



BUSTER GRAFTENRIED INTERVIEW

The first work I ever done, was with Caulsey in 1883-84 Caulsey was a freighting outfit. They had seven or eight wagons

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with seven or eight yoke of oxen to each wagon, and they had a bunch of extra steers. I was hired to drive the steers. This outfit hunted some buffalo and sold the meat, but there were only a few buffalo left in [1883?] so I worked for them that year and then they [played?] out.

Those freighters were tough as could be. They tell this story. One time an Indian was trying to buy a cannon from one of the Army's Generals and was told, "No you will be shooting my soldiers with it." The Indian said, "Me killum soldiers with stick, me want killum damn freighters". Now those freighting outfits were as fine as money could buy. They had to be since they were the only means of hawling supplies. The wagons were huge as this room, heavily built of oak and canvas with water barrels on the side. They had two men to each wagon and they certainly had team work. They all work just like one man. When there was an attack from the Indians within five minutes they would have the wagons in a circle with water barrels and the steers inside and they would have out their old buffalo guns and a whole army couldn't have gotten to them. The wagon boss always rode in front of the train. It was his job to see that the way was clear. If we came to a piece of timber he would ride in to see if there was any ambush. If he gave the signal, the wagons would move up and in no time the protection would be formed. When there was no Indian trouble they made camp much the same fashion at night. One wagon with the provisions would be in the middle where the cooking would be done. Then one of the boys would take the oxen out and let them graze all night. He was called the "nighthawk

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I just wish you could have seen them hitching up in the mornings. Those old steers were well trained. There was always so much dust inside the circle you would wonder how the men ever got the right animals to the [wagon?], but they knew just where to go. They would come up and stand patiently in place, turn those old long horns sidewise, until the bow was in place and locked. They could hitch the right front oxen first, and then the next one would follow until they were all hitched, [then?] with a shout from the driver they would wheel that old wagon out of the circle and take their position ready for another long drive. I learned a lot from watching the freighters and their teams.

Graftenried Interview

Person Interviewed: Buster (Dad) De Graftenried, El Paso, Texas

Interviewer: P. W. Elliott

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American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 – 1940.

www.memory.loc.gov/ammem

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