

[C. D. Bonney—Old Timer]

Georgia B. Redfield. Interview

1630 words.

C. D. Bonney - Old-Timer Interviewed

When this investigator on Writers' Project District 2, asked C. D. Bonney, old timer of Roswell, for a story of some early-day experience, he at first looked amused and then a little reluctant.

I had always heard Mr. Bonney never like to talk of his achievements or adventures and it was very apparent he did not like to appear a hero, as many stories told by others prove him to be.

Mr. Bonney was one of the first settlers in the Pecos, Valley, coming to Roswell from Mississippi in 1881.

At the time of his coming to Roswell he was a young man, courteous, chivalrous, brave. He made many friends in the valley because of his bravery. He was not afraid to enter into any adventure or any business enterprise planned, during the progress and growth of the town.

In 1881, the year of his coming to Roswell, he purchased an interest in the store owned by Captain J. C. Lea, organizing the firm of Lea, Bonney and Company. This store was across the street from where the court house now stands. The goods for the store came over from Las Vegas by ox wagons. In 1884 Mr. Bonney sold his holdings in the store to Lea, Poe and Cosgrove, and bought a ranche thirty miles west of Roswell on the Hondo River. At one time he owed fifteen head of horses on this ranche. C 18 - 6/5/41 - N. Mex.

Library of Congress

2

This bunch of horses and all his ranching interests he sold to R. F. Barnett and engaged in the real estate business. He laid out a tract of 250 town lots, into "Riverside Heights." Establishing a power plant on Spring River, he furnished this tract with electric light and water. He then purchased 120 acres west of Roswell which he sold off in five and ten acre tracts.

During the time of the Indian uprisings and raids (in connection with all of his business enterprises) he served as Indian scout, under Captain Scott. He can tell of many thrilling experiences with the Indians, and interesting stories of the first stockmen - their feuds and fights over grazing lands and the waters of the springs and rivers.

"Well I guess I am an old timer all right," said Mr. Bonney, when told that we wanted a story - preferably of Indians,

"I located a mining claim the other day," he continued, "a gold mine in Cox canon, about four miles east and a little south of Cloudcroft in the Sacramento mountains. I named this mine "The Fifty-five," for that day (June 4th) was the anniversary of my arrival in Roswell fifty-five years ago.

Mr. Bonney rose and closed the door against the hot wind of the first real warm day of this summer of 1936. When he turned to resume his seat there was a little twinkle in his eye.

"So you want a story about Indians do you? Well I could tell quite a few. One of them is of the time we chased a band of Indians on just such a hot day as this - some hotter - it 3 was in July, in 1882." Mr. Bonney resumed his seat. Quiet a moment, he gazed on an oil painting - a splendid picture of an Indian. The painting was done by Mr. Bonney, his wife, who is an artist whose pictures would grace, and be outstanding for its life like naturalness in any art collection in New Mexico, or in the United States. Mr. Bonney was remembering,

Library of Congress

thinking of what would be interesting to tell of trails of adventure he had traveled in the beginning of his life, on the plains, when a young man, over half a century ago.

“One night, about nine o'clock,” he finally resumed, “we were sitting out in front of the hotel, it was the first hotel built in Roswell, and it was in front of where the court house is today. It was just a four room adobe house, owned by Captain J. C. Lea. Paying guests slept in the attic upstairs. We were enjoying the cool evening breeze, when an orderly came with a message from Captain Scott, to come down to their camp. Captain Scott had just arrived with a troop of cavalry. I had known Captain Scott before that time, in Fort Stanton,” said Mr. Bonney. “I went down to his encampment and the first thing he said to me was - ‘Bonney have you seen any Indians around here lately?’ I told him I had seen some, early that very morning, at Bitter Creek, which is ten miles northeast of Roswell and Captain Scott said - ‘Bonney, you must go with me, we just have to get those Indians! If I don't catch them I will be courtmartialed.’ He then told me that a runner had overtaken him at Picacho that day with orders for him to go back to Colfax County and turn his command over to Lieut. Penn.

4

Lieutenant Penn had just arrived from West Point. There had been an Indian uprising over in the northern part of the state. ‘If I catch those Indians, Bonney, it will be O. K. even if I did disobey orders, by coming on here, but if I don't catch them - well, I will be courtmartialed.’ That's the way of the world, one is rarely ever given the credit for trying, for doing their level best, but achievements bring glory and one is overwhelmed with honors and praise.

“Well,” continued Mr. Bonney, “I told Captain Scott I would go with him, but he would have to leave his buglers behind, for you could never catch Indians with a noise like they made. I told him to select five of his best tried men and to leave the rest in Roswell, and at 2 o'clock the next morning to send me one of his best horses, I had my own saddle, bridle and gun. He was to send the horse where the corner of Vain and Third Streets now is.

Library of Congress

Captain Scott's encampment was in an old corral a block north, about what is now Main and Second Street. Captain Scott did send a good horse. We left Roswell at 2 A. M. and crossed Comanche Draw at sunup, where we struck the Indians' trail. We pressed on and caught up with them, just outside of the sands, between Comanche Draw and Mescalero Springs. The Indians made a stand in the sand hills. It looked for a while like we would have to shoot it out with them. They were part Comanches and part Apaches - forty-seven in all. One old Indian, the leader, threw up his gun to fire on Captain Scott. I saw him just in time to throw my gun on the Indian who then was afraid to shoot. I got down walked around, and made a quick grab and got his fine gun and the old fellow came at me with a knife. We finally got the knife away. Then there we were standing in that hot July sun, which about cooked us, when Scott walked up and said - "Bonney, you saved my life." "but you better not put that in," said Mr. Bonney. Why not, I thought, for he deserved all credit for the capture of those maurading Indians. If Captain Scott had been killed the Indians would have made short work in taking the other six of the little detachemnt of soldiers, and would have gone free to raid and plunder at will.

"Well," continued Mr. Bonney, "we then disarmed all the Indians, who soon gave up, after we had caught their leader, and they had pretty good guns too. We went on over to Mescalero Springs and camped all night. We divided the Comanches from the Mescaleros and sent the Comanches to Fort Sill and took the Apaches back to Mescalero Reservation.

"Yes, we got them, and every thing was O. K. for Scott, I guess. He wasn't courtmartialed even though he didn't turn his command over to Lieutenant Penn as ordered." Lieutenant Penn was afterwards made General and was here as inspector of the New Mexico Military Institute. Captain Scott was afterwards made Major General.

"We didn't have such good luck every time we went out after Indians," said Mr. Bonney, "One time a band of Comanches stoke fifty horses from a corral in Capitan mountains and came out to Mescalero Springs. We got so hot on their trail, the Indians stabbed twenty-seven of the horses when they tired out.

Library of Congress

6

Fourteen of them died. The Indians watered at Mescalero Springs and completely disappeared. We had brought no water or provisions and had to turn back. A party headed by Pat Garrett found some of the band, and horses, and brought back moccasins and things as evidence, we asked no questions those days - we knew better - but we surmised a great deal. Anyway no more horses were stolen.

“Just after those times of up-risings,” continued Mr. Bonney, “I met a young lady, Sara Lund, who was teaching the first school ever taught in Roswell, and I can tell you I pursued her, more than I did any Indians, and the money I made as Indian scout went to buy our engagement ring. We were married in 1887. Things have been peaceful and happy all the years since that time.