

[Joe C. Woody]

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Life history Range lore

Phipps, Woody

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Tarrant Co., Dist. #7 [124?]

Page #1

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Joe C. Woody, 57, was born on his father's stock farm at Paradise, Wise co., Texas. His father built the first barb wire fence in Wise co., on a ranch he owned near Booneville, Wise co. His neighbors tore the fence down, and he traded the entire ranch to his father, Joe's grandfather, for a ranch near Springtown, Tarrant co., Tex. When Joe was five, his father's death caused the burden of rearing eight children to fall on his mother. His mother sold the stock farm in Wise co., and moved the family to the ranch in Tarrant Co. The shortage of labor on the ranch forced the children to experience work at an early age. Joe liked to work with cattle, so he naturally did all of his work with cattle, learning to ride a horse at the age of six, and taking a regular cowboy's place at eight. When he left the ranch, he went to Fort Worth, where he dealt in cattle. From a small beginning, he now operates a large cattle commission co in the Livestock Exchg. Bldg. Ft. Worth, Tex. His story:

“Why, yes, I know a good deal about the old range. In fact, I was born on June 27th, 1880, at Paradise, in Wise county, when there wasn't a fence anywhere to be seen. My own

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father was one of the first to see the value there was to a fence, and he built the first barb wire fence in Wise county on a ranch he owned at Booneville.

“The fence didn't stay up long, though, because the neighbors all tore it down. After dad went to all the trouble to put the fence up, and make sure it was a good job, he went out one morning, and it was all cut down. There wasn't a fence post standing anywhere. When they'd cut the wire between two posts, they'd also lassoed the posts and drug 'em down. Some men would have been mad, and wanted to shoot somebody. Not dad. He just went to my granddad and traded ranches. He got my granddad's ranch at Springtown, in Tarrant county. C. 12 - 2/11/41 Tex. [?] 2 “When I was still a baby, my dad moved the family down to the Springtown ranch. I don't remember how many head there was on the place when we first moved there, but it seemed like there was a regular sea of beef and horns. One thing really stayed with me, and that was the iron. All the beef was in the 'WOODY' iron. The reason it stayed with me was because after dad died, I had to burn our brand on our cattle.

“One of the things I remember about my childhood was the sheriff coming by to get dad. There were several gangs operating in Wise county from time to time, and the Campbell gang was one of them. Every time the Wise county officers figured they could capture one of the gangs, they always got word to the sheriff at Weatherford, and he'd go up to help. On the way, he'd pick dad up, and they'd go together. You know, in those days when there wasn't so many people, a sheriff had to be careful who he chose to help him when he went after a desperado. Likely as not, he might pick a relative of the desperado, or a good friend, and he'd lose out when it came to a tight spot.

“This time I remember the folks talking about, the sheriff had come by and got dad. They left word that the Wise county officers had the Campbell boys in a trap, and just needed more men to close in with. Dad especially wanted to see the Campbell boys stopped because he knew two of them had rustled some hosses of his. Chalk and Bob. They were the two.

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“When the sheriff and dad got to the rendezvous with the Wise county officers, they saw a two story farm house with the top floor all lit up, and sounds of music with dancing could be heard. Everybody was really feeling good, because there was no possible [?] 3 chance of escape from the house. The officers and their men had it completely surrounded. After a good deal of talk about whether to charge in and capture, or just let the folks leave one by one, and capture them then, it was decided to wait and take them one at a time. Well, the music played on and on, 'til finally, at about two in the morning, it stopped with the dancing. The officers all waited and waited, then decided that everybody had gone to bed in the house. Just before daylight, it was decided to rush the house and make the capture. This was a dangerous procedure because the stairs leading up to the second floor had a solid wall on both sides, all the way up, with no place to dodge bullets should the outlaws discover their predicament. Well, sir, my dad was the first to mount those stairs. All the way up, he said he expected bullets, but none came. When he got to the top, the doors were unlocked. He eased the door open, and to his surprise, the entire building was vacant. There wasn't a man to be found anywhere. Some way or other, all the men and women escaped through the line the officers and their men had drawn around the house.

“When I was quite a bit over five years old, dad died, and left the burden of raising eight healthy children to my mother. She filled the bill better than many men could. The first thing she did was to let the cow punchers go. Dad had four or five, and the place really needed them, but mother let them go. The next thing she done, was to sell off all the scrub stock, and only keep 200 head of the very best stuff.

“Since I'd always liked to mess around stock, and knew how to ride a horse, it fell my lot to ride herd on our cattle. That was the best job I could have been given because I wanted to 4 be the cow puncher my uncle, Joe Woody, was. Uncle Joe was a cowman from the tip of his boots to the crown of his stetson. What he didn't know about cattle wasn't worth knowing. I saw a good deal of him after dad died, because he advised mother about her

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cattle. He was the foreman of the Farmer Ranch, which was owned by old Uncle Jim Farmer's father. Old Uncle Jim runs the Farmer Commission company with several desks in the lobby of our office.

“The reason I wanted to pattern after Uncle Joe was because even though he limped, he was still a swaggering cow poke that was good and he knew it. He could rope, ride, and shoot as well as any circus performer of today. And better, I expect, because the wild hosses he rode had never seen a man before, and even a hoss with a saddle made them skittish.

“One of the things folks tell on Uncle Joe was about an Indian ambush on the Farmer Ranch. One day, he and about 19 cow pokes were out on a roundup. They were given a certain section around Flag Springs and Farmer's Creek to roundup the cattle. They'd never separated, and were still in a bunch when they rode into a canyon. All of a sudden, a regular hail of bullets fell into them. The shots were all coming from one side of the canyon's rim. Uncle Joe ordered everybody to dismount and force the hoss to lay down. This would give each man something to hide behind.

“Every man in the 20 were good shots, and all of them wouldn't be afraid to tackle the old devil himself. All of them except the negroe cook. This nigger, he didn't do any shooting. Instead, he went to praying in a loud voice. Uncle Joe told him to shut up and go to shooting, but the nigger didn't pay any 5 attention. Since Uncle Joe and the other cow pokes were reloading and shooting as fast as they could, it made him mad for the nigger to not join in on the shooting. Uncle Joe said later, that it seemed like everytime when he was out of ammunition in the gun, he'd get good shots. That gave him an idea, so he had the nigger, whose name was Dick Davis, to reload his pistols and another man's.

“That was the main trouble. The cow pokes didn't have anything but pistols to shoot with, while the Indians were above them, and had the advantage of the canyon's rim to hide them. They never did find out how many Indians there were, but since he'd been in Indian

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fighters before, and everytime the fight lasted anytime, always before, the Indians high tailed it home. All during the fight, he'd hear a certain 'thump!', which indicated that a shot had struck another unfortunate cow poke. The fight lasted all evening, beginning along about noon. It looked like the Indians were going to kill all the cow pokes, so a talk was had.

"Finally, it was decided to let some man volunteer to go for help. Since this was almost certain death to leave the party, it had to be a volunteer. Uncle Joe volunteered, and left. When he left, he had six or seven bullets already in him, and one of them almost made him lose his leg. One of the hosses had gotten away from his rider, but hadn't run off. Instead, he was about 200 yards from the ambush, behind some big boulders. Uncle Joe had watched the hoss all afternoon, with the idea that they might have to use it. When he left the party, he crawled down the canyon, keeping in to the walls as close as he could. He finally made it, got on the hoss, and zig zagged a way back to the ranch headquarters.

"When he reached the headquarters, he got every man out that could possibly go, and started back with wagons and plenty of ammunition. When the wagons reached the men, the Indians had left. There were only four or five of the white men living, and they were [?] badly wounded. The wagons were used to carry the dead and wounded back to the ranch, but the nigger, Dick Davis, didn't even get a scratch out of the fight, so he rode a hoss back. Of course, it couldn't possibly have been funny then, about the nigger not fighting but praying, but later on, the men razzed him so much that he almost left the ranch. The remaining wounded finally died, leaving Uncle Joe and the nigger the only ones to come out of the fracas alive.

"I didn't want to get into any shooting scrapes like that, but I did want to be able to take care of myself in scrapes that might come up, and I did want to know cow critters like he did. They say that in a matter of a beef contract for so many pounds, he'd guess each critter's weight as it passed him, mentally tally it all up 'til he had the beef weight to fill the contract. He could come closer to picking the scrubs out of a herd than any body else.

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That was also my ambition. To be able to look at a critter and tell if it had stamina, or if it was the kind of beef that looks good outside but isn't so good inside. This may sound sort of jumbled to you, but it's part of a cowman's business to be able to know what he's buying. Also, if he intends to build his herd up, he has to know how to cut the scrubs out.

"I had this in mind, and studied cattle all the time. Another thing that helped me to know scrubs was when a critter got sores on it, I doctored it. I always toted a bottle of cru-silic ointment with me to daub on the sores. These sores were from the barbs on the fences, and other things. Doctoring them gave me a close opportunity for study.

"Another thing that gave me a chance for study, was once when a brother of mine got a chance to buy up 40 head of cattle, and he did it. We drove these cattle to our ranch, and right away, they began dieing. It wasn't nothing to look out and see a critter drop over dead. After we got down to where we only had about 10 of them left, Uncle Joe came out and said that the critters had come from a tick-free country. He said that unless a critters is born in tick country, it couldn't live with ticks. That ticks gave cattle fever, and the other cattle always died with it.

"People had funny ideas about ticks in those days, and among the other ideas they had about cattle was that a cow would dry up if it's calf was taken away from it before the calf had been weaned. Along when I was about nine and 10 years old, I started to buying these calves. I could always sell them when they got to be three-year olds, si I just started me a business of buying and selling. By the time I was 13, I had a large number of people who would sell me all their calves, and keep them 'til their cows weaned them. Sometimes, they'd keep the calf two years. Can you imagine?! They'd keep it, and feed it for two years, then I'd get it and keep it a year, and sell it.

"From that start, I've built a big commission business here in the Livestock Exchange building. Lats year, we done over \$12,000,000.00 business. It's these business cares that

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8 have weighed so heavy on me that I've forgotten all these things that happened to me in my youth.