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THE START, OPERATION AND FINISH OF THE
LAZY S RANCH by L. W. Wilson, research worker.

Start

The first pioneers who struggled across the streams, wilderness and prairies of the Indian Territory are, of course, all dead. But with the close of the Civil War came a new and different kind of emigrant. They were earnest men, men who did not fear, men who did not lie, men who came to stay and make this their home and engage in the gainful occupation of stock raising and merchandising.

One of these emigrants was H. B. Spaulding and he knew the cattle business, because, he was born and reared in Sulphur Spring, Texas, the cattle kingdom. He not only became a proficient rancher but also a merchant of the highest type and a financier.

Those were the almost incredible days of the Creek Nation in the Indian Territory. Mr. Spaulding spent his early life among the frontiersmen in Texas as a cowboy. He knew the two-gun bad men, stage coach and train robbers. The notorious gamblers as well as the dead shot lighthorsemen and the U. S. Marshals at Muskogee, Okmulgee, Tahlequah, Ft. Gibson, Indian Territory and other wide open territory towns. He also was witness to the armies stationed at Ft. Gibson and Ft. Towson, Indian Territory, as well as a witness of "Necktie Parties" when horse thieves, cattle rustlers or desperadoes were strung up to the nearest tree.

Mr. Spaulding first engaged in the mercantile business at the old Creek Agency on the south side of Fern Mountain before the M.K.&T. was built through the territory. After this railroad built through Muskogee, he established business there and being no banks he became

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the financier of the then little village and issued script as a medium of exchange known as the H. B. Spaulding script. This script was about the size of the present one dollar bill, with a green background with his picture on one end and the amount on the other end.

While engaged in this business, Texas cattle was being driven through the territory from Texas to Kansas for the northern markets. Result of which adventures end in loss.

He saw the buffalo herds disappear, the Indians confined to restricted reservations, and cattlemen from Texas establishing ranches on unoccupied lands, stocked with herds from Texas. He could not withstand the lure of going back to the days of his early life when he as a cowboy dreamed of the day when he could own a ranch and large herds and as the time was inviting and he had accumulated enough finance, he sought a location for his spread (a ranch).

On Cloud Creek which lies in the Concharty Mountains west of Muskogee, in Sutton Township, County of Muskogee, Mr. Spaulding visualized as being an ideal location for a ranch, halted, let his keen and piercing eyes roam over these prairies and valleys, picked out, with a steady hard stare, the location for his ranch home, foreman's house, bunk house, cook shack, corrals and other buildings.

Fully now decided, he arranged for the leasing and did lease some fourteen or fifteen square miles and started constructing buildings, corrals and purchasing of Texas cattle to be delivered by rail to Summitt and Checotah, the nearest railroad points, as well as to employ men of sterling worth and character.

Thus Mr. Spaulding started, controlled and operated one of the

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largest ranches, second to none, of its present day, the name of which was the "Lazy S" and the Lazy S was known to most all of the inhabitants of the eastern portion of the territory.

Men still live who knew Mr. Spaulding in his life time as their merchant, friend, and their employer.

Operation

After the buildings were constructed, including stables, sheds and corrals, he went back to Texas and bought thousands of head of poor, lean, wild and half wild cattle of all colors, such as, fawn, spotted, black etc., loaded them into stock cars destined to Checotah, I. T. His ranch hands were Jim Garrett, the foreman; Green McCloskey, the horse wrangler, with J. A. Todd, Sam Todd, Bud Hill, Pleas. Townsend, Jim Miller, Jim Cobrey, Charlie Glass, S. G. Bruner, Jas. Spencer and Billy Franklin as "cow punchers" and others as cooks and ranch hands who cared for the salt licks and the cow ponies.

The first train load arrived in a few days and Jim Garrett with all his worthy assistants, including the chuck wagon was there to meet it. Mr. Spaulding came through on the train with the cattle. He personally took up the expense bills from the railroad agent as soon as the Agent made them out, however, unloading started at once.

It was only a 25-car train, unlike those of today with a hundred or more, cars, with air brakes and automatic compellers, for these cars had hand brakes and old link and pin couplings and needless to say, you can imagine the rough handling these poor cattle received, while in transit.

A train load of cattle in these days was between 1100 & 1250 head and it took some two months before the ranch was stocked to capacity as the cattle arrived intermittently, allowing time to get each train load to the ranch and could return for the next train. They handled on an average of about two train loads a week to the ranch and, of course, every cow-puncher spent days and days in the saddle.

A large corral and unloading chutes were at Checotah and the cattle were unloaded, fed and watered and rested before the drive started for their new home. Many of the cows had died while in transit as well as young calves ^{born.} The young calves were usually given away for they were not strong enough to make the drive. Usually someone around the village of Checotah took them or cared for them until someone from the sticks came in and got them. The dead cows were pulled to the car doors by main strength and awkwardness by the cow punchers and they would then throw a rope around the dead cows horns, with the other end tied to the saddle horn on the cow pony and drag them down the chute and into a pile where kerosene was thrown on them and burned them.

The first drive started from the corral with Foreman, "Miller" leading, behind the foreman, came the chuck wagon, the horse wrangler, "Green McCloskey" kept his distance, with fresh cow ponies and even with the point of the herd. Bud Hall and Pleas Townsend maneuvered at the herd's point. Jim Miller and Jim Cobrey worked at the swing. J. A. Todd and his brother, Sam Todd, cared for the flank,

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while Jim Spencer and Charlie Glass rode the drag. The rest of the cow punchers helped along with the wrangler and as the evening sun began to sink into the horizon, they, with the foreman, went galloping ahead locating a place to bed down for the night. The cattle were grazed slowly and it usually took two long days and a night to put them on the home range.

They finally reached the bedding ground which was on the head of Elk Creek, near the present town of Wainwright, Oklahoma. It was a clear night and the cattle were ready to rest as well as the crew. The chuck wagon set up a short distance away and likewise a corral made of rope for the horses. They got their chuck, rolled up in their blankets and fell to sleep, leaving those who helped the wrangler, with the herd in the early part of the night and was relieved by first one and then the other until the break of day. When the cook had breakfast ready which consisted of bread, coffee, sugar, syrup and fried salt-meat, all cooked on open fire, they got their chuck and by this time the cattle was all up drinking at the creek and grazing contentedly on the tall sage and blue stem grass. Jim shouted, "Get that chuck wagon going". "Them horses, Green, what's holding you?" Then he shouted at the cow punchers and called Bud and Pleas to him, "you fellows get the point started and lets get going before the green heads get us, hell fire, we don't want to be all week getting away from here." There was not a green head fly any place but everyone knew the experience they had had on other ranches with the green heads causing stampedes and near stampedes and he told them this, meaning to ride and ride at once and

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get going. Of course, with the point starting the rest of the cow punchers soon got the rest of the herd in formation and it was easy for Spencer and Glass to close the rear with the drag.

Noon that day, as was the day before, the chuck wagon far in the lead had chuck ready without any delay, you might say eating on the run. The menu for the noon day meal was the same as for breakfast, other than the fried bacon, they had beans with a piece of fat salt bacon thrown into them for seasoning.

That night they reached their home range, bedded down and turned the herd over to other cow punchers who Mr. Spaulding had hired before their arrival, because he left Checotah by passenger train for Muskogee, Indian Territory, rode horse back to his ranch and employed an additional four cow punchers to stand sentinel over the herd. The ones on the drive got their chuck at the cook shack and tumbled into their bunks for a real night's sleep.

The next day, the same ones on the first drive returned to Checotah to do all over with another herd as they did these and continued so until the ranch received its capacity. Later shipments came to Summit, I.T. figuring this would shorten the drive which it did. The weather was warmer and one could sleep in the open, while at times they would have to bunk up at the livery stable in Checotah during inclement weather. Course, the chuck was always coming up for they always had the wagon with them.

Additional men were employed as the herds grew larger. Salt licks established at convenient points on the ranch by taking a

a barrel of salt, saw it half into and set it in the ground.

With the sage and blue stem grass high enough to reach midway the sides of a cow pony the cattle grew fat, calves were born and they averaged about one a year to every five cows on the range.

Many of the cattle bore Texas brands and those that did not, were branded with the Lazy S. Mr. Spaulding's brand of identification. Texas cattle was often logged on this ranch with the Texas brand and a log book was given each cow hand so they would know their cattle. All the calves and yearlings were branded with the Lazy S at round up time which was usually each spring and fall.

Ranges over-lapped each other for there were no fences. One could ride 20 miles from the Lazy S to the F.S. Ranch and never come to a fence. This being the case cattle naturally intermingled with other cattle to some degree on different ranges. At round up time cattle not belonging to the Lazy S was driven to their home range and vice versa, those on others to the Lazy S.

When the cattle were fattened on the grass, they were driven back to the railroad, loaded and shipped to the northern markets and more cattle from Texas replaced them. It was an endless chain, cattle coming in and going out yearly.

The cow punchers were all jolly, good hard-working fellows. They loved their ponies, the herds and wide open spaces. They were honest, law abiding and hated a thief. They were brave, fearless men and denounced cowardice. They loved to ride and rope and some of course were more skilled than others. Green McCloskey who started as horse wrangler, became one of the best bronco busters, not only on

the Lazy S but in eastern Indian Territory.

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With all their good traits few if any of them cared for church or thought of the hereafter. They referred to a preacher as a "sky-pilot". A preacher came on the range one day heading for Okmulgee, I.T., and inquired the way to the ranch as he wanted to rest his horse and get something to eat. Some of the boys noticed he carried a Bible under his arm and they kept talking and learned he was a sky-pilot.

They directed him to the ranch house. Mrs. Miller, the foreman's wife, was very religious. They said to him "if old Miss Gits snuffy, pull the Bible on her and she'll be your friend for life. Just locate that part that reads about the fattened calf. Only sort of twist the meaning into fried chicken and hint around that there's wrinkles an inch deep in your belly for hunger. If she takes the hint and kin locate the fowl and if she falls fer your Bible stuff, you'll get the finest fried chicken you ever lapped your lips over." Well no one never saw anything more of the sky-pilot and Jim told the men he never did show up at the house. They all hoped to razz Mrs. Miller about sending the sky-pilot to her.

One time when they were down at Checotah, a new cow puncher was along that had been hired, known only as Dynamite to the gang, for he claimed he could ride a stick of dynamite if it had hide and hair on it. He was one of those old timers out of Texas, a kind of a boomer type. His beard was about a week old and ^{he} figured on going to the barber shop, a little onechair concern in a plank shack. He had a little bundle and just went to the shop and left

it and said he would return presently for it and would then get shaved. He soon returned and noticed his bundle gone from the little shelf where he had left it. Three or four men were in the shop and getting a lot of kick out of the cowboy's bewilderment. Dynamite said, "I put it thar on the shelf, I toldja I'd be back fer it. I toldja I wanted a shave. I've been gone jest a few minutes. Didja put it away somewheres?" The barber said, "Young feller, I'M to busy to look after bundles. What did you have in it. Rags?" Dynamite looked him up and down and his face went hot, to a cherry red.

The barber was a man with red garters on his arm for sleeve holders. His mustache was waxed to a needles point and his hair slicked with perfumed hair oil. His white hands stropped his razor. He wore a fancy vest, a big gold chain and charm on it, he had purchased from some hardware salesman, his pants were striped, shoes with pointed toes and fancied himself a ladies' man and a village cut up besides being a barber.

Dynamite, rough bred, smarted. He stood there face red and than losing its color as the barber continued wisecracking at him. Dynamite gritting his teeth moved so fast no one knew his actions. He grabbed the barber by the vest, jerked him around and open-handed slapped him in the face. Then calmly, which would have done credit to a wrestler and a prize fighter, like John L. Sullivan, he gave the barber a thrashing. He whipped the barber more ways than a cowboy knew the way to town. As fast as he knocked him down, he would pull him up and flatten him again. Blood was spurting from his nose, one eye was closed and the other puffing. Dynamite pulled him up on the floor stood him against the wall and

said, "Now tell me, where's my bundle." "It's, It's in the cupboard where I keep my towels. Please, Please, don't hit me. I, I, got enough."

The barber's clothes were torn and smeared with blood. He was slobbering, spitting blood from his bruised mouth and tears ran out of the corners of his blackened, half-closed eyes, begging, "please quit, I have enough, please have mercy."

The crowd gathered and spurred Dynamite on and slapped him on the back and said, "Fine old boy we'll buy the drinks for you." Others yelled the cow punchers got the drinks on us this time. Dynamite noticed the big barrels along the street, filled with water in case of fire, when he rode in town and remembering them he picked up the mercy, begging barber and struggled with him out through the doorway. The cheering crowd cleared the way and after out near the barrel of water, he deposited the howling barber head first in the barrel and walked back in the barber shop, got his bundle of clothes, out to the hitching rack, jumped on his horse and galloped over to the corral at the unloading chutes.

They nick-named him Dynamite for his bronco busting bragging but I guess the barber knew he was dynamite, otherwise, altho he did not know the boys had so nick-named him along time before this occurred.

Dynamite quit the crew when we got back to the ranch for he got word that Buzz Reaves, the U. S. Marshal, was going to pick him up for the fight. He was a good cow-hand and handled the point of the herd from Checotah to the ranch.

No one on the crew ever knew where or what became of Dynamite. Green McCloskey always said he wished he had stuck around to show him how to do some riding. Many things happened in the years the Lazy S operated like this and other things.

One big event was when Mr. Spaulding built a ten-room, two-story house out of lumber, hauled from Wichita, Kansas by teams. Mr. Spaulding was the owner, operator, superintendent and treasurer of the ranch, of course, Mrs. Spaulding was private secretary.

As time went on foremen and cow punchers would come and go. Some of these cow punchers become ranchmen themselves, particularly recalling J. A. (Alex) Todd and Jim Spencer.

Finish

With the opening of unassigned lands to white settlers, thousands of acres, where once cattle grazed and thrived on bountiful grass and drank from clear streams, were turned into fields of cultivation thus choking as it were the ranchers little by little and the cattle industry was doomed to fate.

Later the Dawes Commission, in behalf of the Five Civilized Tribes, took the acreage and allotted it, in tracts of land from 50 acres to 160 acres to individuals thus making the lands separate and distinct property instead of being owned jointly by all of a particular nation. Ranches continued to operate as did the Lazy S as long as land could be leased from these individuals at a nominal sum with a block of land large enough to operate a ranch on a profitable basis. Year after year the ranches grew smaller and smaller

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- and by the time of statehood most all ranches had disappeared that operated on a scale as large as the Lazy S and naturally Mr. Spaulding sold his belongings before it was sunk, because he could see "the handwriting on the wall."

Two of his old cowhands, Jim Spencer and Alex Todd, finally acquired the Lazy S and it was them, that saw the lands, where they had spent days, months and years in the saddle, as a cow puncher and ranch owner divided and redivided, fenced and re-fenced, homes built, lands plowed and today yielding fields of grain and cotton.

So the Lazy S passed into oblivion the same as all other Oklahoma ranches.