



The cattle drivers

Members of the Trail Drivers Association met annually for many years. This gathering was held on the Luce Wood ranch near Runnels City during the 1920s. The last meeting was in 1927. Jim Johnson is the man with the glasses in the center of the first row. L.P. Allen is the

first man in the front row, L.P. Wood is the second man from the left in the back row, and C.A. Doose, secretary and treasurer is second from right in the back row. The others are not identified. (The photo belongs to Mrs. Rufus Allen.)

Johnson Tells How Modern Times Came to West Texas

By CHARLSIE POE
Special Correspondent

Last in a Series

WINTERS — Early day rancher and financier Jim Johnson remembered a lot about the old trail drives, but he probably had even keener memories of his marriage and his own ranch.

His records tell the story this way:

"In 1886 I married Miss Cora Walden and the following year I trailed a herd for Parramore to Cooledge, Kan., as boss of the outfit. We made a pretty fair drive, average time and nothing except the usual stampedes, storms, high water and Indians begging for beef to contend with. I rode the cushions back a most to my very door for the first time since I had been in Runnels County.

"The Santa Fe had built within six miles of Runnels City and laid out the town of Ballinger just close enough to kill our town as dead as Heck's pup. But we were so glad to have a railroad that we didn't fuss much about the new town until they tried to move the county seat a few months later. We had a sure-enough set-to when that happened, but there was not enough folks to back up our argument that we had come there and started up a town before Runnels County was

'cowboys' manage the ranch, couldn't get along without cattle.

"But we are now doing what is commonly called stock farming. An altogether different pursuit from old-time ranching on the open range with thousands of longhorns grazing where they pleased. Of course, blooded cattle rate higher in the market and they require care and feed too. There is no letting them live on prickly pear and chaparral.

"When I first came to Runnels County, before it was organized as such, there wasn't a school in it. Not a place that a boy or girl could learn as much as the 'three r's'. Now my home town has schools affiliated with the State University and the children have every advantage the city can offer, with fewer vices to help wreck their lives. The church and movies and radios, automobiles and airplanes are all a part of the very-day program now and we scarcely ever stop to consider what wonderful inventions and blessings they are.

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"**Old Dud Tom** made a hard fight against the removal of the county seat, and he won it, too, the first time. Dud built the third house in Runnels City. It was a 15 x 20-foot room, partitioned through the center, with another partition running through one of those rooms and a dining room and kitchen built of poles set up in a deep ditch to make a shedroom, and it was the finest house in town. The lumber used cost \$55 a thousand and was hauled from Coleman City.

"Strange, wasn't it, how we used to tack city onto every town that was named. Now Runnels City 'shore' was a bird of a place to carry such a pretentious title as that. I remember in 1879, when Dud Tom built his house, there was but three business houses in the place. Davis, Guy and Baker had a general merchandise store, as Dud used to say 'about big enough to cuss a cat in.' Dean Swfit had a saloon somewhat larger than that and H.D. Pearce held forth in the post office, a room about twelve feet square, and that constituted the city. But she had the name and she got the reputation as long as Ballinger was not on the map.

"Well, that drive in Coledge was my last one up the trail. I had gone up three times in all, twice to Kansas and once to Wyoming, besides I had made a lot of 'em across Texas which for distance equaled either of the others, but we never counted it going up the trail unless our route lay outside of the State. I took one heard up on the Plains anedd delivered it long about where Lubbock is now located, to the Capitol Syndicate which owned a lot of land and bought an anormous number of cattle. That was a mean drive too, if it was in Texas all of the time.

"**When I left** Parramore in '89 I set up my own ranch in Runnels County, bought and fenced land, stocked it with cattle that I had accumulated all through the years I had been foreman for him, and our company and started in to make a permanent home.

"Three children, boys, were born to us and I have reared them all to know the ins and outs of the livestock industry, to profit by the mistakes I made and think and act for themselves. The result is that two of them are stepping along right in my tracks, I am glad to say missing one occasionally, when it wasn't much to my credit, but the third is a cotton buyer, says he had all of cattle prodding that he wanted when he was a kid.

"Three years ago I moved to the little town of Winters, near my ranch, I say little and it is that, as towns are compared and spoken of his day and time, but it is enough sight larger than Runnels City or Ballinger either one was when cattle were a monopoly in Western Texas., I still, with the help of my two

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"Why if we had but known of the existence of radio waves and the way to harness them up in frontier days, as now, what terrible, suspense, agony and death might have been avoided and what a wonderful pleasure it would have been. More than now? Why, yes, I think that it would, a great deal more; for then all of the connection we had with the outside world was what reached us by the four-horse stagecoach and it took months for news to travel so far.

"**Now we get the** report of the stock market every day and know when to ship our cattle and hogs as well as if we were right at the yards when it was quoted. We are living in a wonderful age and no mistake. But looking backward at the time when we use to eat beans and 'sow belly', sour dough biscuits and thank you for the corn bread when we couldn't; when beef was of so little value that we would kill a yearling, eat prime steaks until we broke camp, take a quarter along in the chuck wagon and hang the rest of it in a mesquite tree for the next outfit that came that way; when we hardly slept in a house from year's end to year's end, and spent most of our money on fancy saddles, bridles, spurs, shop-made boots and leather leggins, with six month's wages on a good ten-gallon Stetson; then we had our work cut out for us and made our own fun."

"I can't help but wonder, some time, if the present generation lacks something that the circumstances our surroundings engendered in the men of that time. Money? Well, some of us had it then, but we had other things that amounted to more than belt full of \$100 bills. Sometimes those who are wealthy in this world's goods go stumbling along in the dust with scorpions and rattlesnakes. The qualifications and attributes of the men of the '70s, '80s and '90s and before that time, laid the foundation for the Texas of today. They were hard-living, hard-working, hard-riding cowboys.

"Not the kind pictured on the screen, but in reality. They bred out the longhorns and brought in agriculture and commerce when land sold high at \$1 per acre. And these were excelled only by their forefathers who wrested thousands of leagues of it from the Mexicans when it was considered valueless save for grazing cattle for which, at that time there was no market value. Upon that land today are located cities second to none in the United States. It is to the real pioneers, those who went before, who rode in covered wagons across sagebrush and sand, who overcame all obstacles, endured hardships and marked their trails with their bones that we owe our greatest debt.

"**When I came** to Gonzales in 1870 it was all frontier country, with a few scattered log houses and an occasional settlement where the women and children gathered in the largest and strongest building every light of

Drives

Continued From Pg. 1B

the moon so the men could stand guard over them and their livestock to prevent massacres and wholesale thieving by the redskins. And yet long strides had been made, even then, toward civilization from a few short years before, when wagon trains and immigrants were busy running from scalping knives and poison arrows.

"It was the continuous travel up the trail that forced the Indians farther west and made it safe for the cattlemen to run their herds as they willed on the open range. Nobody then, could by any stretch of the imagination, fancy the prairies stretching for miles and miles fenced, cross-fenced and stocked with 'whitefaces' that when shown at Dallas at the State Fair, or at the Fat Stock Show in Fort Worth, have their hair marcelled so that it rivals an up-to-date flapper.

"No sir, it just couldn't have entered into the 'scheme of things entire, then. Now, by gravy, there isn't a single longhorn left in Texas, except a few bought up by L.A. Schreiner at Kerrville to keep the breed from entirely running out. Not one remaining loose for your boy to mine to see what we had to wrestle with back in the days when a cowboy was a 'shore-nuff' cowpuncher and not a blamed stock farmer, of which I am one.

"Yes, it does a fellow good, sometimes, to review old times a little. And when he does, he is pretty apt to conclude that the present generation has got it coming their way and it was not a happen so eithr; but the result of concerted action by determined men and women that converted the hunting grounds of the Indians and the rendezvous of white and Mexican renegades into a land threaded with railroads, highways, telegraph and telephone lines; with centers of commerce, industry and education. Markets where the producer and consumer meet on a mutual basis of exchange; and pleasure and happiness feed on the self-denial, and endurance practiced by their forbears. But not withstanding all that, I question, at times whether the Texas of today gives full credit to the most deserving of all her citizens — the men who blazed the cattle trails."