

Wm. L. Evans. Ft. Worth, Texas.

Sherman, Tex. 11/30/27

Dear William - Presuming on your request ^{for} history of the old days. Salvaged from memory. I am asking you to go a part way with me over the (J.F. Evans) old Dodge trail, which was no trail at all. - Only a course for a few hundred miles across country - to a shipping point ~~at Dodge~~ on the A.T. & Santa Fe R.R. And advise whether after 46 years - it will be prudent to disclose my knowledge of this tragedy
THE TRAGEDY OF THE SOD HOUSE
Jaur Poppe J.F. Evans

ON THE DODGE CATTLE TRAIL

IN 1881

After leaving the Spade Ranch on the Salt Fork of Red River in the Pan Handle of Texas in September of 1881, we followed the North Star for two-hundred miles over virgin prairies and across the North fork of Red River, the Canadian and their many uncharted tributaries. The trip was without incident, except the crossing of the swollen and turbulent waters of the Canadian, and the transporting of wagons and equipment without the aid of boat or raft. On the second day of October the herd drifted as peacefully as the shadow of a cloud across the plains of Kansas.

As the sun sank below the distant horizon, the mess wagon halted, the team was unharnessed and hobbled, and the beef herd was rounded onto their bed ground to chew their cuds and rest in peace until the morning sun.

The first guard of two took over the herd and the boys rode in to change their mounts while the evening meal was being prepared. The horse rustler, a boy in his teens, drove in the remuda (horse herd) and a rope corral was drawn round them. Horses that had been ridden through the day were unsaddled, and each man cast his lasso for a night mount; saddled, and was free for supper and his blankets until called for his two hours night watch, when the fresh guard took over the herd to ride round and round them, with the music of jingling spurs and songs. Stars came out and took up their silent march across the heavens, to sink in the west, until the morning star announced the coming of day and the pale pink curtain of dawn was drawn across the sky.

As the sun peeped over the Eastern rim of the grass covered plain, and carpeted the earth with dew drop diamonds, the herd leisurely arose and grazed out to the North. So gently had been their handling, without whip or hurry, that they were unconscious of restraint. They had been led "across green pastures and beside still waters". Nightly songs around the nearby campfire told of happy comradeship of light hearted boys.

But how close tragedy may follow in the foot steps of peace. As camp was pitched that fateful evening, Taylor, a splendid fellow, but both sensitive and courageous, espied in the far distance a sod cabin, the harbinger of squatter civilization. Unmindful of the fact that the Kansas squatter was the hereditary enemy of the Texas cow man, he went in search of vegetables, butter and eggs to supplement camp fare, with the injunction from the boys to "buy them out."

It was a long ride and a weary one, and he returned empty handed at dusk to be joked and jollied by the camp. They all wanted to know "had he come for a pack horse, or a wagon to bring in his supplies".

Finally Taylor told them that he had been insulted by the squatter, who had drawn a gun on him and cursed him, and told him that he and his friends could go to _____ (perdition). The boys made merry and joked Taylor about his squatter friend. Taylor replied briefly, "You may laugh at me tonight, we will see who laughs tomorrow."

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The next morning before leaving camp, Taylor buckled on his six shooter. Friends tried to dissuade him from renewing the quarrel of the evening before, but when the herd was opposite the squatter's cabin, Taylor rode straight to the house.

The boys watched him dismount, throw his bridle reins over his horse's head, and walk to the door. (There were no fences). He stopped outside for what, to the watchers, were anxious moments. Then stooping, he grabbed a board from the ground and disappeared inside.

He was out again on the run, and reaching for his pistol at ten feet he turned and three puffs of smoke leaped from the muzzle of his gun before the bark of his forty-five reached the ears of the watchers. For a minute Taylor stood with gun muzzle to the door, then dropping pistol into scabbard, mounted, and leisurely rode for the herd.

But the boys, with spurs in horse's flanks, were on their way to the cabin. As they raced past him, Taylor turned in saddle waved his hand, and called after them "first aid!" Leaping from saddles before horses could stop, the boys were inside the dark room, where they stood dumfounded. They drew sleeves across doubting eyes and looked again, at bare floors, moldy walls of an empty and abandoned cabin.

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They returned to the herd, calling to mind that "He who laughs last, laughs best".

(J.F. Evans)

The Tragedy of
The Sad House
on the
Dodge Trail
in 1881