

## [Albert K. Erwin]

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Folkstuff - Life on a Range

Gauthier, Sheldon F.

Rangelore.

Tarrant Co. Dist., #7 [40?]

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Albert K. Erwin, 88, living at 1021, N. Sylvania St. Fort Worth, Texas, was born Feb, 19, 1850, at his father's farm then located in Smith co. Texas. His father died while Albert was an infant. He was adopted by [?]. B. Arnold, then a resident of Burnet co, with whom he made his home until 1865. Albert secured work on the cattle ranch of Jordon Bolin, then located in Llano co, in 1865. He remained with the Bolin ranch for several years after he quit his job with the Bolin ranch he worked for the J. Harris ranch, also located in Llano co. He experienced Indian raids, cattlemen's wars, and rustler fights. He watched a gun fight between a gang of rultlers in the streets of Llano. His brother was killed, as he was entering the Court House, to testify in a murder trial. The killing was done by friends of the defendant.

His story of range life follows:

"I was 58 years old Feb. 18, 1850. I was born right here in Texas, Smith co, was where my folks lived when I was born. My father died while I was just a tot and I can't recall him. People by the name of Arnold took me and I was reared by the H.B. Arnold family. they

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were located in Burnet Co, I lived with the Arnolds until I was 15 years old. H.B. Arnold farmed land located in the Colorado River bottom, near Lake Victor. He also run a few cattle on the [up-land?]. The critters were sort of left to take care of theirselves. Arnold had good salt licks at several spots near the river and the animals stayed in the vicinity of the licks fairly well. C12 - 2/11 - 41 - Texas

“During the years I was sprouting into manhood and living with the Arnolds cattle were not worth enough to bother with. During the Civil War and for a good spell after the war ended, there was no market for cattle. A number of cattlemen in the Lake Victor district did not bother to brand their cattle. 2 Gauthier, Sheldon F.

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“Arnold depended on his farm for our living. The cultivated land was fenced, with split rails, against the thousands of cattle that roamed the range. Of course, you understand that in those days the range was open to anyone. If a person wanted to start a cattle ranch, a watering hole and the critters were all one needed.

“We lived off of what was produced on the farm and meat was taken off of [of?] the range. Wild game was trapped or shot easily at any time we had a hankering for the meat. Wild turkey, sagehens, pheasants and ducks were some of the fowl we could go out and [bag?] most anytime. Deer and antelope were running the woods in droves. Buffalo, also, were roaming the praire land in herds of thousands.

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"We grew plenty of corn, wheat, cotton and vegetables. Arnold made corn meal in his own grinder and traded wheat for flour. Our clothes were made by the colored help, which were slaves until after the Civil War ended.

"I don't suppose that Arnold bought a \$100. worth of food and supplies for his family during a year's time.

"I learned to ride a hoss at an early age and was able to ride 'em in good shape when I was 12 years old.

"I secured a job as a cowhand with the Jordon Bolin outfit in 1865 and was paid \$10. per month. The ranch headquarters were just camps located here and there wherever we felt it was the handest. At the time I started to work for Bolin, cattle prices were low, but there were expectations for better conditions ahead. However, prices didn't pick up until around three years later. 3 "The Bolin outfit was located in [Llano?] co, and our work took us over many miles of the range in the Lake Victor district. There were five of us cowhands and we rode the range each day looking for sick or injured critters. Also, we watched the bogs for mired critters. If we located a critter mired in a bog, we would put the loop around its horns and the hoss would drag the animal out. If one hoss couldn't do it, as often was the case, two hosses would be used.

"During the summer time screw-worms were our biggest worry. When a critter received a deep scratch or a cut, the worms would develop in the cut and cause a festering sore. Us waddies were furnished with a concoction in the form of a salve, which we applied to the cut. The concoction would kill the worm and then the cut would heal.

"In the Spring and Fall there was held the general roundup. All the outfits would throw into gather an and work as one large outfit. Some one of the rawhides would be out in charge of the roundup and he would direct all the work. The cattle would be gathered in one section at a time. After all the critters had been roundedup and worked in a section then

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the outfit would move to a nother location. The different brands would be separated and each branch herded separately. During the spring roundup the calves would be branded in addition to the other work.

“The roundup would take around [90?] days. After the roundup we went back to our regular work of watching the herd.

“Our camp was a dug-out. That is we lived in those during the bad spells of weather and the winter months. During good weather and summer months we lived in the open. We used our 4 saddles for pillows and the soft side of the ground for a mattress. But, sleeping outside was more to our liking than sleeping in the gopher hole.

“The dug-outs were just about eight feet square and when all of us were crowded in the hole on a damp night the atmosphere became a little whiffy on the [lee?] side, especially when the whiffleberries were on the chuck line, and those generally were.

“Our chuck was composed of beans, meat, sourdough and cornbread and a few canned vegetables. We made and drank black coffee by the gallons. When we had canned vegetables, we broke the chuck monotony with son-of-a-gun stew. Also, during the Spring, when we castrated the male yearlings, the chuck monotony would be broken with messes of mountain oysters.

“During the first couple of years I worked on the Bolin outfit, the cooking was performed by us waddies. We took weekly turns at the job. Care of the chuck wagon was handled in the same way. About the second year after I lit with the Bolin outfit it was rumored that cattle would be in demand, because a railroad was being built into Kansas. Then Bolin took on more hands and we went to work in earnest taking care of the herd. We kept the critters herded close and there were two men put to night riding.

“While the Civil War was being fought, there were a great many cattle left unbranded and a scramble to brand the critters started. The scramble led to many fights. The unbranded

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critter was supposed to belong to the herd with which it run or to the controller of the range where found. Some men started in the 5 cattle business by branding the unbranded critters and never paid out a dollar for cattle. They registered a brand and then went on the range branding every critter without a brand regardless where it was found or the herd the animal was grazing with. Then later, some went further and worked brands over. There were several methods used. One we had was picking the hair, another was using the sap of the milkweed which would cause the hair to die where it was applied. But, the chief means was using a wagonbox rod, or one like it. By heating the iron the hot end could be used as a pencil, changing the brand. For instance, the letter F can easily be change to read E. A one to a seven, six, ten and so on.

“It was next to impossible for a brand to be deviced which the brand burners couldn't change.

“I heard of one brand which had the brand burners stumped. The brand was known as the year brand. The figures of the year in which the branding was did were placed on the critters. For example: If we were to brand a critter this year, of 1938, the one would be placed on the flank, the nine and three on the hips and the eight on the jaw. That brand was used by a ranch up in the wyo. country.

“When the cattle business began to pick up Bolin started to increase he herd. He too began to give the unbranded critters special attention. Orders were given to us waddies to brand all critters which we found grazing in our section without a brand. We were finally paid a bonus of 50¢ for each critter we found and placed the 'JB' brand onto it. To be honest about it, we waddies didn't over look any bets and brander critters wherever we 6 located it even if it was in some other territory. We generally found a reason for riding into other territory- when we thought no one would see us.

“We were kept busy and the crew was increased to 15 hands and the herd grew to better than 10,000 head. Then the outfit was furnished with a cook, an old negro which had been

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a slave on Bolin's home place, and Tom was a tolerable good cook. We were furnished with a hoss wrangler too and our outfit became a real cowcamp.

“Our remuda was increased to around 100 hosses. That provided each rawhide with six hosses in his string and a few extra. Horses were used up mighty fast on a cow ranch and it was the wranglers job to keep the remuda full of fresh hosses. I have seen five of six hosses ruined during one stampede. Some would be [solosed?], wind-broken or ruined otherwise from overriding. Some would step in a hole while running and break a leg and then have to be shot.

“When a stampede started at night, or day for that matter, there was no thought of saving hoss flesh. The range held plenty of wild hosses, which could be had for the taking, and cowhosses could be bought broke and ready for work for from a \$15 to [35?].

Naturally, our worst stampede always happened at night during the worst storms. At such times men or hosses could not see where to step. It was a case of trusting to luck and many times luck seemed to be asleep.

“I am going to tell of one night when we had a stampede which I can't forget. The day had been a hot one and hard one 7 the critters. The animals didn't do much grazing until about an hour before sunset and them continued to graze past their usual bedding time, which was around dusk. This night a heavy cloud showed suddenly in the North and came on fast. A heavy rain with sky-fire came on. The syk-fire was scaring the critters causing all of us to do plenty of riding in order to hold the animals from going on a run. Suddenly, hail about the size of pigeon eggs began to fall. When the hail hit the critters they decided to go somewhere in spite of hell, highwater of rawhides, and the animals did that pronto.

“While working in that hail storm was, one time I found the ten gallon honk cover a mighty handy article. If we rawhides had been wearing any ordinary hat, the hail [stones?] would would have knocked us loco. Our heads were saved, but the rest of our bodies was full of welts from the pounding of the hail stones. Our hosses were loco from being pelted and

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we could hardly control the poor devils. About half of the mounts started pitching. Those which were not pitching, were running away from their riders. We were luck that the cattle and hosses all were going with the storm. In addition to loco, hosses, critters and half loco rawhides, it was dark and we couldn't see what we were running into.

“The hail pelted us for about ten minutes or so, but that was more than enough and when the hail stopped no one could reckon where the other riders were or what became of the herd.

“Us waddies lit out to find the herd soon as the hail ceased falling. The herd stared towards the Colorado River and we all reckoned the same way, and that was it was still traveling in that direction. We knew that when the herd reached the river it 8 would have to stop or swim the river. From where the herd started was about ten miles from the river. In face of the fact that we all were separated, we had reckoned the same way and were heading for the Colorado.

“Soon as the hail stopped we all began to shoot our guns to let each other know where each other were and it was not long till all/of us had our hearings. Most of us had reached the herd just before it reached the river. We just let the animals run until it reached the river and there, of course, it stopped, and the animals went to milling and we went to work keeping the critters from scattering. We finally got the herd quieted and settled, then started the herd back.

“When we checked up on our condition after the run, we found that we had lost two hosses from broken legs done by stepping in a hole. We picked up their riders on our way back. Three hosses were [soloaed?] From this stampede you may get some idea of how hosses are put out of working condition of a cow ranch.

“The railroads were finally built into Kans. Abelene, Camp Supply, Fort Dodge and other places became shipping points for [?] cattle, but the critters had to be driven from Texas to the northern market. Driving of hundreds of thousands of cattle out of Texas then started.

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Cattle prices raised from nothing, comparatively speaking, to an average of around \$25. a head for two's and three's (two and three years old).

“In the [Llano?] co, section cattlemen bunched their market critters into one herd. Some one man with a crew would drive a herd to market containing several different brands. After 9 the cattle were delivered [?] the drover would return and settle with each rancher. The ranchers were paid the amount received, less his portion of the expense.

“A driving crew numbered around a dozen men, besides the belly-cheater and the hoss wrangler. The cooky's job was to attend to the chuck wagon and keeping cooking fuel on hand besides cooking the chuck. Of course, the hoss wrangler attended to the remuda.

“The number of hosses in the driving remuda varied in number, but averaged about four for each trail rider.

“The first day out with a herd, we would drive from early morning till around dusk without a stop, except for water. The reason for pushing the herd so hard the first day, was to get far as possible from the home range for bedding time. If the herd was close to the home range the animals would attempt to return to their usual bedding ground.

“As a rule our hardest day for handling cattle was the first day. With each days driving the critters would become more accustomed to being driven and would handle better, until it took the drift without any urging.

“After the first day we would allow the critters to graze along practically at their own gait, but always pointed up the trail. The only time we would push the herd forward was when we wanted to reach a certain spot at a specified time, such as getting to water, bedding grounds or across a stream before dark.

“A herd will drift around 10 miles a day, but reckoning as 10 the crow flies; about seven miles was the average. Drifting at this rate cattle will drift several hundred miles and be in

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good flesh at the end of the drive, if there is plenty of grass. If a drover did not care about the condition of the herd at the end of the drive, for instance, if the herd was being driven to a new range, a herd can be driven from [10?] to [30?] miles each day.

“When it comes to talking about trouble with a herd on a drive, that all depends on the nature of the critters in the herd, the kind of a range it was raised on, how it had been handled all are big factors contributing to how it will handle. If a herd came off of a rough bushy range those were hard to handle on a prairie. If the herd had been kept bunched and were used to night riders those were easier to handle than those let run at will.

“I made many drives while with the Bolin outfit and we always had more or less of a mixed herd. I never drove two herds thick handled alike. I have been with herds that could hardly be put on a stampede and others herds that would want to run all the time.

“We started out of [Llano?] co. one time in the early 70's with a herd which began running the first day and gave us a [run?], on the average, each day till we landed in Abilene Kans. The animals had run so often that when we arrived in Abilene, their running ability was developed to perfection and any one of the critters could out run a race hoss. The animals had 11 conditioned to whip-cord muscles and bones. Of course the critters were not fit for market and had to be sold at a greatly reduced price.

“Our worst run with that herd took place about six miles S. of Doan's Crossing of the Red River. Now, it seemed that herd would start from the noise made rolling a smoke bill. We had been pushing the herd the late part of the day, because we wanted to make the river for water before dark.

“Something caused a critter to snort and that was the signal for a run. From the [previous?] runs [made?] by that herd we had learned to just hold the animals in a bunch until the herd had tuckered itself out, but at this time the millet outfit was ahead of us with a herd. We

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didn't know whether not Millet had crossed the river, therefore, tried to turn the herd and put it milling to prevent a possible mixing with the herd ahead.

“Several of us waddies went to the lead and emptied our guns into the faces of the critters several times, but our efforts did not stop the run or even turn the herd. All we could do was to divert their course to one side then back again. All the time the herd was going in the general direction of the river. The course followed by the critters, I reckon was caused by the animals scenting water. Well, the herd was not long in reaching the crossing and the leaders lit into a quick-sand bog. About a 100 of the critters became mired, and some went down it. [????] 12 “Darkness soon set in after we arrived at the river and there we were with the herd split into three bunches. A part of the crew were put to pulling the bogged critters out of the quick-sand while the rest of the rawhides devided followed the critters along the shore. We were two days getting the herd bunched and had lost around 100 animals. We lost 50 in the quick-sand. Some died before we could drag the animals out and others were too week for further travel after being hauled out.

“During that entire drive a [dauble?] double crew were kept on duty doing night riding. When we reached Abilene the crew was in about the same gaunt condition as the critters.

“What I have been talking about deals with handling critters, but during my days on the range we had other things things to deal with which delt us plenty of missery. It was Indian depredations and cattle rustlers.

“When I lit in [Llano] co. Indian raids were expected at any moment and a person didn't know what second a bullet or arrow from an Indian weapon was going to brand him.

“I want to tell of a particular incident that happened to a fellow named [aycoff?]. He and I were riding side by side, and we were, as usual those days, scanning the territory to locate any lurking Indian. [?] a [?] sight of one did we see. Sudenly, an arrow hit [?] on the top of his skull and entered his head. He dropped out of his saddle and was dead by the time I reached his side. The Indian who shot that arrow was hid somewhere and shot from a

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distance. The distance 13 must have been far beyond the normal distance for straight arrow shot. That Indian [?] the aim high enough to put the arrow in a downward position when it hit.

“I never could believe the hit was more than a chance shot, but the shot showed that the Indian was a good archer to, put an arrow anywhere near the object when it was necessary to shoot at the elevation that particular shot was made.

“I was at Cal Calvert's house with a party of five other rawhides. We had stopped for a little chat with Cal. While we were there about 25 Indians suddenly popped up and surrounded the house. As luck would have it, Cal's wife and child had ridden over to a neighbors for a visit, so there were just we men folks and no women folks to worry with.

“The 25 Indians were to many for us five waddies to handle in the open, but we had the advantage of the log house. I don't think the Indians calculated on meeting up with any men besides the Calvert famliy, or they would not have came into the open.

“We rawhides open fire shooting through the door and two windows, also, we pulled the chinks from between the logs at several spots all around the house and we were using the chink holes for port-holes.

“The Indians were constantly circling the house. They indicated that some of them wanted to get to the house, for the purpose of setting it on fire, no doubt. Fire was our biggest danger of all danger, until we had a chance to brand a good many of the redskins. We were all good shots and were hitting frequently. In fact, we kept two Indians busy carrying wounded 14 Indians out of firing range.

“We put five Indians out of combat in a hurry and then the whole crowd/ of indians drew off and held a pow-wow. We reckoned that they were laying plans for firing the house and drive us into the open. If that happened that bunch of Indians could shoot us down as a bunch of rabbits would be shot coming from under a brush pile.

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“While the Indians were talking their next move over, we went out of the rear door and crawled on our bellies through grass a distance of about half mile to a small brake. When we reached the brake we went to running. We had not left the house a great while until we saw the smoke of the burning house.

“At Long Mountain lived the Witlock family whom I knew. Word came to us one day that Indians had raided and destroyed the Witlock home. I, at once, started to the place. When I arrived there were a number of people there. Several of the [Shults?] men, [J?] Bell, the [Ross?] boys. Jim Shults, who now lives in Fort Worth, was all of the crowd present.

“We found the house burned and the entire family dead, with the exception of two young lads who happened to be hunting at the time of the depredating. Everyone of the dead people were scalped.

“We started to ride after the Indians and went in the direction of their trail so long as we could follow it. We lost the trail at the end of the first day [first day?], but continued to scout the 15 the surrounding country.

“A little past noon of the second / day Indians were sighted. J. Bell spied a party of Indians by the use of his spy glass. The Indians were lying on the ground in the shade of a tree. We calculated they were asleep an they were. We didn't know whether or not them were the Indians which did the depredating. But there were no question asked of them. Our party quitely surrounded the crowd of Indians and when we all were in good shooting range we poured the lead into them. If the bones have not been carried away, the bones of all the Indians are' still under that tree.

“To give some ida of the fear folks lived in every minute those days. I want to relate a laughable deal that happened near Pack Saddle Mountain. The muzzle loading gun was still the tops in guns and most people moulded their bullets. The women folks generally did the moulding during their spare time. They used a ladle into which solid lead was

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placed, then heated until it would pour. When the lead would pour it was poured into a bullet mould.

“One time [James?], if I recall the name correctly, was sitting before the fire-place moulding bullets. Mr James was seated in a rocking chair fogging his pipe and feeling contented. Suddenly their tranquility was broken by hearing a noise under the house. The noise came from a spot under where the couple were setting. Mrs James at that moment held a ladle full of hot lead. The first thought which intered the couple's heads was 16 that Indians were under the house for the purpose setting it afire. Mrs James poured the melten lead through a crack in the floor. The moment the lead went through the floor a loud cry of pain emitted from a human, followed by the sound of a scrambling person.

“Mr James rushed out and saw the forms of Indians departing. He investigated under the house and there found a pile of tender wood ready to be fired.

“I was hunting in the Falls Creek bottom one day and herd the sounds of running hosses hitting the ground. Fearing that the riders were Indians, I climbed to the top of a tree which had a heavy foliage. Lucky for me that I did. I had not been in the tree long until a small pary of Indians rode up searching the woods. They had, no doubt, heard my shooting and had come to get my scalp. You may be sure I didn't move and did my breathing lightly during the five or ten minutes the Indians were hunting in the brush.

“There was a spell of time when the settlers in the [bottoms?] were compelled to lock their hosses with chairs to trees in order to prevent the Indians from stealing the critters. Between the Indians stealing hosses, scalping and raiding and the rustlers stealing cattle the ranchers were kept from being lonesome for something to occupy their mind.

“Rustlers wore organized through a general understanding which caused them to stick by each other and conviction for rustling or killing was next to impossible. It was dangerous to give evidence against one of the rustlers or to even talk 17 about stealing or killing.

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“My brother thought he was big enough to give evidence against a rustler who was being tried for a killing, but Jim never got inside of the Court House.

“I went with brother Jim the day of the trial. Jim had seen the killing and had told what he had seen to the prosecuting Attorney. As was the usual thing those days, when a murder trial was being held, a large crowd was gathered around the Court House. When I saw the crowd I cautioned Jim and called his attention to two notices he had received warning him against testifying, but he would not listen to me.

“He and I were just about to enter the court door when two shots sounded and Jim toppled over dead. Who did the shooting was never learned. The shooting was did by someone in a crowd of around 75 people, but not even one person could be found who would admit they saw or know who did the shooting. Without Jim's testimony the prosecution could not prove the defendant was the killer.

“I watched a desperate gun fight in the streets of [?] one day between members of the same gang of rustlers. John [?] and Jim [?] were sort of leaders of a number of rustlers. Some one of the [?] folks were accused of running off at the mouth about some rustling. The members of the gang became engaged in a heated argument over the matter which led to a division of the gang. Hartly was at the head of one crowd and [?] the other.

“On the day the battle was fought, the two crowds were in town and the [?] arguement reached a bursting stage and shooting 18 started.

“There was an old shack near the main street, sort of a box building built of upright boards. One crowd baricaded theirselves in the shack. The firing sounded as though an young army was turned loose when the fellows on the outside started pouring lead into the shack. The men inside were peeping around the door jamb and firing back. The fight was hot for about half hour and when the fighting stopped there were several killed and wounded on each side. The fighting stopped when there were only two or three people on each side

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able to continue fighting, and they were anxious to call the firing off so that the dead and wounded could receive their attention.

“Everyone stayed at a safe distance while the shooting was taking place, but when it stopped people crowded around and gave [aid?] to the wounded.

“That fight had a quieting effect on the rustlers and afterwards killings became less.

“As an example of the danger lurking for one that express his opinion about the killings and to state what one knew of the the facts, I want to relate the experience of a young fellow named Reed who came into the section to teach a country school. He was in the wagon yard one Saturday and was talking to a crowd of men expressing his opinion which was condemning the killings. The following Monday morning he was walking in a path going to his school and came to a piece of paper hanging by a string from a limb of a tree. It was a notice to him demanding that he keep his mouth shut or else he would be giving his friends a job of digging a little hole. The teacher answered the note and 19 thanked the advisors for giving him the tip. The teacher would not talk about anything but his school thereafter.

“I quit the Bolin outfit sometime in the early 70's and went to work for the [??] ranch. I worked for [Harris] four or five years and then went over to the Duncan ranch. After working for the Duncan outfit for a spell I went to work for the Franklin outfit which was about the biggest outfit in the section of the range country. [Their critters?] numbered around 15,000.

“I quit the range in [1893?] when a [panic?] hit the country and the cattle prices went to nothing. The cattle condition during the hard times of [1893?] and for a few years following was hard as the war period. Wages went down to nothing also, and I decided to try farming. I went on a farm and [worked?] so long as I was able to work.