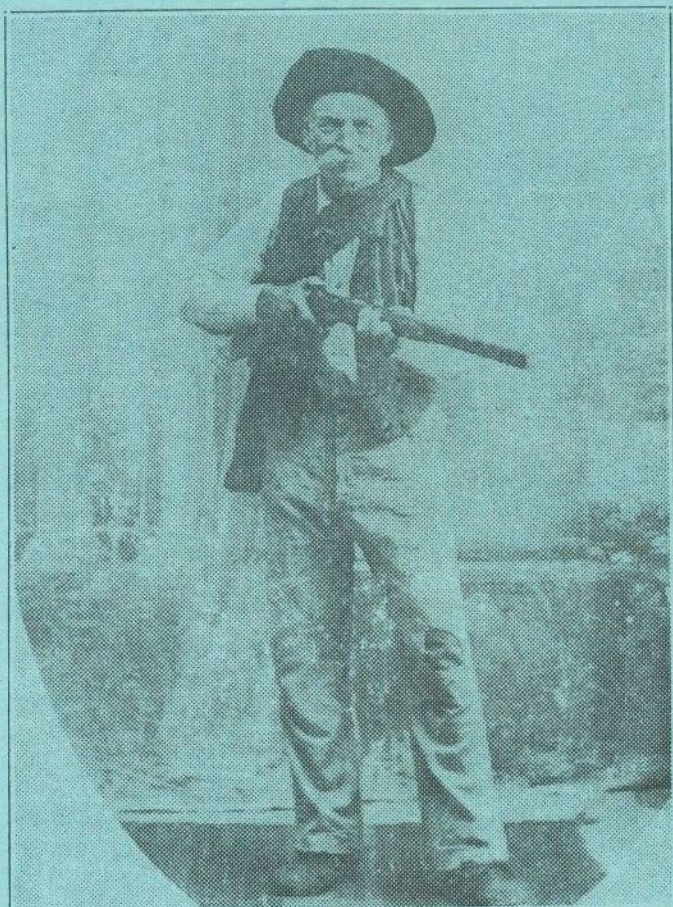


FRONTIER TIMES



TOBE JOY, TEXAS FRONTIERSMAN

DEVOTED TO
*Frontier History, Border Tragedy and
Pioneer Achievement*

An Old Timer in Reminiscent Vein

THE FOLLOWING letter was recently received from Powell Roberts, of Santa Rita, New Mexico. While it may not have been for publication, we are taking the liberty to publish it, so that any of Mr. Roberts' old friends who may read it will appreciate it as we have. And we are sure he will be glad to hear from any of them:

Santa Rita, New Mexico,
March 2, 1931.

Mr. J. Marvin Hunter,
Frontier Times,
Bandera, Texas.

Dear Sir:—I have been in the hos-

pital for two months with a bad stomach, and have a lot of reading matter in my room. When I take stock I find Frontier Times has the lead. I am in receipt of a letter from Ben M. Roberts, the youngest member of veterans in the Confederate Home at Austin, Texas. There are about 280 of these old vets. Cousin Ben Roberts is the baby of the home, he being 84 years old. Ben informs me he has just started in sending a short story each week to the Dallas News, stories related to him by the old soldiers, telling of their war-time experiences of the sixties. I wish you would call the at-

tention of the public to the fact that in another ten years these old men who suffered and fought for the South will about all be gone and much valuable history with them. It would be valuable service if some one would make daily calls on these old men and get some good history, not only of their service in the Southern army, but their experiences before and after the war. Many of them were trail drivers, cowboys of Texas and Indian fighters. Nothing would make better reading than for someone to write these experiences every month and send to Frontier Times. Many of these old men have a clear recollection of things that happened in their young lives sixty and seventy years ago.

Cousin Ben Roberts' father, Jeremiah (Jerry) Roberts, was the oldest of fourteen children. My father, Joseph Benton Roberts, was the youngest. Uncle Jerry was born January 9, 1801, and came from Mississippi to Texas in 1824 and settled where the town of Lockhart now stands. He served with Captain Ben McCulloch for six years as a Texas Ranger, when Texas was a Republic. Later Captain McCulloch became a General in the Confederate army. The Roberts name is no stranger to early day Texans.

In 1849 my father was engaged in the manufacture of furniture with Mr. Mabry, who was married to Abbie Roberts, my uncle Jerry's oldest daughter. Mr. Mabry and father had their small factory a half mile east of Lockhart, and with a home-made lathe and an old sorrel bald-face horse for power, and Little Jack Mabry to drive Old Baldy, they turned up table and chair legs and made furniture for a year, then went into the merchantile business at Belmont.

Holloway and Jonathan Ellison, brothers, married two sisters, Roberts

girls, who were first cousins to my father and were aunts to Captain Dan Roberts of Austin. These Ellison families came from Mississippi to Caldwell county, Texas, in ox-wagons in 1849. Alexander (Buck) Roberts, a brother to these two sisters who married the Ellison brothers, and father of Captain Dan Roberts, came to Texas in 1836, and was buried in Gillespie county many years ago; James F. Ellison, a son of Jonathan Ellison, was one of Texas' big trail drivers in the early days, and located at Marfa forty-five years ago, where he had a cattle ranch.

My cousin, Joe Roberts, now 80 years old and living at Del Rio, Texas, drove seven trail herds from the Nueces country, 1872 to 1878, for Uncle Billie Slaughter. The name Slaughter in Texas has been associated with cattle since early days. In the spring of 1878 I remember several men coming to our home in Palo Pinto county. A tall man riding a big sorrel horse was pointed out as Lum (C. C.) Slaughter, who bought some steers from my father. A left-handed man who done the roping when they branded these steers was Landrum Harris, who was shot and killed in the fall of 1881, just a mile and a half east of where our house stood then. The town of Mineral Wells sprung up and at a dance a man shot Harris dead and escaped. Sixteen years later a man named Glass Hill was arrested in Arizona, returned to Palo Pinto, and was tried for killing Harris and came clear. In 1888 I found myself on the Lazy S. Ranch on the plains, working for Lum Slaughter.

My folks moved to Palo Pinto county in 1877. They were Baptists, and Lum Slaughter's father was a Baptist preacher. He lived on the Brazos river, some fifteen miles above our ranch, where he had cattle. The

preacher frequently stayed overnight with us in our log cabin home. He was a Hardshell Baptist and never got through Sunday service before 1 or 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and his night services lasted until 11 o'clock. But his service was free; he never took a dime from anyone. He owned a good ranch and many cattle. His son, the late Colonel C. C. (Lum) Slaughter, was a Baptist, and one gift from him to the Baptist cause several years ago was \$50,000. He made others.

In 1892 the Lazy S was put on 13,500 calves on the Dawson county ranch, and I put the stamp iron on at least 10,000 of these calves, for I worked with Henry Perkins, who ran the branding wagon. We did not have to stand night guard.

We moved from Burleson county, where I was born, to Johnson county in 1872, twenty miles south of Fort Worth. While living in Johnson county my fourteen-year-old half brother, Charley Wilson, left home with another young fellow by the name of John Coffee. John Coffee's sister, Sallie, was married that Sunday to John Cain. After dinner these two boys disappeared, and my father hunted for them for a week, but failed to locate them. About eight months later, after we had moved to Palo Pinto county, Charley came home. He had twenty-five cents and an old cap and ball pistol. Father informed him that he would have to get rid of the pistol, so he traded it to Tom Duff, a neighbor boy, for seven big white marbles. That represented his eight months' work away from home. Tom Duff's father had a big tank of water near their house and he threw the pistol in the middle of the tank. A few months later Charley Wilson went to work driving a bull team for Pat Wooding, who had three 8-yoke teams two big

wagons with big trail wagons. He hauled freight from Fort Worth, the nearest railroad point, to Belknap and Fort Griffin, and it required two months to make a trip. This was in 1878, and I never heard of them being bothered with Indians, and they never lost any freight by white thieves, although it was wild country.

In 1882 and 1883 I was driving a four-mule freight team from San Antonio to Junction City, hauling freight for Faltin & Schreiner's store. On our return trip we usually hauled wool in spring, cedar posts in summer, and pecans in the fall. The men who freighted with us (we usually went in four to six wagon trains) were Mart Cadell, Bill Robertson, George Graves, Old Man McLemore, my brother and myself. We were camped in the Buffalo Camp Yard on Flores street in San Antonio the evening Ben Thompson killed Jack Harris on Main Plaza. Harris was expecting Ben Thompson, but Ben's friends put him wise to the fact that Harris was waiting for him at the door. Harris had a crippled arm and he held a shotgun on the crippled arm and stood just inside the blind door. Thompson stepped to one side and shoved the door open and fired, killing Harris. There was a stairway just inside this door, and less than two years after Harris was killed three men with shot guns, stood at the head of this stairway and shot Ben Thompson and King Fisher dead. Ben Thompson had served Austin as chief of police, and I have heard many people say he made a good peace officer unless he got drunk, then he wanted everyone else to obey the laws.

One cold night a man hailed the stage coming from Llano to Austin. The stage was crowded and the driver told this man to get up and ride with him, but the man said, "No, my name

is Ben Thompson, and I'll ride inside; let someone else get out and ride in the cold. I'm riding inside." A man who knew Thompson's reputation said, "Here, Mr. Thompson, take my seat. I'll ride outside with the driver." When they reached Austin the obliging passenger was telling his friends what a narrow escape he had, and told of letting Ben Thompson have his seat, and how he nearly froze riding out in the open air with the driver. Just then Ben Thompson came down the street and this man was introduced to him. He then discovered that the other fellow had put one over on him and made him suffer the cold ride. So he started out to find the man, saying that if he found him he would give him a real good whipping for passing himself off as Ben Thompson.

Marvin Powe, the present city marshall of Silver City, New Mexico, was an 11-year-old boy living in Uvalde when Ben Thompson and King Fisher were killed in San Antonio, and Powe carried the telegram several miles out to Fisher's wife informing her of his death. In 1890 the Powe family was living in Brewster county, when Marvin Powe's father, a one-armed, was shot and killed over a maverick yearling at a round-up by a man named Fine Gilleland, who then forced Manning Clements to turn his horse over to him, as Gilleland's and Powe's horses both ran off during the shooting. Gilleland shot Powe four times. Powe had only three cartridges in a pistol which he had borrowed from Manning Clements. He had fired one shot at the maverick. Then both men got off their horses, Powe tried to hold his horse and shoot with just one arm. Gilleland turned his horse loose. Powe's shots grazed Gilleland's belt. Gilleland rode off and later a posse

was formed and followed him, but he made his escape. Sometime later it was discovered that he went into the Glass Mountains, and Ranger Felix Cook and Deputy Sheriff Putman went to look for him. Neither knew Gilleland. When they met him late in the evening he passed Putman, who was riding ahead leading a pack horse, and Cook spoke to Gilleland, intending to inquire about water for their horses in the canyon. Before Cook could ask the question Gilleland fired and hit Cook in the knee, the bullet going into Cook's horse's shoulder, Cook dismounted, pulled his rifle and shot Gilleland's horse down, then called to Putman to kill his (Cook's) horse which was running away with his saddle. Gilleland lay flat on the ground behind his dead horse, firing at the officers. When the battle was over Gilleland had a hole in the top of his head, his horse and Cook's horse were dead, also a dog belonging to Cook was dead.

The cowboys branded the maverick MURDER, and no one claimed it. When it was four years old Marvin Powe asked Joe Erwin, who was making up a trail herd to drive north, to take this steer out of the country, saying that he was tired of looking at it. Powe went as far as Midland and the steer went on up the trail with his MURDER brand.

I was in your town. Bandera, once. That was in September, 1823, and I have always wanted to visit there again. I liked the town and the country round about. I enjoy Frontier Times, as I know Texas, and know many men and women mentioned by the writers for your magazine.

In 1893 I rode horseback alone from San Antonio to El Paso. I have no Indian stories to tell, but can give a few

facts about white folks.

When my thoughts go back to boyhood days I wonder where are my old associates, who did they marry and how many children have they? Three years ago I made a trip over the old road I drove a freight wagon over from San Antonio to Junction, the first time I had been there in forty-six years. Two miles out of Junction I went over to a cold spring on Johnson's Fork of the Llano, lay down on my belly like I did in 1882, and drank to my heart's content. I have always said that Kimble county has more good cold spring water than any place

in Texas.

I wonder what has become of the people who lived in Kimble county in 1882, the Gilmores, Moss, the Hankins, Glass, Tomberlin, Joe and Zaek Wood, Cadell, Graves, Joe Meek, Ames, Snyder, Crenshaw, Stewart, the Taylor and Joy families? The brands some of the cattle wore were HBT, 70L, J5, and SO.

The divide between Junction and Kerrville had many mustang horses running there in 1882. These horses were the property of any man who could catch them. But most of them were small and worthless.
