

# Old Cowmen Tell of a Big Steal

*From the Kenedy (Texas) Advance, April 15, 1926*

The following unusually interesting account of a happening in this section of more than fifty years ago, was related not long since by A. M. Nichols, well known citizen of this city, to S. C. Butler. Mr. Butler remembered the details of Mr. Nichols' narrative, and during an idle hour recently committed the facts to paper, and which were later verified by Mr. Nichols. Mr. Nichols was sixteen years of age at the time:

It was one bright moon light night in the month of March, 1875 that a man by the name of Frank Fountain at the head of about thirty cowboys, came in quietly on San Antonio river and Escondido. The men spread out, fanlike, up the creek. They spread out, fanlike, up the five miles wide, and drove out all the cattle that could be found within that radius. By daybreak the next morning they came together a few miles above where the town of Kenedy is now located. The rustlers had herded together a bunch of cattle to the number of some 9000 head, and which they proceeded to drive on west. By making a hard day's drive they reached the Atascosa creek in Atascosa county, at what was then the Peacock ranch.

Bill Irvin, a cattleman of Atascosa county, by accident, came up on them in their day's drive and recognized the brands on the cattle as belonging to cattlemen on the San Antonio river and Escondido creek. Having his suspicions aroused he rode on and when out of the herd, he put spurs to the splendid animal he was riding, and with all speed possible headed for the Conquisto crossing on the San Antonio river, where he knew Wm. G. Butler was encamped. Here he notified Mr. Butler of what he had seen. Mr. Butler immediately dispatched Sam Calvert, a cowhand, on a swift horse with a message to J. M. Nichols, who was then living about one mile south of the present town of Kenedy, with instructions to notify all cattlemen below and also Goliad and Bee county cattlemen. Mr. Nichols in turn sent a man post haste to notify J. M. Choate, P. B. Butler, S.O. Porter and others, and Mr.

Porter sent runners to Buck Pettus and Edd Lott, and they spread the news in Bee county to John Wood, John Claire, Pat Burk, John Linney and other cattlemen in that section.

Bill Irvin had reached Mr. Butler's cow camp about sun-up, and Jim Nichols was requested in Mr. Butler's note to him to get all available men and come to his camp as quickly as possible. Mr. Nichols had seven men besides himself, all riding good horses and well armed, the party being composed of Mr. Nichols, J. A. Martin, Geo. Little, Craig McAda, Frank Oneal, Thomas Nichols, Sam Calvert, and myself, reaching the Butler camp on the Conquista, 5 miles south of where the town of Falls City is located, about 8 o'clock that night. Mr. Butler and Manuel Coy, supplemented with the recruits headed by Jim Nichols, immediately left camp, and in less than an hour's ride struck the trail of the stolen cattle, and which was easy to follow in the bright moonlight. All night long we rode, and at 4 o'clock in the morning stopped to get a little sleep and to let our horses rest and graze.

Little time was spent in loitering however, and by daybreak we were up and proceeding on the trail of the cattle. Shortly after sunrise we ascended a high hill and looking down into the valley below a distance of a mile or such matter saw a large herd of cattle,

After viewing the cattle we halted for a few moments' consultation and to examine our pistols. It will be remembered there were only ten in our party, while Fountain was at the head of thirty men, supposedly grim-determined rustlers who would not hesitate to take every possible advantage. The fact that we were outnumbered failed to daunt the spirit of our bunch however, and regardless of the fact that a fight was expected as soon as we got in range. Previously Mr. Butler had been selected as leader of our party and following him we rode unhesitatingly into the herd. Mr. Butler rode up beside Mr. Fountain and spoke to him, as I remember it, as follows:

"My name is Butler and I understand

that you have some of our cattle in your herd, and that you have said that you would not allow your herd to be cut. We have come to cut out our cattle." To this Fountain replied: "Mr. Butler, you or anyone else who have cattle in my herd can cut them out. I am no fighter and no cattle thief, as Mr. Calvert, who is with you, knows me." Fountain had recognized Sam Calvert as an old school mate. At this juncture Calvert let out a loud laugh, and addressing himself to Fountain, stated: "I told them if you were the same Frank Fountain I knew that you wouldn't fight—and was an honest man." These few words relieved the tension, everything calmed down and Fountain ordered his men to bunch the cattle. We at once proceeded with the work of cutting out our cattle and which continued throughout the day. Before sundown we had cut 2700 head and many more were left to be cut out the next day.

We drove our cattle about a mile away and stopped them for the night, standing guard over them by turns. About noon the next day we had finished cutting and added about 1800 head to our bunch.

With 4500 head of cattle under herd we drove them about ten miles in the direction of home and stopped for the night at Uncle Dan Brister's, on the Lapan creek. The next morning we got word that another herd of cattle had been located on the Atascosa creek. Leaving three men to herd the cattle at the Brister place that day Mr. Butler took four men with him and went to look over the herd. Along in the later afternoon the party returned driving about 1200 head they had cut from the other herd. As we were very short of rations we butchered a big fat speckled cow, and Mr. Butler detailed me to cut up the meat and barbecue it. I had built a scaffold about 4 feet wide and 12 feet long, and about 1½ feet high with an axe and spade I borrowed from Uncle Dan, and built a big fire. While it was burning into coals. I had cut up the meat and placed it on the scaffold, with the coals underneath, and kept the fire burning all day. The meat was well cooked by the time they came in with the other cattle. Uncle Dan Brister's folks had cooked up a wash tub full of bread and

also prepared vve gallons of coffee.

Meantime, the Goliad and Bee county cattlemen were gathering with all haste. Sam Porter had neither slept, eaten or drank for 72 hours. About dusk we saw them coming, 100 strong. Among them I remember was Buck Pettus, Ed and Will Lott, John Linney, Sam Porter, John Wood, John Claire, Bud Jordan, Babè Moye. The old speckled cow I had spent the day barbecuing was cleaned up that night by bed time. It was a hungry bunch that descended on us there on the Brister ranch.

I can never erase from memory how Sam Porter looked as he came riding up with his horse covered with foam. Two long six-shooters dangled from his belt, and he was wearing a pair of high heeled boots to which were attached a pair of Rowell spurs. A handsome handkerchief was around his neck. He was a typical Texan and he looked as vicious as a Mexican lion. From the run of his conversation it would not have been very healthy for Frank Fountain if he had happened to show up at that time. Porter was under the impression we had let Fountain off too lightly, and was not at all in a good humor, after having sat in the saddle for three days and nights. The reader can imagine what would have happened to Fountain if Sam could have caught sight of him. After a hearty supper he quieted down.

Fountain, it developed, was not working for himself, but had been employed by another party to put up a Kansas herd.

The following morning we were all up before daylight, and with Jim Nichols and Edd Lott in charge of the outfit we headed for home. Mr. Butler and most of the others headed west towards the Frio river in search of more cattle.

After a long day's drive we arrived at the San Antonio river opposite Panama Maria, where we watered our cattle. In the meantime Mr. Butler had sent Calvert to move his camp to this point, and it was a glorious sight as we beheld the camp wagon, all hands being hungry, tired and thirsty.

The cattle were held over another night and the next day Edd Lott cut out the Goliad and Bee county cattle and headed them down the river.