

## [John W. Fletcher]

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Folk Stuff - Rangelore

Gauthier. Sheldon F.

Rangelore.

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John W. Fletcher, 70, living at 450 St Louis Ave, Fort, Worth, Texas, was born in Parker co., Texas, Sept., 22, 1868. His father, Dewey Fletcher, farmed an 80 acre tract, which he had fenced, and owned a small herd of cattle which he raised on the open range. John W. Fletcher began his range career assisting his father and at the age of 15 accepted a job on the ranch of Bill Smith. Later he worked for Bud Davis. He saw the bodies of the two Cantrell women who were hanged from a limb of a tree near Springtown, Texas, for rustling cattle and horses. He was with his brother, Jim Fletcher, who was a Texas Ranger, and Ranger Man Roe, when those two men buried the corps. He went to Uvalde co., in 1888 and there he worked for the Miller ranch. He worked on the Miller ranch for a period of five years and then came to Tarrant co., where he established a farm and since has remained in the county.

His story of range life follows:

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"I was born in Parker co., 70 years ago at the farm of my father's, Dewey Fletcher, which was one of the few cultivated fields there those days. It was Spet., 22, 1868, when the event of my birth took place.

"My father had about 80 acres fenced with a rail fence. A practical wire for fencing was not on the market as yet. Fencing was done by cutting rails and cording these up. The system was called the "Stake and rider" method. The distance between each rail was about six inches. Just about space enough for a man to put his head through, but not space enough for a critter's head. C.12 - 2/11/41 - Texas

"Father cultivated about 50 acres, which was planted in corn, wheat and a vegetable patch. This grain and vegetables were for family use. Also, we raised some cotton for lint to make clothing and sell for cash. The cotton furnished the money to buy the 2 few needed articles for the family. The articles needed were thread, buttons, some store cloth, boots, hats, and spice and other articles to season food with.

"In addition to raising crops, father had a herd of Texas Longhorns, as everyone had those days, and these cattle bred, also, found their own living on the open and free range. All the land which was not fenced, and very little was, was free and open for anyone's cattle. The herds numbered from a few hundred to several thousand.

"Some of the large cowcamps - they didn't call 'em ranches those days— were the ranches of McClean, Watson, Bill Smith and John Collins' outfit.

"My father, as all owners of small herds did, sold his [?] stock to buyers. These men came through the country, at intervals, purchasing cattle for drovers or for themselves. The herds drove to markets generally numbered 2000 to 3500.

"The cattle did not cost the folks such to raise. Salt was the only thing bought for the cattle, and some men made their own salt. The owners of a small herd was not out much, if

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anything, for hired help. Generally, the members of a family gave the critters such attention as they received. The owners of large herds hired more or less help.

“The Parker co., country is more or less rolling and contains many draws,/ and valleys. Also, contains considerable timber which cover more or less of the range. This condition provided a shelter for the cattle during a storm or a norther. Therefore, the critters were not wont to drifting. Due to this situation, it was not 3 necessary for riders to hold the herd before or during a storm, and stampedes [by?] our herds never worried us. In the event any critters did drift away, these cattle would be gathered during the Spring and Fall roundups.

“The general roundups were jobs did by all the cowcamps uniting to form one outfit. The crew worked the range over by working one section at a time. All the various brands would be separated and calves branded according to the brand carried by its mother. The strays, that is such cattle which were away from their home range, would be taken charge of by a representative of the critter's home range, and drifted back home.

“Generally, cattle on a range with excellent shelter will always be found grazing in the vicinity of their water hole and salt licks regardless of the weather conditions. However, there were always a few would stray off. The largest number of strays were those which came into our range from the prairie range country, and some of these critters drifted as far as 75 or more miles. Usually, following the Winter season, when severe weather prevails, is when the largest number of strays from far distances were found.

“My father, older brother, and I, when I became old enough to ride which was about 10 years of age, attended to our herd. Occasionally we would ride over the range to see how the cattle were fairing, and attend to any injured or sick critter located, even if it did not carry our brand. The other outfits did the same thing. Thus, there existed co-operation between the ranchers in caring 4 for the cattle on the range. Out side of this work and during the general roundups, we did nothing relating to attending the critters. The only

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other time we would go among them was when we made a sale. Then we would roundup our herd, and cut out the class sold.

“The money father received out of the sale of cattle from his herd, which numbered about 500, was clear profit. Our living was made out of the land. We made most of our clothing. Mother and my oldest sister, now 82, living at Azel, Texas, Mrs Mun Roe, did most of the [spinning?] and [?], also, the making of clothes. I, as a child, assisted by doing what I could. Many nights me have sit up till the late hours carding and spinning. I still have a mental picture of my mother sitting at the spinning wheel, and I can hear, the old wheel turning.

“While/ we lived a busy life and at times put in days of many hours at work, still we had times of relaxation. But, with it all, we lived a secured life.

“The woods was full of edible game. When we needed meat, we went into the woods and took game or beef as our appetite called for. We raised corn and wheat for our meal and flour. We raised [evegetables?] and sorghum. Therefore, our living troubles were comparatively few.

“The Indian depredations were just about at an end in our territory at the time of my birth. My folks had their share of Indian raids to contend with, but none of them were ever injured 5 in in any way. I recall just one raid after I was old enough to realize what was going on. A party of Indians made a raid on our [romuda?] and made off with five of our hosses. They sneaked in about an hour before daylight and were gone before my parents could get a shot at them, within shooting distance. Each of my parents shot a couple times, but their shots fell short of their mark. The Indians desired hosses above cattle, because they did not steal for profit, but for use. There were plenty of cattle in the woods, which they could obtain and these they took as beef [?] as needed by them. While there were a good many wild hosses, the Indians prefered a busted critter and they caused us to keep a close watch over our [romuda?].

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“There was the rustler trouble to contend with, and the number of critters father lost to the theives is difficult to estimate. Besides the rustlers, there were many men who would not take a branded critter, but seemed to be unable to distinguish between their own calves [ant?] [?] those belonging to the other fellow.

“I have often rode up to where men were branding calves and I knew the calves did not belong to them, but would not utter a word indicating my thoughts. Those days , it was just not the best thing to do for one's health, to even suggest to anyone they were branding wrongly.

“The number of the calf crop some hreds produced, indicated all the cows had twins and some triplets. While on the other hand, with some herds it required two or more cows to give birth, to one calf.

“There was a period when every one knew that the other fellow 6 was branding all the calves he could find, and in order to stay even it was necessary to do likewise. Therefore, the fellows whom were present with the best calf crops, were the fellows who could hunt and brand calves the best. During this period there was not much objections to branding calves. Ranchers took the practice as a matter of course, but did object strenuously to fellows taking branded cattle.

“While I was still in my teens, there were a couple, women operating in Parker co., and adjacent territory, who were high class rustlers of hosses and [cattles.?] There name was Cantrell. It is difficult to reckon the number of critters these women drifted off which belonged to other people.

“These two women were finally tried and hanged by a vigilante court. They were hanged to a limb of a tree near Springtown, Texas. It seemed that no one passed the tree or noticed any buzzards flying over the spot where the hanging took place until these women had hanged by the neck till their bodies parted from their head, and dropped to the ground.

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After the decapitation took place, some one passed the spot and discovered the bodies, and reported their find to the officials. My brother, Jim Fletcher, and Mun Roe, were rangers at the time, and were assigned to bury the bodies. The two corps were interred in the cemetery at [Springtown?]. The present Jacksboro Highway runs within a few yards of the cemetery as it passes Springtown.

“The [vigilantes?] hangings of these two women in one of the very few, if any other, such hanging. 7 “My folks lived in a log house, and while I was in my teens a log house or tent was the only kind of a dwelling I saw. The cow camps in our territory usually used tents for shelter. There were two exceptional houses in the section which were considered magnificent structures, and which caused people to ride out of their way to view. One of these houses was built by Mark Clifton, and located on Ask Creek, about five miles W. of Azel. It was built out of rough [stone?] which was dug out of the mountain or hills. This structure was still standing a couple years ago. The other structure was the John [Collins?] ranch home, and it was located near the line of Parker and Tarrant counties. This building, also, was built of stone and contained port holes which were placed at intervals in the walls at all sides of the house. These port holes were placed in the walls for the purpose of defending the home against Indian raids, and the holes enabled the [Collins?] family to beat off several Indian raids.

“At one time these port holes enabled Mrs J. Collins to save herself, her young son and a young waddy named Morrison.

“Young Collins and the waddy were out on the range looking after some critters, when a party of Indians took after the two lads,. The boys reached the ranch house before the Indians could catch them. The Indians surrounded the house and attempted to storm it. Mrs Collins and the two boys shot true and fast with rifles, Collins always kept loaded in the house.

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"They killed a large number of the Indians. In fact, so many of them that the rest gave up their attempt to break into 8 the house.

"Morrison and young Collins dragged the corps to a ravine and dumped the [boddies?] there for the wolves and buzzards to feed on.

"Word was sent to Ranger Captain King, with a number of rangers trailed the Indians and killed a few more of them.

"When I arrived at the age of 15, I went to work on Bill Smith's ranch, located in Parker co. He grazed about 5000 head of the Longhorns.

"We used tents for shelter and the cooky did all the cooking over a camp fire. We lived a genuine camp life and a good one. We were fed plenty of good plain food.

"Our work for the most part consisted of riding the range, keeping a general watch over the herd and our eye out for rustlers. For a period of three months of each Spring and Fall [??] working with the general roundup.

"My wage was \$20. per month at the start. Begining with my second year I received \$25. per month. Those days the wages were reckoned as fair pay. In fact, one could do a lot with \$25. those days. One month's wages would buy enough range clothes to last a year or more. A pair of boots cost from \$5. to \$10., but would wear considerable over a year. A \$10. hat would wear several years.

"I worked on the Smith outfit for a little over two years and then worked for [Bur?] Davis. The work and living on [?] ranch was about the same. 9 "I went to Uvalde co., in 1890, and worked on the Miller ranch. The open ranch still existed in Uvalde co. Miller himself acted as foreman. The herd was handled by Miller, his three sons and three hired hands. The territory was a mountainous country, which provided excellent shelter for the cattle during a spell of stormy weather. Therefore we had no drifting trouble, or stampeds stampedes to

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handle. If a norther headed in the cattle would drift to the valleys at the lee side of the hills, and remained there until the storm subsided.

“Miller ranged around 5000 head of Longhorns, but at the time I worked on his range, he was buying Hereford bulls to replace the Longhorn males.

“There was an abundance of grass and water, also, excellent climate for cattle raising. In addition, we did not have enough cattle/ rustlers to make stealing a problem. Our work was just routine, such as riding over the range to look after the cattle and watching for any unusual condition.

“We had our general roundup, the same as held in other sections pf the cattle ganges. These roundups required our attension for about six month of the year. When a sale of cattle was made we had our own roundup to cut out the class sold. San Antonio was our market and we drove the cattle to the city.

“We lived about the same as waddies lived in other cow camps. Meat was our main food [withe?] beans and sour-dough bread. The country contained plenty of game, such as turkey, deer, grouse and edible wild animals and fowles, and honey beyond one's imagination. 10 “There was one place, among the [namy?], where the wild honey bees stored honey that I must tell about. The place is called Dead Man's Mountain and is especially noted for its number of bees and the amount of honey stored there. In the mountain's side there are many caves and to these caves the bees hived and stored their honey. These caves varied in size, but each contained more or less numbers of bee hives. I have seen honey combs built up three or four feet high and about the same distance in [with?], extending from 10 to 25 feet in lenght. Also, in the same cave, the walls and ceiling would be covered with combs filled with honey. Some of this honey had been there so long that it had turned to sugar. This sugar was so hard that it was necessary to use an ax or pick to remove it.

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“The older folks living in this country told me that bees had hived in these caves as far back as they could recall.

“With honey stored in great quantities, and game on every hand, with no game laws to interfere with hunting and trapping as one desired, there was no excuse for one to go hungry. Those days deer was killed for the lion and ham cuts and hide. It was the same with killing wild turkey, just the choice cuts were taken and the balance of the carcass thrown away.

“After working for the Miller outfit five years, I came to Tarrant co, and bought a tract of land. I engaged in farming since.