

## Pioneers At Least Had Running Chance To Avoid Scalping

By Monte Noelke

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MERTZON — The Shortgrass County was more tranquil during the Indian wars than it is today. Ambushes combined with log cabin downing parties couldn't have been as nerve wracking as our modern existence.

It's the tax officials that make life miserable in this neighborhood. They run us ragged as a seaport bartenders' helper. Once a Shortgrasser is commissioned to fill the public till, he falls to the task as if the fate of all humanity were based on his seeing that every dogie lamb, every orphaned chick, is carrying its share of the tax burden.

Just to show how bad it is, take what happened this past weekend. On Sunday a couple of stray mares were ranging up the highway that runs through the ranch. By nightfall the horses had reached the eastern edge of our country when a couple of oilmen spotted them and decided that if the mares weren't put in our pasture they'd cause a horrible wreck.

The next morning I innocently reported the lost horses to the combined office of sheriff and tax assessor. (In small counties such as this one, settling husband-wife affrays and harvesting the tax money come under the same authority. The only reason I can think of for this arrangement is that it gives the high sheriff a chance to snoop private premises in search of taxable property while spending taxpayers' money in refereeing domestic disputes.)

The lady deputy in the courthouse answered my call. Before I could explain the matter, she was wanting to know whether to add the mares to my rendition as work animals or riding mounts.

It was a serious situation. At any time, the tax snatcher for the School District was likely to overhear the conversation. I knew that once a taxable item reached the attention of either official, an around-the-clock session of the Supreme Court couldn't get 15 cents knocked off the total evaluation.

Read all the history you care to, you won't find the pioneers suffering this kind of grief. The early settlers may have had it a bit rough, being choused by redskins day and night, but at least they weren't hounded by heartless women tax collectors. Tomahawkings were bad. But considering how wampum pouches are emptied today, they were kids' play.

I don't know what this old country is coming to. Brother is turned against brother. Old friends take up the seal of office as if they were imported revenue agents. It looks like our best days will be laden with trouble and misery.

Who ever thought that stray animals would come under the tax system?