Traveling across the prairies of the southwest back in roundup days, Colonel John Alley, head of the University department of government, became acquainted with the country during that transitional period of the early nineties. With his father, an Irish immigrant, adventurer and cattleman, Colonel Alley became a part of the southwest before the opening of those famous "last round-ups."

Memories of Roundup Days

By JOHN ALLEY

MY radio has made me reminiscent.

As I listen evening after evening, to the various and oft repeated renditions of "I'm Heading for the Last Roundup," a memory-picture of boyhood experiences persists persistently returns. I see again through a vista of more than four decades the vast stretches of verdant prairie land, over which our covered wagon crept hour after hour, day after day, through the richest portion of the greatest of all "roundup countries" the world has known: the most prized area of that great cattle Barone of six million acres controlled by the powerful group of cattlemen known as the "Cherokee Strip Live-Stock Association."

Of course I did not then realize that this great corporation was in the process of holding its "Last Roundup," preparing to surrender its princely domain, in sudden submission to an edict of President Harrison. The persistent and relentless pioneer homeseekers had shortly before won their bitter and long drawn-out battle with the "Cattle Barons." The greatest of all feuds between the "Nesters" and the "Punchers" had ended as usual, in victory to the former. The Congress of the United States had spoken. The ranchmen's lease with the Cherokee Indian Nation had been terminated. By December 1, 1890 all cattle must be removed. The famous "Cherokee Strip" must be thrown open to settlement. Let the "Last Roundups" begin!

It was a crispy, sunny, autumn day in 1890, when our horses splashed through the shallow ford of the Arkansas River, topped the low rise of ground which was the southern extremity of the wide sandy stretch of river bottom and headed south-westward into the open country.

Before us, as far as the eye could see, lay the unbroken sweep of the "Cherokee Strip," unspoiled by human abode. I was charmed and thrilled with its vastness. Here, in very truth, were spread out before me—

"The gardens of the desert, the unbroken fields, the boundless, the beautiful, for which the speech of England has no name—The Prairies—They stretched, in airy undulations far away, as if the ocean, in his gentle swell, stood still, with all his rounded billows fixed, and motionless forever."

Our progress continued throughout the day in a general southwesterly direction. As the sun bent its course toward the western horizon we approached a wooded valley of a stream which offered an inviting camp site. We turned aside from the prairie trail into a grove of trees near the margin of the water, unharnessed our tired horses and lead them to the gently sloping bank of the clear stream, which we recognize as the Chikaskia River. The horses splashed boldly out into the current, thrust their noses well down into the water and drank greedily. From time to time they would blow up breath bubbles as they propelled the air through their submerged noses.

Having drank their fill each horse, in turn, raised his head slowly, filled his lungs in a deep drawn sigh, gazed intently up the tree lined stream, then turned his head for a similar survey down stream. Being fully domesticated farm animals, rather than natives of the open range, the pervading Sabbath stillness seemed to puzzle them: they could not understand the utter absence of human, or other forms of animal life in an environment so inviting to life.

Content with their survey of the strange, quiet scene, each horse in turn retraced his steps up the bank, selected a suitable spot in the sandy loam, dropped to his knees, then to his side and indulged in a satisfying roll. They wallowed and grunted and wriggled, first on one side then on the other to their hearts content; then lunged to their feet, shaking the sand and dust from their tired bodies and made straight for the wagon in quest of their evening grain.

Our horses provided for we gathered dried branches, built our camp fire and cooked our supper. Then we, in turn, stretched out on the soft cushiony grass and watched the twilight gray turn into the blue of the night. The stars moved down close to us in the clear, crisp atmosphere. The stillness brooded upon us, broken occasionally by the owl's hoot or the plaintive call of the whip-poor-will.

We enjoyed our camp that night on the banks of the Chikaskia more than any we experienced during the four weeks of our trip. As I recall the charming setting after more than four decades, I am reminded of the lines of Robert Louis Stephenson—

"The bed was made, the room was fit by punctual eye the stars were lit, the air was pure, the water ran, no need was there for maid or man, when we put up, my Ass and I, in God's green caravanserai."

The next day we drove through miles of low, level, prairie land, which stretches out to the southwestward from the Chikaskia to the Salt Fork River. This area, covered with luxuriant grass was the most prized portion of the six million acre pasture of the Cherokee Strip Live-Stock Association. It was soon to become the garden spot of Oklahoma's most fertile farming country, with Blackwell in the northern area, Tonkawa to the south, Lamont and Nardin to the west.

That night we camped on the sandy waste of the Salt Fork bottoms. The river is rightly named. Our horses did not seem to mind the taste of the brackish water but to us it was bitter and unsatisfying. Our coffee was a total loss. The prospect of a night with our thirst
talked with my father of my ambition to kill a deer. He laughed at my boyish enthusiasm for the hunt, remarking that all the sporting blood of his Irish ancestors seemed to have been transmitted to me; some hunting had never interested him, notwithstanding abundant opportunities which had come to him during a life spent in pioneering days along the Missouri Valley and westward. He told me stories of his own experience, hauling flour from Omaha, Nebraska, to the village of Denver at the foot of the Rocky Mountains in the later "sixties;" of how the plains swarmed with buffalo and occasional herds of antelope; how he had become acquainted with a great game hunter, one William F. Cody, before that now famous plainsman had earned his sobriquet of "Buf-falo Bill" as a result of his contract with the Union Pacific Railway to supply its construction gangs with fresh meat, as it pushed its line westward, across the great plains. The fresh meat his outfit provided was supplied by the simple process of rounding-up and slaughtering the buffalo which ranged along either side of the railway survey, from the Missouri River to the Rocky Mountains. When his wagons appeared across the prairie, loaded down with freshly killed animals the graders along the right-of-way would sing out, "there comes Buffalo Bill!"

Later in the day my father pulled the team to an unexpected halt, turned to me with the remark, "well, my boy, here's your chance to kill a deer." He pointed off across a tree lined draw to the slope a half mile beyond, where a small dun-colored animal could be plainly seen. "There's your chance," he said. Excitedly I scrambled back from the wagon seat, extracted from the bedding my father's "Spencer" carbine which he had carried as a cavalryman in the Civil war, and jumped to the ground. My father admonished me to calm myself and follow his directions. I was to move off to the left until I reached the trees in the draw, then follow this depression under cover to the right and I could get within easy range of my quarry without being seen by it. Warning me to be calm was futile. I was able, however, to move with circumspection until I gained the screen of trees, then I broke into a run, my heart beating a high tempo and my breath coming hard. Having proceeded up the draw to what I estimated the proper distance, I threw myself on my belly and crawled up the bank. Raising my head I peered breathlessly over the ridge and immediately located my victim quietly cropping the grass some distance farther to the right and well up the prairie slope. I noted another change: game hunting had a couple of hundred yards further up which furnished me a desirable screen at an easy range. Wriggling back to the low ground I hastened on up the depression to the spot I had located.

The deer must certainly be mine now for the taking. With little success I struggled to suppress my excitement in order to steady my arm. Walking slowly and doubting over, I reached the clump of trees. Again I threw myself on the grass and repeated my former crawl toward the rim of the draw. I thrust the cocked carbine forward, adjusting the butt to my shoulder, drew a long breath and raised myself on my left elbow, training my formidable weapon in the proper direction. Slowly I raised my eyes above the obstructing grass. There was the dun-colored animal not more than seventy-five yards in front of me and still apparently oblivious of danger; still cropping away at the grass. It was too glorious to be true.

Dropping my head back upon my left arm, I drew another long, steady breath preparatory to firing. My confidence returned. I raised my head again, attempting to concentrate my gaze on the most vulnerable spot, just back of the left shoulder blade. My great moment had arrived.

As I trained the forward sight of the barrel at the spot selected, something in my sense of proportion sounded a warning note. The color scheme tallied, but instead of the graceful, curving, slender neck of a deer, I was aware of a straight, unartistic upper line of neck, covered by a fringe of coarse, shaggy hair of darker color; the neck slowly straightened, the head turning in my direction. What should have been the graceful contours of a deer now suddenly changed to the unhandsome lines of a raw-boned, sadistic brute. My "greatest moment" faded! I let the carbine fall, buried my face in the grass, and drank my cup of bitter disappointment to the dregs! Slowly I rose to my feet, crossed the draw and dejectedly returned up the farther slope to the wagon. I explained to my father that "his deer" was nothing more than a jaded cow pony which the horse wrangler of some near-by roundup outfit had turned out to die, after a heartless cowboy had ridden the guts out of him.

That day we continued the line into what was soon to be known as "Old Oklahoma," the area of the "original opening" of the previous year. We bore southwestward until we struck the old "Chisholm Trail" just north of Kingfisher and camped that night on "Kingfisher Creek" in the northern outskirts of the struggling town of board shanties and tent houses. I had assumed that the creek had been named from the Kingfisher bird which is indigenous to the area, but I learned that this was not the case. The town lies just south of the junction of two small streams, the larger one coming in from the southeast known

The Sooner Magazine

January

The Aldridge
New Chickasha
CLAREMORE
Will Rogers
DUNCAN
The Wade
ELK CITY
Casa Grande
ENID
The Oxford
HOLLIS
The Motley
MCALESTER
The Aldridge
NORMAN
The University
OKLAHOMA CITY
Biltmore
OKMULgee
Beaumus
SHAWNEE
The Aldridge
TULSA
The Alvin
WAGoner
The Wagoner
WEWOka
The Aldridge

Patronize the hotels which patronize you!

As "Uncle Johns Creek." The smaller one heading into it from the southwest had no name until the well known cattleman, King Fisher, established his ranch in the valley between the two forks. Whereupon the western branch became known as "King Fisher's Creek," from which the town was named.

Coming into Kingfisher from the northeast, the most of our route lay through the "Black Jack," sandy hills, north of the Cimarron River largely homesteaded by Negroes. These Negro settlers had flocked into this sandy cotton land after the rush of white men had passed over, preferring the open prairie or wheat land. For this reason Kingfisher and Guthrie got more than their share of the Negro overflow from the Black Jack hills, as compared with El Reno and Oklahoma City. I remember a story of those early days, bearing on the rivalry between Guthrie and Oklahoma City. A travelling man from the latter town, getting his shoes shined in a barber shop in Guthrie, asked the porter how many people were now in the town. The prompt reply was "about 10,000, suh!" The travelling man said "now look here, you know there are not 10,000 people in Guthrie." The negro stoutly replied "yas suh, ten thousand —countin' de whites!"

From Kingfisher we followed the Chisholm Trail southward to Minco, at that time the southern terminus of the Rock Island railway, where we crossed the South Canadian River and again entered the Indian country—the "Chickasaw Nation." The following night we camped in the timber which grew luxuriantly along the bottoms of the Washita River. This river country was a pleasant relief from the wind swept prairies we had passed over the previous days, and the clear streams likewise reminded us of the Chikaskia, after the dreary, sand swept bottoms of the Salt Fork, the Cimarron, the North and South Canadians. The night was cloudy, the air damp and the temperature was falling. We built a wonderful camp fire from the abundance of dry timber along the bottoms. The next morning when we peered from under the sheltering canvas of our wagon we saw a blanket of snow several inches deep, weighting down the trees covering the landscape. An early Oklahoma blizzard had swooped down upon us while we slept. The sheltering timber and the high bank rising from the river bottom broke the force of the wind and we soon had a merry fire crackling around which we hovered.

As we were cooking our breakfast a noisy whirr of wings startled us and we saw a great flock of prairie chickens swoop in from the snow covered prairie and light in the trees below our camp. Immediately suffering another attack of the hunting fever I got my double-bar-reled, muzzle-loading shot gun from the wagon, envisioning a mess of fried prairie chicken for breakfast. I approached the chickens which seemed to number up into the hundreds. They appeared utterly oblivious to danger. I got within easy range under cover of the trees but as I prepared for the slaughter I noted that my gun was still "uncapped." I drew my box of percussion caps from my pocket, but my bare fingers were stiff with the cold and I was shaking with the "buck ague" which frequently afflicts marksmen in critical moments. The cover of the tin box came off with a jerk, the box flew out of my shaking fingers and the caps were scattered through the four inches of fleecy snow around my feet. As I wildly scraped into the snow searching for the elusive caps a wary chicken gave a warning cry and the whole flock sailed off down the river, leaving me fuming, shaking and scratching in the snow.

My second effort as a wild game hunter in the "territories," ended in humiliating disaster. The Gods of the hunt were against me!

The trip through the Chickasaw Nation to the Red River was full of interest, but devoid of further excitement. Patches of prairie land interspersed with wooded hills and streams, presented little evidence of Indian population. Occasionally we would encounter a cotton farmer, an Indian lessee, in his log cabin on a fertility stream bottom; again we would pass a squaw-man's ranch house on an open prairie stretch. But real Indians were few and far between.

We crossed into Texas at the Big Bend Chisholm Trail ford, to the eastward of the present town of Ringold and drove into Belcher, the first "white man's town" we had seen since leaving Minco, some ten days earlier. From here we turned westward toward the Texas Panhandle and my father established himself on a six hundred and forty acre tract of virgin prairie land some miles eastward of the town of Wichita Falls. Here we remained for some three years engaged in the unprofitable, hybrid occupation of Farmer-Ranching.

During this period which merged my boyhood into youth, I became a full-fledged cowboy, in the game of riding bucking broncos, throwing the rope with a skill comparable with the best of the cowpunchers, and following the roundups. The experience had its thrills, but as I look back over the period I think of these critical years of my life as largely wasted.

To me the life of the cowboy was essentially brutal and barren. The cowboy does not have "his mount" as the cavalryman or jockey does. He has his "string of poneys." Such a practice as "grooming" or "feeding," is foreign to him. The use of a currycomb is a me-
cum a ki-yi-yupie, eal
cum a ki-yi-yupie, yupie, yea, yea, yea
cum a ki-yi-yupie, eal

My life among the cowboys ended abruptly soon after the opening of the "Cherokee Strip." The call of the "promised land" stirred the wanderlust which afflicted the blood of my pioneering Irish father. He answered the call.

I followed him some months later, making the return trip in a covered wagon as usual.

I was not sorry to leave the cow country of Texas. The urge for an education was upon me. Cowboy life and the glamour of the range were beginning to pall. As I look back over those years I still feel that they were largely wasted—precious years which should have brought richer returns. I was glad to get them behind me—to forget them.

It is said that Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes once remarked before a medical audience that, "if the entire materia medica were dumped in the middle of the sea, it would be all the better for humanity and all the worse for the sea." To my mind the passing of the range cattle industry is all the better for the cattle, all the better for humanity and all the worse for nobod

The mania for restaging the most brutal and barbarous phases of the ranch cattle era in the form of modern "Rodeos" is, to me, an evidence of the appeal to primitive and savage instincts. How a community that considers itself civilized can condone such demonstrations of inhumanity toward dumb animals, in order to make a "Roman Holiday," has always puzzled me. When Governor Rolph condoned his California lynching, he was probably thinking about the voting power of the mob and the rabble which opposed its action. At any rate the victims in that case were neither innocent nor dumb. Why shouldn't a community round up a group of undesirable citizens and stage a good old fashioned multiple lynching in lieu of a Rodeo?

We returned to the Cherokee Strip and settled at Perry. The "Round-Ups" were a thing of the past. The wide stretches of the "strip country" were all blacked off by quarter section lines, a home on each square of 160 acres. The trails were fenced up; the cattle were gone. The Cherokee Live-Stock Association had passed into history. The final meeting of its Board of Directors had been held in Kansas City in April, 1893, and in the following September an hundred thousand eager home seekers had swarmed across the lines, changing the great cattle Baronage in a day into farms and cities. During this past September (1933) the fortieth anniversary of the grand opening was celebrated at Enid, now a thriving city of some twenty thousand souls.

Soon after my return I took up the long, bitter fight for an education dependent upon my own resources. But that is another story. However an in-