

# TALE OF A TEXAS CO

**F**ORTY-NINE years ago, H. W. Kingsbery was a young man living among the goober vines in Georgia. He could not resist the call of the West, so one day he set for out Texas, and after a long overland journey arrived at his destination, in a sparsely settled section of Southwest Texas. There he located and began work on a ranch as a Texas cowboy, facing the hardships and danger incident to such work during pioneer days. In his own words Mr. Kingsbery tells the following story of his experiences:

## Bought 5,000 Wild Cattle.

"I spent the winter of '76 in camps and on the road in a two-horse wagon west of San Antonio; most of the time I was near the line of Old Mexico. Needless to state, the country was overrun with outlaws and Indians. Raids would be made on my party each 'light of the moon,' especially by unfriendly Indians, while the bandits and outlaws kept 'open season' for stealing our stock and driving them across the border. It was impossible for us to regain any of our property, once it was taken across the Rio Grande river. During these trying times one Indian raid alone resulted in the death of twenty-five Texans.

"The winter of 1876 we purchased three herds of cattle, totaling 5,000 head, which we expected to deliver in the spring of 1877. These cattle were bought in Frio, Medina and Uvalde counties and were very wild. For a while affairs went well; so well, in fact,

that by springtime we started with the cattle to the Black Hills of Nebraska. We purchased necessary supplies in San Antonio, sufficient to last until we reached Fort Mason.

"Without intending to digress, it is significant to state here that just prior to 1877 freighters, in the old-time covered wagons, began to make regular trips to the western sections of Texas, including not only Fort Mason, but Concho, Santa Anna, Brownwood, Paint Rock and other struggling towns in those respective sections, which are now well populated and enumerated along with other thriving towns of the Southwest. Contrary to the general belief, however, these long covered wagon trains were not operated from San Antonio, Austin, Waco or any of the larger Texas cities, but from Round Rock, Williamson County, Texas, then counted one of the liveliest, thriftiest towns in the State, and used as a concentration point; from there the freighters made their many pilgrimages farther west.

## Knotty Brush Almost Impassable.

"We drove one of the three herds of cattle up the Nueces Canyon, and the brush was so thick and knotty we could hardly find a place to camp and make our beds. One dark night a band of Indians and outlaws, who had joined forces, stampeded the herd, and were successful in stealing 17 of them. When we finally got out of the brush and on the prairies, I am sure we felt very much like the children of Israel when



Col. H. W. Kingsbery, Age 79, Pioneer Cattleman and Trail-Driver, Santa Anna, Texas.

they emerged from the wilderness into the Promised Land. We camped two weeks near Coleman, not only to recuperate, but to save a number of our calves, who were about to collapse from the long and arduous drive.

"While we were camped near Coleman Mrs. John Homesley and family, accompanied by Mrs. Homesley's maid, Miss Baker, of Comanche, Texas, joined our party. Later they traveled with us into Kansas. Mrs. Homesley, who still lives at Comanche, believed she had tuberculosis at the time, and was traveling in the interest of her health. Her outfit consisted of a two-horse buggy, a hack and a wagon. I frankly admit I was deeply interested in Miss Baker, who was a beautiful girl; she spoke Spanish fluently, having been reared in San Antonio, while her English was choice and indicated culture and refinement.

## The Buffalo Hunt.

"From Coleman we proceeded to Fort Griffin, on the Brazos river, and then on to the Panhandle. While in the 'Panhandle' we saw a very large herd of buffaloes. I believe there were not less than 20,000 head of this now almost extinct animal in that one herd. Far as the eye could see the treeless country was brown and black with them. Half of the men of the camp went in quest of buffalo meat, but met with small success. The following day I told the other half to get astride their best mounts and join me, as we were now going to have a real buffalo hunt. This they did. After riding a few miles from camp we came up with the main herd. We rode down the dry bed of a creek, so as to get closer upon them, then decided to take it Indian style. One man in the lead, was to cut off several hundred of the buffalo and run them into our camp. The lead man had instructions not to shoot until he was two or three hundred yards ahead. The remainder of 'our bunch' was following, close, about twenty-five yards apart. At a given signal we all opened fire with our 45's. We got right into the midst

of the herd. After twice emptying our revolvers, all shooting was abandoned, and I was glad, because the ruthless slaughter did not appeal to me. The seeming sport was very similar to killing cattle, and about as easy. We unintentionally wounded several big bulls, after which we rode around and tried to kill them by shooting them again, this time through the big mott of hair on their foreheads. Several boys even tied bulls to their saddles, but later were compelled to cut their lassoes and release them.

"We then rode back to the high divide from whence we first sighted the main herd, and we could clearly see that a stampede had begun among the buffalo. They were now following us. For about four hours, we sat on our horses, watching this moving mass of buffalo flesh, and permitting our mounts to rest. All members of the camp joined us, and during the four hours we remained silent in our saddles the buffaloes rushed by us, pell mell, some to the right, others to the left, but madly onward. It was spectacular and impressive. The ground beneath us trembled from the impact of the huge animals, and their horns knocking together sounded like distant claps of thunder. We estimated that the herd of the previous day had been augmented by this herd, and that the total number of buffaloes in the stampede were not less than 30,000 head.

"Soon after our adventure with the buffaloes we had a two days' drive without water. When we did sight water we also sighted approximately 2,700 Sioux and Comanche Indians, who had been on the warpath in the Black Hills and were being returned by a guard of United States soldiers to their reservations in the Indian Territory.

#### Indians and Romance.

"All at once, and without formality, the young bucks of both tribes became desperately smitten with Miss Baker. When our cowboys were asked by the Indians whose squaw she was, they replied jokingly that she was mine.

The bucks, accordingly, followed me everywhere, insisting on 'swapping' squaws, offering me ponies, blankets and beads, as an incentive. They called me 'Big Squaw John, (all Americans, at that time being 'John' to them). It was necessary for Mrs. Homesley to again move her camping outfit up to our camp for protection. Many of the big bucks continued to sit on their ponies around our camp just to steal even a glimpse of the beautiful 'pale face,' Miss Baker. She remained awake throughout the night for fear of being stolen.

"At Fort Griffin, Texas, we bought enough supplies to last us until we could reach Dodge City, Kansas.

"From Fort Griffin we trailed northwestward, crossing the Red, Arkansas, Big and Little Wichita, and North and South Canadian Rivers. The cowboys were almost constantly on duty, day and night, to prevent stampedes among our cattle.

"We finally arrived at Dodge City, Kansas, which was on a boom, as a railroad had been recently built into this frontier town. Dodge City was then the big cattle market of the West and Southwest. It had a few stores, but was mainly a wild and wooly saloon and dance hall town, governed by the six-shooter in the hands of men who could draw and shoot the quickest and most deadly.

"Having been offered a profit of 30 per cent for my cattle in Dodge City, I decided to sell and not attempt to drive them on to the Black Hills of Nebraska. I therefore sold, paid of my cowboys, and then went on to Kansas City to attend a State fair. I spent the entire winter in Kansas and Colorado, and it was in the latter State that I met Buffalo Bill. Sometime I may tell the readers of the Magazine Section a few interesting incidents about Buffalo Bill, who was a trail driver, government scout and Indian fighter."

EDITOR'S NOTE.—A few years after the "cattle drive" referred to Mr. Kingsbery became a permanent resident of Coleman county, following the purchase of a ranch not far from Santa Anna. Since that time, 1888, he has been one of the county's most industrious, useful and honored citizens.