

ROSS, ELIZABETH HUSKY SCYTHE SWINGER.

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Husky Scythe Swinger.

Years ago, before the advent of improved and labor saving farm implements, wheat and oats were reaped by men who wielded scythes and cradles. In referring to such persons they were often mentioned as being "swingers of the scythe". In that connection there has descended to the present time (1937) the story of how one of the hardy farmers of a bygone day swung the scythe so effectually as to merit for himself the distinction of being recognized as a champion.

Near the banks of the Barren Fork river, in the vicinity of the present hamlet of Welling, Oklahoma, lived for many years a prominent member of the Cherokee Nation whose name was Riley Keys, usually referred to as Judge Keys, as he had filled judicial positions during a lengthy period. Most of his farm labor was performed by Judge Keys himself during his years of activity. Besides corn he raised some grain, wheat and oats, and one warm and sunshiny morning he went to a ten-acre tract of ground for the purpose of cutting oats. He had cut one round of the tract when interruption came. Leroy Keys, a brother, who lived quite a distance away, rode

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up horseback, saying that one of his horses had disappeared and that as the animal had been raised in a section some miles east of the Barren Fork he had no doubt it would be found in the hill country. Not being familiar with the rugged and wooded region, Leroy Keys desired that Judge Keys accompany him. Judge Keys replied that the cutting of the oats could not be delayed, whereupon Leroy Keys offered to swing the scythe in the oats field if his brother would go into the hills in quest of the missing horse. Judge Keys acceded to the proposition, being quite familiar with the regions east of the Barren Fork. Soon Judge Keys rode away and Leroy Keys engaged in wielding the scythe.

Mile after mile Judge Keys rode, and as he rode, Leroy Keys continued at his labor, making round after round of the field and gradually lessening the standing oats. Finally Judge Keys reached the section in which the truant horse had been raised, found the missing animal, placed a rope about its neck and started on his return journey home. The sun was near its setting when Judge Keys forded the Barren Fork near his home.

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Deciding to go to the field and ascertain what portion of the oats his brother had reaped, the judge surmounted the high bank of the Barren Fork, rode up the declivity and soon arrived in the near vicinity of the field. As he did so, Leroy, carrying the scythe, emerged from the field, in which to the astonishment of Judge Keys no standing oats were visible. Leroy Keys, himself a husky man and handy with the scythe, had completed within less than a day the reaping of the ten-acre tract, less the one round completed by Judge Keys in the early morning. There were some hardy and excellent swingers of the scythe in the early days, but none ever surpassed the feat of Leroy Keys so far as known.

No other wielder of the scythe has been mentioned as performing a similar feat.

Authority: Judge Riley Keys, and William H. Balentine, Senior.