

## [Dr. Ed B. Smyth]

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### FOLKLORE

Miss Effie Cowan, P.W.

McLennan County, Texas.

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Interview with Dr. Ed B. Smyth, White Pioneer, Mart, Texas. Elias B. Smyth, (father of Alva P. Smyth); about the year 1848, my father, Elias R. Smyth, while a young man in his twenties, came to Texas from the State of Alabama and lived for a year or two at Palestine, Texas. About the year 1850, he married Miss Elizabeth Wood, at her home near the old town of Springfield, Texas, three miles from the present town, Grossbeck.

“After my mothers' father died, father took charge of the plantation at Springfield, and when the war between the states came, father joined the Confederate army, made his head slave, Henry Majors, the overseer and he looked after the farming and kept the work on the plantation up until fathers return when the war ended. There were four boys and three girls born to my father and mother; Alva P., (deceased); myself; Tom; Lee, (deceased), and Ella, Beulah and Mabel; all lived to be grown and to rear families of their own.

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“My grandmother Wood brought her husband to Texas in a covered wagon, he being too ill to sit up, was brought upon a bed, it was hoped the change of climate would restore him to health. They brought their teams, tools and slaves with them, crossing the Mississippi River at Memphis, Tennessee, and reached Springfield, Texas, after a trip of two months. This town at that time was the county seat of Limestone County. They settled about five miles from old Parker Fort and near Springfield. The town of Springfield being moved to the present town of Groesbeck, when the Houston and Texas Central Railroad was built in three miles of Springfield in 1870. C - 12 Tex. 2 “In the reconstruction days, following the war between the states, my father was living near Springfield when the trouble with the freed negroes took place. I can remember when the white men would come to our houses seeking my father's advice in dealing with this situation. I remember, one day several men came and after a lengthy discussion they told father “if he said the word they would take up arms against the troublesome negroes.” But, father was a man who did not advise anything which would cause any more trouble and felt that there was already enough trouble and advised a more conservative course.

“In those days the banks were at Waco and Dallas, the nearest distance to [Waco?] being forty miles and over bad roads, travel by horse-back. Father did not like to take these trips so he buried his money near the house. I remember how, when he sold his cotton one time he buried a thousand dollars under a post which was around a potato bank. Robbers would rob the stage-coaches and trains but it was seldom that money hid at the house was found.

“I can remember our father buying an old negro women named Aunt Caroline, to take care of us children. He gave a thousand dollars for her. She remained with the family until long after the slaves were freed. Aunt Caroline was our delight, it was she who interceded for us, it was she who delighted us with ghost stories and tales of hob-goblins and the like. When the slaves were freed my father provided for them. He furnished them and let them work the land, he saw that they were never in want. 3 “The plantation was in the

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[Navesota?] bottom and at that time the prairie was not considered good for anything but ranches. About the year of 1879, he bought what has become known as the Smyth ranch. This was about twenty miles from Mexia and six as the present town of Mart. At that time Mart was called Willow Springs.

“The ranch consisted of around six thousand acres, four thousand of this was in ranch and two thousand in farms. The ranch was stocked with horses and cattle. My oldest brother Alva P., was given charge of the ranch and lived on it for some years, until he moved to Mart. At my fathers death in 1889, this estate was divided between us children and part of it was cut up into farms and sold. Several of us had married and lived on the ranch until we later moved to other towns for the benefit of the schools. I moved to Mart where I still reside.

“The country where the ranch was located was open prairie, no wire fences. When we had the round-ups the cattle were rounded up by the thousands and the cowboys would cut the calves off from the cows and brand them. The cattle were driven to the northern markets or shipped later by train. We had our roundups for the cattle in the spring and summer and in the fall we rounded up the horses and the branding was done after cool weather arrived.

“The horses were driven to the corral where the branding took place. Several men worked together. A fire was built outside the corral, but near the fence. Each colt was roped and thrown. One man placed his knee on the colts neck, caught one of his ears in one hand, so that its head was on the ground, with the nose pointing up in the air. This required 4 considerable skill and was the most effective method of holding the colt on the ground. A further precaution was taken by tying the two hind feet and two fore feet together, and held slightly off the ground. As soon as the colt was secured in this way one of the men came with the red-hot iron and applied it to the colt's side, shoulder or hip. The application took only a few seconds. The colt was released to join the others. This process was continued until all the colts were branded. This brand lasted the animal throughout his

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life. Sometimes the brand was altered by thieves, or if the colt was sold, by changing the original brand into other letters or figures of brand used by the buyer or the horse thief.

“It was not often that the branding of cattle or horses took place in the summer on account of being infected by insects and if they were, heroic remedies were used, sometimes by heating a branding iron and applying to the infected parts, then treating with ointment, kerosene, or turpentine.

“It might be of interest to tell how the herd was started. The hands were sent out on the ranch to pen a bunch of horses. The next morning other horses were driven into the pen, these were driven to the nearby grass and a cowboy kept them together. At first there would be from thirty to forty, and each day this was increased until the corral was full. They were kept near the ranch house and soon learned the way to the corral when they came up at night. It was not difficult to handle several hundred head of horses in this way. All one had to do was to get on the back side of the herd and give a few yells, that would start the leading mares that had been in the herd the summer before, and they led the rest to the corral. After the first two days the herd was referred to as the cavey-yard. This word was coined from the Spanish, Caballada. It comes from the same word that is used for horse, Caballo, Americanized in “kaveyo”. In each herd there were the stallions, they were often good herders themselves. They rarely allowed any wandering in the herd. On sight of danger they swiftly lead the herd to safety, if out on the range.

“There is a legend of the early '70's, of a handsome gray stallion who with his band of twenty mares, roamed the prairies, at his will. He was described as a pacer who never broke his gait as he easily out-ran all his pursuers, as he sailed on and on, always just ahead, with his mane flying out on both sides of his neck like wings, his long tail sweeping the ground he seemed to skim through the air like a flying bird. He was more a phantom horse than a real flesh and blood animal. Many and varied were the efforts made to catch him but they all ended in defeat. He could always be found near his range of the Navasota bottom until the tide of emigration finally drove him and his herd into the boundless West.

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“I remember the prairie as it was when I came to live there. They were beautiful in the spring with the wild flowers, and when the spring rains brought up the bluebonnet and the red Indian head, golden-rod and other wild flowers it was a landscape in as beautiful picture as could be painted.

“In 1886, I married Miss Belle McLeish of Shreveport, Louisiana, daughter of Peter and Elizabeth McLeish. Mr. McLeish was a merchant and architect, and plantation and slave owner. Mrs. McLeish superintended the plantation while he followed his business. Their plantation was located where the city of Monroe, Louisiana now stands. Mr. McLeish built the court house and jail. They both are still standing as monuments of those early days of the beginning of the town of Monroe.

“There were seven children born to us. All lived to be grown. They were Alva P.; Bessie; Willie; Clyde; Leon; Azile; and an infant who died at birth. Bessie, wife of Ernest Strange of Mart passed away in November of 1918.”