

[E. F. Forsgard]

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FOLKWAYS

Wm. V. Ervin, P. W.

McLennan County,

District 8.

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Consultant - E. F. Forsgard, 1122 North Fourth Street, Waco, Tex.

"I was born in Waco in 1870. My father, S. J. Forsgard, came here in 1852. He established a store not far from the river.

"My father said that cattlemen driving herds to market and wishing to cross the river, which would take them a day or two, sometimes three, with a herd; would leave forty or fifty pounds of gold with him to be placed in his safe until they called for it, which would be when they had got their herd across and were ready to go on. When they would call for their gold, which was usually in saddlebags, they would not count it.

"My father told me, too, about how cotton and money were sent to Houston before the Civil war. There would be probably fifteen or twenty bales of cotton to be freighted down there by ox-wagons. There was a little screw gin down the river where the cotton was ginned. When the cotton was ginned and baled it was wrapped in cowhides. The merchants at

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Waco would want to send money to Houston to pay bills they owed and to pay for more goods, so they would all go to the gin, each with his money in a buckskin bag, and they would put all the money in a bale of cotton and wrap the bale with a white and black cowhide or other oddly marked hide. Then they would write the cotton factor at Houston a description of the hide, and he would know which bale contained their money. The freighter who hauled the cotton would not know which bale the money was in.

“When I got to be old enough boy to remember things Waco was still a pretty wild place. Killings were frequent, in fact it didn't amount to much to shoot a man then, or to hang him for cattle-stealing. One day when I was ten or eleven years old myself and some other boys about my own age found a man hung to a tree down on the river not far from where the water filtration plant now stands. We didn't know who he was, but we supposed he was some fellow hung for cattle-stealing. There was quite a lot of cattle-stealing going on then. A bunch of outlaws had a rendezvous, or hideout, on Trading House Creek where there was a pretty dense thicket. The officers here didn't bother them, though, because the outlaws would do their stealing at some distance from here and dispose of it before they came back to their hideout, which was eight or ten miles from here; and so it would not have done the officers here any good to catch them as they could not have proved anything on them. To do that, they would have had to catch the outlaws with the goods on them. The outlaws would keep to their hideout here until things had quieted down.

“My father was a member of the Ranger force, and one time he and about two hundred rangers were sent after a bunch of Indians that had made a raid at Comanche. They caught up with the Indians over about Brownwood, and killed some of them. They then killed a cow to get rawhide strips to tie rocks to the bodies of the Indians so they could sink them in the bayou over there so as not to leave any sign, for other Indians, I suppose.

“Sometimes cowboys from over in Bosque county or somewhere else would drive in several head of cattle they had stolen and sell them to a butcher here in Waco for money

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enough to go on a spree. They would tell the butcher it was "jumping stock", and 3 was to be killed at once so it wouldn't be found.

"The cowboys would come in with herds and stop here and get drunk and shoot and yell around some, but nobody paid any attention to them. If they shot out any show windows in the stores their boss man would go around to the merchants and ask them what the damage was and pay it. If the cowboys got to shooting too much, the storekeepers would put up heavy wooden shutters before the windows, and then the boys wouldn't see any glass to shoot at.

"Lots of gambling went on. It was a regular business. There were several men who had saloons and gambling halls, usually the gambling places were in a room over the saloon. These men were square-shooters, they had their families here and they were treated like any other respected citizens of the town. If they caught any of their dealers or any player cheating or playing a crooked game, they would tell him that he had to get out, and would ask him where he wanted to go, and when he told them they would buy him a ticket there, put him on the stage and see that he left town. They wouldn't allow any toughs to stay in town or any cheap gamblers. If any came in, they would tell them to get out in twenty-four hours, and if he didn't, they ran him out.

"Four or five or six of these big gamblers would sometimes get together in one of their places and play poker. Sometimes the game would run for as long as a week. If one of them wanted to leave the game for awhile to take a nap or go out in town, he'd count up the money he had, the banker would make a note of it, and the gambler would stack it to one side on the table, and it would be there when he came back, even if he was gone a day or two.

"A lot of gambling would go on right on the square. The cowboys, 4 gamblers and Mexicans would come into town and tie their horses to the hitchrack on the square, spread down a blanket, get out their cards and have a game right there among their horses.

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"I saw Sam Bass when he passed through Waco on his way to Round Rock to rob the bank there, and was killed there by rangers. He stopped at the old Ranch saloon on the square, There were two or three others with him. They stayed a day or two. They had some friends here they stopped to see. I don't remember just who their friends were. Bass figured to hold up a bank here, but I think the big gamblers told him to move on. We didn't know who he was when we saw him, but we looked his and his men's horses over pretty well. When we heard of what happened at Round Rock, we were able to connect up certain things, descriptions, and so on, and knew then that we had seen Sam Bass. He was about a medium-sized man; had sort of brownish gray eyes. He was not so much out of the ordinary looking, but he was a man that when you had seen him once, you would know him when you saw him again.

"Myself and my son, Sam, were with the Winchester Repeating Arms Company for between seven and eight years as firearms demonstrating. We were expert shots with rifle, shotgun and pistol. I have won a good many trophies at national and international meets. I won one trophy by hitting twenty-five live birds in twenty-five shots. Over a year's time I have hit 2,077 shots out of 2,100.

"My father said that in the early days if a man came into Waco with his family and was broke the people would see that he and his family had something to eat and a place to stay, and they asked no questions. They figured that if he was a good man, he would prove himself, and that if he was a crook and a thief, they would find that out about him, too. If he was all right and it was necessary, they would build him a home and keep him and his family in supplies until he was in a position to take care of them.

"My brother Sam, who was a small, boy, and some other boys were killed when a wall of the [Orand?] livery stable collapsed in 1876. It was a new brick wall, and the cement wasn't dry, and they were running and playing on top of it when it fell and crushed them.

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"I saw Judge Gerald and the Harris brothers have their gun battle, when the Harrises were killed; and I sat Brann, the iconoclast, when he shot and killed the man who had shot him. The man fell off the sidewalk into the gutter, and Brann kept shooting him. Brann was shot once through the left chest, and I don't believe he would have died, but the officers were so excited and afraid of more shooting that they took hold of him and ran with him all the way to the jail, and he lost so much blood that I think that was what killed him. I believe he would have lived if it hadn't been for that. He died about a week later.

"There were some of those oldtimers that wouldn't back up for anybody. The officers were afraid to try to arrest them. If they had a warrant for one of them, they'd send him word that they had a warrant for him, and he'd send word back that he would be down to see them in about thirty minutes, and those fellows always kept their word to come in. It went too hard with their pride to submit to arrest. They wouldn't submit to anything without a fight, and I have seen them make even some of the nerviest officers crawfish and talk nice.