

# Will Rogers' Tribute to Trail Drivers Cherished

Will Rogers' visit to the old range and a barbecue given him by the Old Trail Driver's Association of San Antonio a number of years ago, are related in one of his Sunday newspaper articles, which is cherished by C. M. Francis of Stamford as one of the most beautiful pieces ever written by the late humorist. Rogers visited Stamford July 3 during its Cowboy Reunion.

The article is reprinted here as one of the favorite articles written by Rogers:

I have run into a good many pleasant things on my jaunts, but the other day I hit San Antonio, what used to be before Progress hit it, one of the three unique cities of America. It's a great old town, is San Antonio, even if they have got a filling station in connection with the Alamo. You have to sacrifice something to progress, but I never thought it would be the Alamo. I had the most wonderful days there I think I ever had.

There is a bunch of men there called "The Old Trail Drivers' Association." Due to the work of a few like Mr. Saunders, Mrs. Russell, widowed wife of a fine Texas cattleman, and a great character, and Col. Ike Pryor and a few others, they have formed this bunch together and they are what keeps San Antonio of the old days alive. They gave me a barbecue. One of the finest feeds I ever had in my life. They had everything. Son-of-a-guns made from stolen beef. Free holys, Dutch oven biscuits, cooked by real roundup cooks. They had the chuck wagon, even made one of the fires out of "chips." It sho was fine. I am a mighty young man to be allowed to mingle with those old fellows. For every one of them saw actual service up the trail to Kansas and Montana, from the Sixties to the early Nineties. It's always been the regret of my life that I didn't live a few years earlier. I believe I would-a fit in with that gang better.

There is a lot of this so-called "Progress" that I can't keep step with. An ax handle wrapped with cowhide, I believe, would have fit and felt better in my hands than a niblick. I wish I could have lived my whole life and drank out of a gourd instead of a paper envelope.

I just looked at those old fellows that day in wonder. Here they were 70 and 80 years old, lots of them straight and fine. They had trailed herds of cattle by the thousands from the Pecos to the Platte. They had done it year after year with not even a toothbrush in the outfit, six and eight months at a time without a manicure. Not even individual soap. They all had to use the same piece.

There was old grizzled gentlemen come to eat at that Barbecue that was 85 years old and never even had a face massage in their lives. How they ever lived and existed under such unsanitary conditions I will never be able to know. They swam rivers for 20 years without even a bath towel. Some of them didn't even know a "Putter" from a "branding iron." I was raised up in the Cherokee Nation and the names that was at that barbecue used to stock our country every year, and ship out in the Fall to market. Their names were to me like you would look on Presidents. I had heard all my life of such families as the Pierces, the Slaughters, the Pryors, Waggoners, Burnetts, "Windy" Scotts, Russells, McFaddens, Saunders, Blockers, Mavericks.

Every business has its aristocracy. If you are in the Automobile business why Ford, Irskine, Willys and a few of those are your ideal of that business. But these men that I have named above handled thousands and thousands of cattle, from one State to another before the days of convenient railroads. Johnny Blocker sent 82 thousand Steers up the trail in one year in '85. He was one of the greatest Ropers that Texas ever produced, and when I say Texas ever produced why I mean the World for they have turned out more Ropers than any State. He was originator of the "Blocker loop." That's a big loop, and you go up side of the steer and turn it over as you throw it, and it goes down over the Steer's shoulder and picks up both front feet. He picked up a rope there the other day and showed me just how he used to throw it. He is around 75, and I bet he can spread it on one yet. He was Judge of the first Roping Contest I ever was in in Texas in San Antonio in 1901. I was just an old Cuckoo Kid and had a little Pony and got it jerked down so many times they wanted me to tie the Horse's feet instead of the Steers. He even remembered it the other day and the color of the Pony.

Met one old Fellow there that drove the only herd of Buffalo that ever was trailed from one place to another. There is a nice job on a dark rainy night when they start to

run. Met one of the Mavericks. The name Maverick on an unbranded cow brute started with that family. They brought a bunch of cattle and didn't brand 'em, just turned them loose and everybody seeing one unbranded or unmarked called it "Mavericks." So that's how the name got started. If he could have always held the unbranded ones, boy, he would have had some stock today! Then they after got to calling them "slick and ears" when they had never been marked.

There is a wonderful Book they presented me with, "The Trail Drivers of Texas," published by the Cokesbury Press of Nashville, Tenn. It was published under the direction of George W. Sanders, President and organizer of the "Old Trail Drivers Association." It's not a story; it's just a collection of experiences written by the men themselves, over 300 of them, of their different experiences in going up the trail. Get it, it's the most unique thing ever published. It shows these old timers' pictures. Some of them Millionaires today, and own Thousands of acres and hundreds of oil wells, while others are poorer than when they worked on the trail for wages. But in that group together they are all the same. Johnny Blocker, who sent up 82,000 in one year, why "Lady Luck" hasn't dealt any too kindly with him. He wasent lucky enough to get in on the oil. But when he is with these boys, he is just as welcome as Ike Pryor or Dan Waggoner.

They are trying to raise money to erect a monument in San Antonio, to the Old Trail Drivers. It's a beautiful thing. The model is there now. It is being made by Gutzon Borglum, the originator of the Stone Mountain one. It would be a great thing to have, and San Antonio would be the logical place to have it. I certainly hope they get it. There is monuments to pretty near everybody that ever was drafted to kill somebody. Every Governor that was ever paid a big salary by each State for just living in the Mansion. But not a thing has anyone ever done to perpetuate something commemorating what a Ranchman or Cowpuncher has ever done. Texas would be in Mexico today if it wasn't for them. Right after the war cattle was all they had, and no market or no railroads for them. These old Boys drove 'em north till they found markets and buyers, and it was through their efforts that the whole Northwest was stocked with cattle. The only revenue that come into this whole country for years was just what was brought back by these old "Waddies." Now I don't know what kind of co-operation they are getting from all the rest of the Southwest, but it certainly ought to be plentiful, for Lord help you silk garter boys of today that are setting mighty pretty down here now, if it hadn't been for these old Timers.

You know sometimes in our satisfied ease and prosperity why we forgot to sorter remember somebody that is going on kinder over the brow of the hill. We say, "Oh, those old timers, let 'em rave!" Well there is one thing about an Old Timers raving, he has gone through something to rave over. The sad thing is going to be the coming generations listening to us. We will be raving with nothing to rave over. Our most thrilling experiences will be how we run to catch a street car and missed it, one cold day, or how we lost four good golf balls in one game. Build this monument now! These old Boys ain't going to be with you long. Let them see it finished while they are alive. If it's a bore to you to listen to their old time ways, why you won't have to listen to them long. Make them happy for their last years. They have made it possible to make you happy for many, many years. You can certainly give 'em that much happiness. It will be to the glory of your State forever. They will live longer in legend and story than the first herd of Fords that was ever driven North. The Old Trail Drivers Association has a purpose: they are not just organized to eat lunch away from home once a week.

It's getting kinder late in the afternoon for a lot of these old Boys, and they will be a-drifting them to some nice high, dry divide, to bed 'em down for the night. They will be a catching their night horses for the last time. They will be rolling their old "tarp" out and crawling into their old "Sougans" and "Parkas," and when they are waked up with a kick to go on guard by a Golden Slipper, instead of a shop-made boot, why they will roll out of there and face their new Range Boss, and when he asks them, "Boys, are you ready to go with me?" they will look him right in the face and never bat an eye and say, "We are ready to go with anybody that is right."

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