the plan to establish a series of forts along the great trail route. In 1847 the first Mormon migrants, under Brigham Young, crossed the state on their way to New Zion (Salt Lake City), establishing en route the Platte River ferry near Fort Casper. As part of this plan the United States government purchased Fort Laramie in 1849 for four thousand dollars.

The famous Gratten Massacre, the beginning of a long, painful, and sordid series of Plains Indian wars, occurred near Fort Laramie in 1854 over an old Mormon cow. In reality it was not the cow that triggered the wars but the crossing of a "pain threshold," for it was clear to the Indians that the pressures of settlement were their doom. In the seasons of 1858 and 1859 sixteen million pounds of freight passed through Wyoming on the way to Utah on the Oregon Trail.

In 1860 the short-lived Pony Express crossed Wyoming on the way to the west coast—"short lived" because in 1861 the transcontinental telegraph line was completed across the state.

The Indian troubles increased throughout this period as the pressures increased on the Plains tribes. The troops extended their occupation area and became ever more savage in their attitudes, culminating in the infamous Sand Creek, Colorado Massacre in 1864 and the Fetterman Massacre of 1866.

1867 saw the founding of the city of Cheyenne and the County of Laramie (by the Dakota Legislature). The Union Pacific pressed into Wyoming that same year and the Indians continued to resist with the much romanticized and overplayed Wagon Box Fight in the Big Horns. Estimates of Indians killed ranged from six to 1,500.

1868 marked a turning point in Wyoming history, for treaties were signed with the Sioux, Crow, and Arapaho at Fort Laramie and the Bannock and Eastern Shoshone at Fort Bridger. The Shoshone Reservation was established, and on July 25 Congress established the Territory of Wyoming.

The first Territorial Legislature met on October 12, 1869 and on December 10 of the same year the Legislature enacted the radically innovative bill of women's suffrage, the first in the nation. Also in 1869 the Union Pacific Railway was completed across the state.

Wyoming's progressive attitudes toward women continued in 1870 with the appointment of Esther Morris as the nation's first female justice of the peace. That same year the first homestead was proved up. The census listed Wyoming's population as 9,118.

Despite the state's modest population count it continued to be innovative on the national scene: Yellowstone was designated the first national park in 1872, four years before General George Armstrong Custer led his troops through northern Wyoming on his way to a fateful battle on the Little Big Horn.

The national census of 1880 listed the state's population as 20,789, which was twice what it had been a decade earlier, but still less than any eastern city, a condition that remains unchanged.

On September 6, 1887 the University of Wyoming was opened, and in November of 1889 the state constitution was adopted.

The population tripled during the decade and the 1890 census listed 62,553 citizens of the state, and in 1890 Wyoming was admitted into the Union. On October 14 Francis E. Warren, the last territorial governor, was installed as the first state governor. It was during this same year that the last of the vital Plains Indian bands was butchered at Wounded Knee. The Pennsylvania Oil and Gas Company brought in Wyoming's first oil well in the Shoshone field of the Salt Creek District in 1890 as well.

By 1892 the white man focused his attention away from the Indians and toward killing himself in the ignominious Johnson County Cattle War, and in 1895 a major oil refinery was built in Casper, where the industry still prospers.

The state was still young in 1900 when the national census listed the population of Wyoming as 92,531. The year 1906 marks a milestone of sorts for the state, for it was then that the Devil's Tower was established as a national monument—and the state had its first automobile accident.

By 1910 the state's population was up to 145,965, which was still less than two people per square mile, concentrated primarily in the east and south. The wilderness, it appears, dominated, for the State Guide's singular entry for 1913 reads, "A wolf is trained to carry mail over deep snows."

In 1920 the state's population had again increased substantially to 194,531, and the state continued its progressive attitudes by electing Nellie Taylor Ross, the nation's first female governor, in 1924; in 1933 she was appointed the director of the United States Mint, and was the first woman to hold that post.

In 1930 the state's population had grown to 225,565—215,000 more than sixty years before! The scene was set for the Dust Bowl, the Great Depression, the New Deal, the Works Progress Administration, and the Federal Writers Project.

The Federal Writers Project (FWP), directed on the national level by Henry G. Alsger, was a part of the larger Works Progress Administration (WPA) and like it was designed to put America's unemployed—in this case, writers—to work. Franklin Roosevelt issued an Executive order in 1935 initiating the system of field offices and workers. Its short, frantic history was to be simultaneously gloriously productive and painfully frustrating, and as is always the case with governmental projects, the FWP's supporters primarily saw its strengths while its detractors were blinded by its inadequacies. As is also usually the case, the truth was somewhere in between.

For example, anti-intellectual congressmen saw the FWP as an idle exercise at a time when the country was in need of substantive work,

and they pointed to the Federal Writers Project folklore questionnaires, which included such items as “animal lore—how the bear lost its tail,” as prime evidence. Even today that would seem a frivolous pursuit to many people, and yet, the FWP workers collected tales, songs, customs, proverbs, and beliefs that can no longer be found today and would be totally lost if it were not for those questionnaires and the workers who used them. Whether that is indeed idle or useful is a matter of values.

It was also in the period immediately preceding the Second World War that political reaction became a congressional watchword. There was thus a constant barrage of charges that the FWP staff was saturated with Communists. There can be little doubt that those charges were sometimes accurate, but it is also clear that many congressmen and bureaucrats confused “intellectual” with “subversive.”

In addition to these external attacks there were many internal problems—for example, the fact that the principal qualification for those who sought work with the Project was that they had to be officially poor. At least ninety percent of the staff had to come from the relief roles. This meant that the most successful authors in America were not eligible; many others might have been but would not admit their poverty.

In spite of these ponderous handicaps the Project’s ten thousand workers produced 120 publications in less than eight full years of effort. When the Project closed in 1942 as a result of the combined pressures of the growing war effort and increasing political attacks, it had generated a magnificent series of public service publications, notably the state guides, many of which are still in print today, seventy years later. As flawed as they might have been, nothing better has come along in the seven decades since their production.

Even more important perhaps are the thousands upon thousands of files the state offices left behind, unpublished. They lie in library basements, in historical society archives, even lost in government storage buildings. These raw data represent the most thorough survey of American culture ever attempted. Now, three quarters of a century after they were collected, the materials are still capturing the attention of scholars.

This is, in part, due to the timing of the Project—in 1935 it was still possible to interview Civil War veterans and former slaves, Homesteaders and Oregon Trailers, Indians who remembered the Little Big Horn and horse traders who had plied their trade in the days before the automobile complicated everything.

In the case of folklore, the FWP collections take on even more luster because the directors of the national program worked extensively with John Lomax, who was an experienced and accomplished field worker in folklore, especially folk music. Later, Benjamin Botkin, a major figure in American folklore studies, brought to the folklore project new expertise in urban and contemporary lore. Bearing in mind the economic restrictions of the Depression, the stifling atmosphere of the political situation nationally and internationally, and the difficulties stemming from an untrained and demoralized staff, the accomplishments of the FWP are astonishing.

A good deal has been made by modern folklorists of the techniques used by the FWP field workers. In all fairness it must be remembered that the FWP staff members, with rare exceptions, were not professional folklorists before they found themselves working with folklore. In most cases they had not originally been concerned with folklore even in an amateur capacity. With that fact in mind, one must admit that the quality of the collection is extraordinary. Substantial credit for the relatively high quality of the folklore collection must go to Lomax and Botkin for their direction and the questionnaires that guided the workers in the field. The general format was a checklist, a listing of the kinds of items the fieldworker was to search for, such as animal tales, cures and magic remedies, death and burial customs, folk games and dances, jokes, legends, nicknames, proverbs and sayings, superstitious beliefs, signs for planting, weather beliefs and meanings, wishes, etc.

In some folklore areas the questionnaires were more specific and could serve as a direct field sheet that could then be filed only as raw data. The following is a sample questionnaire used to establish a file on Wyoming place names.

QUESTIONNAIRE ON WYOMING PLACE NAME ORIGINS

County:

Date:

Worker:

Address:

- 1a. Name of place:
- 1b. By underscoring one of the following terms indicate whether the place is a county, city, village, town, township, post office, old post office, ghost town, river, creek, butte:
2. For whom named? (If for an individual, give his or her full name or initials, identity and title, if any: as, Capt., Dr., Etc:
3. Resident of the community? If not, give address at time of naming:
4. Give his or her connection with the place; as, businessman, officer of a land-holding company, railway employee or official:
5. If place was named for another place, give name and address of latter:
6. If named for neither person nor place, give history and reason for naming (such as coined names) and date of naming:
7. Give full name or initials of person or persons who selected the name and give community connections:
8. Was there an earlier name or names? If so, what?
9. Origin of or reasons for earlier names, if any:
10. Reason for change of name:
11. For cities, towns, or villages, give the following additional information (this does not apply to extinct post offices or ghost towns):

Population:

Altitude (ft.):

Date settled:

State whether incorporated as a city, town, or village:

Date of incorporation:

Give names of railroads (Specify if main or branch lines) that enter the town:

Official number of highways (State, county, or U.S.):

12. Sources of Information (individuals or publications):

13. Remarks:

Use reverse side for additional information.

Of course, the effectiveness of each state's project depended in large part on the skill and enthusiasm of its staff and the general attitudes of the region toward folklore. Wyoming gets mixed marks in both categories. In his eminently readable history of the Federal Writers Project, *The Dream and the Deal* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1973), Jerry Mangione writes:

In Wyoming, as in many other states, the hostility of the citizenry toward the WPA and the Writers' Project was often an obstacle. There was a deep resentment that the government should be using taxpayers' money to pay salaries to writers. The term "writer" coupled with "WPA" connoted everything that the New Deal haters considered scurrilous about the Roosevelt administration. During the fact-gathering trips the Wyoming director and her husband made around the state, she discovered that, invariably, she would be rebuffed if she identified herself as a member of the Writers' Project. Once she hit on the ruse of representing herself as a writer for the Wyoming Stockman Farmer, a magazine to which she had contributed, she had no further difficulty.

Moreover, Wyoming's staff, unlike Nebraska's for example, had little taste or interest for folklore and suffered the same kinds of attack that were the custom in Washington. Again, from Mangione's *The Dream and the Deal*:

In some states the instructions were received with derision. "We simply could not believe our eyes," recalled Agnes Wright Spring, the former director of the Wyoming Project. "None of us had ever thought much about folklore and when we received an index to folklore subjects listing 'Animal behaviors and meanings, such as a rooster crowing, dog barking, cattle lowing, etc.,' we thought it was the biggest piece of malarkey we'd ever seen." One of her former colleagues, Cal Williams, who had resigned from the Project to work

for the Republican Party, happened to see the folklore instructions and used them to sneer at the New Deal. An editorial he wrote for the Wyoming Tribune began: “The Roosevelt administration is doing things no other administration has ever thought of,” and continued: “Animal behavior is being studied intensely and before long our people will know why a rooster crows and a dog barks. . . . Briefly the big idea is this: There is no end to the work to be done—there is no limit to the money it will cost. Boondoggling must go on and you must pay the bill.

It is difficult at the distance of three quarters of a century to judge the competency of the Wyoming staff but there are subtle implications that it suffered from the same kinds of problems that Mangione documents for other state organizations. A glaring example of the kind of boondoggling that put incompetent workers into key positions only on the basis of influence is suggested by a small office note attached to one of the Wyoming folklore documents that is riddled with misspellings, faulty constructions, and downright shattered prose:

Checked for accuracy by Ellen Spear Edwards

Title: Daughter of the late Hon. Willis M. Spear

Despite these obvious problems the Wyoming collection is a rich repository of folkloric data, requiring only the most perfunctory sorting once the six bulging WPA file cabinets and the random materials of thirteen dusty boxes stored in the basement of the Wyoming State Archives and Historical Department had been thoroughly searched. The collection was not as rich or as “pure” as one might like, but most assuredly it was better than many other similar collections.

The editors, James R. Dow, Roger L. Welsch, and Susan Dow came to the Wyoming Federal Writers Project files from different directions. Welsch, who taught folklore in the English Department of the University of Nebraska, had written *The Treasury of Nebraska Pioneer Folklore*, published in 1966 by the University of Nebraska Press and based on Nebraska’s FWP files. He had found that state’s files to be a wealth of folklore materials and had based two other books on the material and

had been casting about for other similar collections in neighboring states. Dow, a German linguist and a trained folklorist at Iowa State University at Ames, had previously been on the faculty of the University of Wyoming, so it was logical that the subject of the Wyoming FWP files should come up in a conversation between Dow and Welsh at a meeting of the American Folklore Society. There was a collaboration made to order: Dow had surveyed and culled the Wyoming files under a grant from Iowa State University but had found himself in an academic schedule that made further processing impossible; Welsh had just finished a book on tall-tale postcards and was ready to begin another project. Susan Dow helped select the items to be included and edited the manuscript. Thus the concept of this book came to be.

While the editors will not—need not—apologize for the materials included here anymore than the scientist needs to apologize for the personality of the phenomena he studies, it may help the reader to understand the nature of the materials included, and to know the processes of selections through which they have passed. It must first be realized that the material reproduced on these pages is not at all the sum total of Wyoming's folklore, nor of the Wyoming FWP files.

First there was the selection process exercised by the Federal Writers Project field workers in Wyoming. As Mangione stated above, they were not particularly interested in folklore and so the data collected are far less than they were, for example, in Nebraska, where enthusiasm ran high, largely because of the able work of accomplished folklorists like Louise Pound and Lowry Wimberly. Wyoming had no such professional folklorists. Moreover, the Wyoming workers seem to have been drawn to legend, local and oral history, and pioneer reminiscences, rather than to songs, traditional beliefs, or foodways. Nothing can now be done about such gaps in the basic materials; the alternative, which has been chosen here, is to take advantage of the strengths of the collection rather than lamenting the weaknesses. It is conceivable that, given more than its meager seven and one-half years, the Wyoming project would have developed a comprehensive collection but the abrupt termination of the program exercised an arbitrary selection process on the Wyoming fieldwork: whatever had not yet been collected was not to be collected.

In much the same way the youth of Wyoming as a state exerted a powerful restriction on the development of folklore there. Tradition does not require a specific amount of time to grow and yet it is clear that time is directly related to that development and the accumulation of a body of lore.

A function of the same factor is population. One of the results of Wyoming's youth and of its geography (which is in part also a factor of its youth) is the state's low population density, which may in turn have its effects on the density of folklore.

A further factor in every state's collection was the very nature of the fieldworker. Germans from Russia in Nebraska maintain a close, closed society; there were few German-Russian field workers, and therefore there was little collection of German-Russian folklore materials. The same must be said of the Indians in Wyoming; there were no Indian FWP workers and so little authentic Indian data were collected and those that were collected were filtered through a series of white mentalities.

Finally, there is no way for us to know how complete the basic files are now. Seventy years is not a long time, but there have been several intervening wars and thousands of disinterested bureaucrats. The editors found several obvious gaps in the Wyoming files and there could certainly have been more where the discontinuity was not apparent.

In addition to the historical filters, the ethnic skew, the fieldwork biases, and the physical influences on the collected material, some selective influences have been exerted on the FWP materials. It will help the reader understand Wyoming folklore to keep in mind the rationale for all of these selections.

The first level of selection was done by James Dow, and then by Susan Dow, who used a very broad discretion and tended to include material even if there was any question attached to it. Welsh then screened the texts several more times, applying several additional criteria: initially he omitted materials that represent "high" culture, i.e., literature, whether popular or elitist. Newspaper accounts and personal reminiscences were included where they seem to occupy the margin between history and folklore or where they provide background and context for the folklore texts. Wyoming texts that are common to other areas or that are readily

available in print elsewhere were screened out next. For example, the slim file folder of folksongs offered nothing that could not be found in any number of previously published collections and therefore were not included in this volume in order to concentrate on prose narratives. Finally, while a few of the texts tell of a Wyoming citizen's adventures in another state or begin or end outside the political boundaries of the present state of Wyoming, the focus of the final selections is clearly on Wyoming. It should be noted, however, that only a few texts were excluded on the basis of this consideration. It was clear that the Wyoming workers had used the same criteria in their own collecting.

Two final points must be made, one for the professional folklorist and one for the nonprofessional reader. The folklorist will understand that the data printed here are, in every case, a written record of what various people—from cowhands to penniless FWP workers to folklore scholars—have conceived to be the folklore of the state of Wyoming. It was recorded mostly by nonprofessionals who worked from a guide list and their own biases, of course, which were often extremely romanticized. They did not have tape recorders, they recorded minimal biographical data, and they were obviously totally unaware and unconcerned with questions of “texture, text, and context,” “storytelling events,” structural typologies, and folklore as “performance.” For much of contemporary folklore research the data presented here then are minimally useful, exactly because none of the research orientations just listed were used. Nevertheless, the FWP collections are substantial and need to be published (and thus subjected to active criticism). They often represent, as in the case of Wyoming, the only systematic surveying of the folklore of a state or region, and they stand as something of a monument to both the only direct involvement the U.S. government had ever had in folklore up to that point and to the hundreds and thousands of people who worked at recording what they and their informants felt to be the folklore of their state. For most readers such statements as the preceding ones may well appear to be meaningless professional jargon. To the folklorist it is necessary for putting the research data into its proper perspective.

The other point to be made concerns materials in the texts as they were recorded by the FWP workers. There is no question that some

of the characteristics of the Wyoming collection are offensive when judged by contemporary standards. Paternalistic or even openly prejudiced attitudes toward Wyoming Indians and African Americans, for example, are especially troublesome to the editors of this volume, but it would constitute a serious and unnecessary compromise of the folklore to “clean up” the texts. It is therefore necessary for the modern reader to exercise maturity and to view the implicit slurs as cultural indicators of seventy years ago. They do not represent the attitudes of the editors or the publisher.

Where it is clear that the stylistic anomalies—misspellings, faulty or confusing constructions, gratuitous commentary, conclusions, or stylistic remarks—are the work of the FWP workers rather than an integral part of the actual texts, they have been omitted or corrected. Where, on the other hand, such problems seem to be a part of the actual text, they have been left as is. Nor has there been any attempt to regularize the style or format of the texts, which display differences that result from the fact that they were collected and transcribed from different sources by different workers in different areas at different times. Such changes would constitute an unnecessary compromise.

No book is the result of only its writers, and nowhere is that more true than in the case of folklore. The editors therefore offer their sincere and profound gratitude to the following: Professor Wayland D. Hand (of UCLA), who originally inspired James Dow to undertake this research; Katherine Halverson and her staff at the Wyoming State Archives and Historical Department, who enthusiastically aided the search for, then good-naturedly stood aside and let Dow plow through, all the WPA materials stored in Cheyenne. Finally, we thank the numerous people of the state of Wyoming who served as FWP workers and as informants to the project. It is their folklore.

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I

Pioneer Memories

“Oral history” was an unfamiliar phrase to the Federal Writers Project workers (and unfortunately, still is to many of today’s academic historians), but that is precisely what they were collecting when they interviewed old-timers and copied down in their notepads, with the greatest accuracy they could exercise, the pioneer accounts of what it was indeed like during the years of territorial exploration and settlement. Because of the incredible but dubiously benevolent advance of technology during the past seven decades, we have come to think of those years as being but distant memories, almost prehistoric. But we are today, in reality, only a few generations removed from homesteading, and when these materials were being collected in the late 1930s, the memories of the settlement of the Wyoming Territory were still vivid in the minds of many.

It is to the inestimable credit of the Federal Writers Project administrators (and the eternal thanks of these editors!) that the work of the agency was not simply directed toward further investigation of governors, railroad magnates, and other prominent historical figures, but concentrated instead on the accumulation of information from the very people who had lived the history directed by the governors and magnates—the pioneers themselves.

Here, by including in this collection some of the excerpts from the interviews, we can better understand not only the history of Wyoming but also the folklore that sprang from (and sometimes gave birth to) that history. Perhaps by virtue of the folklore, readers will be able to understand more clearly both the economic and political history of Wyoming as well as its common-man history.

The selections we have included are, above all, restricted by the limited selection of materials in the FWP files—and now, of course, the sources of these transcriptions are no longer available to us. We would have preferred to have interviews with trappers, prospectors Shoshones, or shepherders, but those choices are simply not available. The glimpse we will have of Wyoming’s pioneer life then will include a story of three cowboys on the trail in 1879, a hair-raising episode from a frontier wife’s life, two examples of frontier originals, a conversation with an Indian chief, and finally, some fine-grained anecdotes.

1 Cowboy Days with the Old Union Cattle Company

Life Notes of Thomas Richardson.

In 1884 my father decided that he had had enough of the Niobrara [River] (in northwestern Nebraska). Mostly, we had known hard times, strife, and disappointment there. In June we loaded up two covered wagons and started out on a long trek to find a new location.

We traveled south to Kearney, Nebraska, and went on into Kansas and Colorado along the Republican River. That country was similar to the Niobrara, so we returned to Kearney and spent the winter. On the first of April, 1885, we resumed our wandering, but headed north that time, traveling up the UP [Union Pacific] Railroad through Cheyenne and Laramie until we came to Rock Springs. We crossed the LaBonte Mountains and came down on the Platte River at old Fort Fetterman. From there we turned north and came through Buffalo towards the Pumpkin Buttes and looked the Belle Fourche Country over, but my father could not find a location to suit him. Either the water was scanty or bad or something was the matter, so we kept right on traveling east through Sundance onto the head of Stockade Beaver Creek to the L. A. K. Ranch. Bill Smith ("Elk Mountain" Smith), who had been our neighbor on the Niobrara, had come to this country before us and was then nicely settled on a ranch at Elk Mountain. We decided to look him up and pulled on about eight miles farther to Elk Mountain.

In that vicinity our journey ended, for at last we had found the ideal location for which we had searched so long. In all our journeying we had not seen anything better than this. A huge spring gushed forth a stream of water large enough to take (care) of a thousand head of cattle, and there was grass and pasture land galore. There we set about building up a ranch.

For a couple of years I stayed at home and helped my father but I had always dreamed of becoming a cowboy and working on the great roundups. This was a wonderful stock country then. It was all one, big,

open pasture with a luxuriant growth of grass and water in nearly every draw. There were cattle droves everywhere, it seemed, in the little valleys and scattered all over the hills. Many big outfits ran cattle over the far-flung range that as yet knew very few fences. One of the largest outfits was the Union Cattle Company that was formed (by) the merger of three big ranches, the S & G, the Bridle Bit, and the 70s.

On the 4th day of May I went to work for the Union Company. My first job with the outfit was far from the exciting life that I had pictured. Some of us younger men were detailed to roll wire in the mud. If there is one thing a cowhand hates it is riding or making any kind of fence. We loafed on the job until the boss came and gave us “thunder.” He sent us to the bunkhouse and we thought sure we were going to get our time, but instead he just gave us another good “bawlin’ out,” and said, “now, go on back and (loaf) as damned little as possible.” Well, we finally managed to get the fence fixed and on the 10th day of May the big roundup started.

One morning my horse threw me and took off across the prairie, bucking for all he was worth. My stirrups were flying in the air and some cowboy threw his lariat and caught my stirrup, right up close to the saddle, ripping the strap loose. Such instances were common and very often a bunch of us had to get together and do some repair work while the rest would be halfway to the head of the creek on circle.

Sometimes we ate dinner at ten o’clock, sometimes at two. Supper was generally at four and right after supper we went to bed, if we didn’t have to stand first watch on night guard.

The only recreation the men got while on the roundup was card playing and they didn’t get much time for that. Some of them snatched a few games between circles.

“Old Ginger,” so called because he was red-headed and bad tempered, was the cook of the Bar ʁs. The boys loved to pester him because he flew into such terrible rages. They would make some remark about his cooking and then Ginger would take after them with a butcher knife and run them around the mess wagon. He had a deck of cards and was continually persuading the boys to play *Monte* with him and of course

he always fleeced them good and proper. He kept his winnings on the top shelf of the mess box and anybody that came near that box was in danger of getting carved, so the money was about as safe as in the bank, or so Ginger thought.

But one time a big, tough fellow by the name "Mizzou" joined the outfit. Every time he got a chance he played *Monte* with Ginger and of course the old cook won every time. It looked as though Ginger had taken in all of Mizzou's money, for there was a big pile of bills on his side of the blanket, when suddenly the cowboy jumped up and pulled his six-shooters. He shot into that pile of money and blew it all to pieces.

Ginger was pretty surprised and scared at that and he made a run for the wagon with Mizzou right behind him. Mizzou said, "You get up there and hand me out the dough from the mess box. Be damn quick about it too," and to hurry things along he began prodding Ginger in the ribs with his six-shooters.

Ginger was trying to climb the wagon wheel but he was so scared that he kept slipping off. "Well, damn it," he shouted as Mizzou kept poking him with the guns, "can't you see I'm hurrying." He took a bag full of money out of the mess box and handed it to Mizzou, who promptly pocketed it and proceeded to shake the dust of the camp from his heels.

Of course there was always plenty of excitement right in the line of duty and the boys didn't have to go to town looking for any while the roundup was on. After the general roundup that summer of '87 our horses being all ridden down a new string was brought in for us. These new horses had been brought from Goshen Hole near Cheyenne and were supposed to be broken but they had only been ridden a little the year before. We drove them within seven miles of Dewey in sight of Elk Mountain on ground now owned by myself. Here we selected our bronchs (*sic*) and prepared to break them. The boss asked us to choose our own horses so he would not be responsible for broken bones and necks. We went into the cavvy and picked our horses until each man had six mounts.

The next morning an old cow hand by the name of Soaper was up before anyone else. He had selected a nice brown horse with a white

blaze (*sic*) in its face and he woke the rest of us talking to the cook about the horse. He says to the cook, “Don’t you think he had a good sensible head on him?” We got up laughing, ate breakfast, and prepared to saddle our new mounts.

Of course we all had some trouble but Soaper had the most of all with that horse that “had such a good sensible head.” Every time he went to set foot in the stirrup the horse reared and fell over backwards and every time he fell over Soaper got a little paler.

I was having a good deal of trouble with my horse too. It took two men to help me bridle him and we tied his front feet together and yet he lunged around over the prairie dragging us with him. Finally I managed to get mounted, and still Soaper was on the ground.

Then we all went to roasting Soaper and telling him that only about twenty men were waiting on him and his sensible horse. The horse fell over about five times and Soaper was getting more and more scared, but he decided that he had to ride that horse or lose face in front of the whole outfit.

When he did mount of course the horse keeled over on him and then got up and ran while Soaper just laid there, plumb knocked out. One hand that was an exceptionally good man with horses caught the bronch (*sic*) and gave him a workout that took some of the orneriness out of him. Then Soaper came to and got on the horse and rode him all afternoon.

He didn’t ride him again for quite a while until the boss asked him what he had done with his horse that was so sensible looking. Soaper said, “I’m jest a-goin’ to ride him today.”

He caught and saddled the horse and tied him to the wheel of a big bed wagon and then went to breakfast. The boss had ordered some young tenderfoot to grease the wagon the afternoon before and the tenderfoot had forgotten to put the bur of that particular wheel back on. While breakfast was going on, something “goosed” Soaper’s horse. He reared back, jerking the wheel off the wagon, and went through the sagebrush with the wheel hitting the high spots behind him.

Well, of course that caused a lot of fun and we razzed Soaper again about his sensible horse. Something like that was always going on.

When the roundup camps moved it was a wonderful sight. The great herds of cattle and cavvys of horses spread out over the prairie for miles. The roundup cooks jumped in their wagons and raced each other for the best camping grounds. They wanted to get under trees near to the water as possible.

For one thing we always had plenty of good wholesome food and hot coffee. All cooking was done over the coals in big Dutch ovens and no better method of cooking has ever yet been devised. Huge coffee pots stood full of hot coffee nearly all the time. Our meat was the best to be had. Every day a fat yearling was selected from the herd and brought up near the cook wagon. She was killed and skinned right there and only the hind quarters were used. When the boys got hungry between meals they would take the ribs and roast them over the campfire (and) then stand around gnawing on those bones.

The old-time cow hand had to be alert every minute, for emergencies were continually arising and those who weren't equal to the situation or who hung back either lost their lives or were looked upon as tenderfeet. We worked, and the rain never poured down too hard, the gumbo never got too slippery or the blizzards too fierce to stop our work. The floods never raised the streams too high but what we were supposed to cross in the line of duty.

It really rained in those days. We wore our slickers and rode in a downpour most of the time. The ground was sodden with moisture and every so often floods came down the creeks and turned them to raging rivers.

I recollect when a flood came down Beaver Creek when we were working near where Dewey is now. Our herd of cattle was on the other side of the stream and we had to cross to get to them. We were swimming our horses across and one big, young puncher failed to make it. As his horse made a desperate leap to climb the bank its legs sank so deep in the soft sand and mud that it fell over backwards. The saddlehorn struck the boy in the stomach, knocking him breathless. The horse drifted down the stream without a rider.

We saw the cowboy's hat come up above the water several times but we couldn't see him. His hat was tied on with a gee string but no one

seemed to know that and in spite of all the cowboys gathered there as eye witnesses to the scene that boy lost his life. On account of the water being so swift and muddy we never saw his body until it drifted out to where the current was more shallow.

We recovered the body then and two cowboys riding real close together made a stretcher for him. We laid him across the two horses in front of the riders and in that way brought him to camp. By this time the body was so stiff that they took and stood him up against a wagon wheel and those hard-boiled, devil-may-care cowhands would go up to the corpse and talk to it, offering him cigarettes, etc., and then cuss because he didn't answer. It was a little too thick for me in spite of all I had seen with the vigilantes.

The cowboys showed little pity or consideration for a tenderfoot and still smaller consideration towards death, either for themselves or someone else.

I remember when we were working at the 3,9 (*sic*) Ranch on the mouth of Lance Creek a young fellow, relative to Sturgis or Goodall, the owners, came out from Cheyenne on a visit. The young man was an office worker, little used to riding or life on a ranch. Naturally he wanted a horse to ride and help in the roundup.

We were driving the cattle into a big corral and somehow that young fellow followed the cattle into the corral, and that onry Mizzou, who was one of the meanest men that ever lived anyway, shut the bars behind them. A big, black steer with long, sharp, mottled horns began "rimming" the fence—that is, circling the corral and running his horns along the poles. Every time he bumped into a post, he got a little madder.

The boy was sitting on his horse among the cattle and when the steer caught sight of him he made a dive at the horse and ripped it up the stifle (*sic*). The horse reared, throwing the boy to the ground, and like a flash the mad steer whirled and before anyone could do anything to prevent it he had plunged his bayonet-like horns through the young man's stomach.

The boy died soon afterwards and the steer was still circling the fence with the striffen (*sic*) of the stomach drying on his horn. Finally one of the punchers climbed on the fence and shot the steer down.

The Union Cattle Company had a great, fenced pasture of government land near Dewey. It was thirty-three miles around that pasture and every day it was one man's job to ride the fence. As we cut out the beeves that were going to be shipped we threw them into that pasture. When we had gathered up the required number of cattle, men were detailed to drive them to the railroad.

I will never forget the fall of 1888. Eight men that were supposed to be the most trustworthy employees of the Union were detailed to take the beeves to the railroad at Orin Junction, the nearest shipping point at that time. I was one of the eight men detailed to go.

We drove seven hundred head of cattle from the big pasture and set out on the long trek. We were well equipped for the journey with one big wagon that served both as a cook and bed wagon and plenty of provisions. A good cook that could drive four horses was provided and a day wrangler and a night wrangler, or "night-hawk," went along to take care of our string of forty-eight saddle horses.

We had traveled about sixty miles towards Orin Junction when a terrible, driving storm came up. The rain quickly developed into a blizzard and struck us about two o'clock in the night. Everyone got up and we were all busy trying to keep the cattle, and four of us at a time would go back to the wagon to change horses and get a bite to eat.

About four in the afternoon four of the boys went to the wagon and stayed there. They claimed that they did not have clothes enough and that they were actually freezing to death in the storm. They turned their horses out, ate, and crawled into bed to get warm.

They stayed so long that we sent another man after them and he stayed too. There were only three of us left—Matt Brown, Chas. "Big" Smith, and myself—trying to hold those 700 head of cattle. The storm increased but we stayed in the lead of it for twelve long hours, without a change of mounts or a bite to eat. We were cold and wet, nearly freezing in fact, but we would have held those cattle until we dropped.

The boss at the S&G Ranch, knowing that many thousands of dollars was at stake in that blizzard, started out to overtake us on the trail. He hitched up to a light buggy and drove the sixty miles without stopping to feed or water his horses, pushing through that blinding storm at an

average of nine miles an hour. On reaching the mess wagon he found out about the state of affairs and kicked those five quitters out, ordering them to our relief. After riding twelve hours in the blizzard our horses were played out and we ourselves had stood more than ordinary men could bear.

About the time we were relieved the storm broke and ceased all together at sun up. The cattle had scattered over three miles of country but we had held them so well that they had managed to travel only about four miles from the wagon and we hadn't lost a one. When the sun came out the cattle stood quiet with the snow melting from their back in little rivulets.

After we were relieved we still had to ride the four miles to the wagon on our exhausted horses, but when we got to camp did we ever fill up on beefsteak and coffee! We only got to sleep about three hours and then we had to get up and help the cook move the outfit.

The rest of the trip was made without any (complaints), for such things were all in a day's work for the cowhand. When we returned to headquarters, the fall work being about over, I called for my time, only the oldest hands were kept on through the winter.

The average cowhand of that time was a happy-go-lucky sort of fellow. He lived from day to day with no thought of the future or no ambition. When he drew his time in the fall he usually hit for the nearest town and gambled away his money in one night. I have heard many-a one tell what a tough time he had to get through the winter, often living on one meal a day, or less, and picking up a few odd chores to eke out an existence. They would exchange their experiences on the next roundup and laugh over them.

After two years on the roundups I had enough and decided that I wanted to join a surveying crew on the new line that was going through.