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THE ESTANCIA SPRINGS TRAGEDY

By CHARLES POPE

I WAS born and raised in the down-town section of a large mid-Western city where my father was a practising physician. In the spring of a year in the middle eighties when I was a lad of fifteen, my parents became concerned because I was under weight and not very strong for my age. Believing my health would be benefited by a summer in the open air, they arranged to have me spend the vacation period on a ranch in the far West as the guest of an old family friend, a Dr. Edward Henriques. To a city bred boy who was tired of school, whose mind was full of secret longings to be a cowboy, it was a fascinating prospect.

A native of northern Michigan, of French descent, and a graduate of a well known medical college, Dr. Henriques had served several years as an assistant to my father. Both of my parents were much attached to him. In my home, he was like another son. To me, he was like an older brother.

It was the era of railroad expansion and construction. When the Santa Fé railroad, building across the continent, offered the doctor the position of Company physician at the various railhead construction camps, my father believed it a rare opportunity to acquire valuable experience and persuaded him to accept it. But in 1879, when the track reached Las Vegas, he resigned, opened an office for the practise of medicine and married a lady who was a member of a prominent, wealthy and much respected family of Spanish ancestry with extensive land holdings

throughout the territory. My summer was to be spent on a ranch belonging to his wife's family.

The long railroad journey across the great plains was interesting but uneventful. My first stop-over was Las Vegas, formerly a sleepy little Mexican settlement but already transformed into a thriving community with many modern buildings and some six thousand enterprising citizens. The doctor met me at the depot and took me to his comfortable but not pretentious home in the suburbs where I received a cordial welcome from his wife, a beautiful and charming woman, who had been educated in the East and spoke perfect English.

An arresting figure in any company, Dr. Henriques—with greying hair and a close clipped grey mustache—was a tall, slender, broad shouldered, dignified man in his middle thirties. Quiet and soft spoken, with a disarming smile, he made friends easily and was well liked.

During the few days I spent in Las Vegas, the doctor and his wife exerted themselves to entertain me, showing me the sights. I remember they took me to the neighboring "hot springs," to see the palatial hotel the railroad had built to catch the tourist trade, now, I believe, converted into a sanitorium. But the big event was the "grand" Fourth of July ball at the city hall where, to the music of fiddles, guitars and an accordion, I saw ladies in full evening dress dancing with men in tails, white ties and gloves, and in the same quadrille, in true pioneer style, with cowboys in boots and blue overalls.

But the doctor's home was not a cheerful place. I had never been specially observant yet I could not but notice the pall of restrained sadness ever present in the house, the moments tears gathered in the eyes of my hostess. I sensed the trouble was serious altho from the affectionate way the doctor and his wife addressed each other, I was sure they were not having domestic differences. I was puzzled. I did not know it was the aftermath of a tragedy, a shock from which my kindly hostess had not fully recovered but before any outside busybody enlightened

me, the doctor and I left Las Vegas,, taking a train for a station south of Albuquerque.

There we were ferried across the Rio Grande river to one of the many ranches belonging to the family of the doctor's wife where we spent the night. Early the next morning, riding in a buckboard behind a matched pair of thorough-bred driving horses, we started on the first leg of a leisurely trek eastward thru a pass in the mountains, headed for Estancia Springs, another family ranch that was to be my home for the summer. It was a dry country, uninhabited and wild, but the doctor knew the little traveled road and so timed our journey that, when night overtook us, we would make camp at a water hole. Then, after hobbling the horses, he would build a fire and cook supper. Afterwards, as we did not carry a tent, we rolled in blankets and slept under the stars.

The doctor did not wear a belt studded with cartridges or carry a holstered gun on his hip. Except for a broad brimmed felt hat, then called a "Stetson," he did not look like the heavily armed Westerners pictured in the story books but he was not weaponless. Between us, lying on the seat of the buckboard, was a loaded revolver. Not for protection from bandits—the doctor said there weren't any bandits—but to be handy in case we met a bear. To my supreme disappointment, we did not see a bear. The drive was made without an exciting incident.

Altho singularly averse to talking about himself, the doctor could, when so disposed, express himself clearly and concisely but at best he was not a talkative man. Nevertheless he was a pleasant companion, kind and always willing to answer my eager questions, to tell me whatever I wanted to know. Altogether it was a wonderful experience for a boy totally unfamiliar with out-door life.

On the morning of the third day, we were in the foothills with the mountains behind us. Soon the doctor said we were entering a broad valley and at a junction with a more traveled road, we were able to sight the ranch buildings, still far away. By noon, the hills had leveled. In

the evening, we arrived at the ranch. There, ready to greet their employer, the middle-aged American foreman had assembled the cowboy employees, a rough and care-free crew, jolly and playful, half of them young Americans, half of them young Mexicans, all unfeignedly glad to see him.

These cowboys were superb horsemen, experts at roping with the lasso but they did not wear the stunning costumes familiar to patrons of the modern rodeo, "Wild West" show or the cinema. Instead of gorgeous silk neckerchiefs and shirts, their neckerchiefs were cotton bandannas, their shirts flannel. Instead of neatly tailored, doe skin pants, they wore shapeless blue overalls. Instead of "ten gallon" hats, they wore soiled and battered "Stetsons." A few wore chaps, a few wore spurs but their boots, worn down at the heels, were never polished. They seldom shaved, their hair was seldom trimmed and around the ranch house, they never carried firearms. Only on long rides did they wear a belt with a holstered gun, not for fighting but because sometimes they had to shoot a rattlesnake, a coyote or a skunk.

Nowadays people expect a cowboy to sing. Romancers delight in describing him twanging a guitar in the moonlight as he serenades a beautiful young lady but, at the Springs, I found it to be a delusion. We did have many moonlight nights but if there had been a guitar on the ranch, none of the boys could play the instrument and assuming some one among them could sing, which I doubted, there wasn't a young lady, beautiful or otherwise, within miles of the ranch to be serenaded.

But altho the boys had little schooling and few social accomplishments, they knew their business. In their work, they were capable at everything they were ordered to do.

Lying in the midst of a vast dusty plain they called the "Valley," the ranch—with no near neighbors—centered around an inexhaustible running spring. Even in the hottest weather of the dryest season, its overflow kept a shallow lake—about the size of an average city block—constantly filled with cold wholesome water. Later I was

to learn it was the most dependable spring in a country notoriously dry, and that its possession made the ranch a very valuable property, so valuable that greedy men had coveted it, fought and killed for it, and even died for it.

From the lake, as far as the eye could see, the sun-baked, treeless, plain stretched away monotonously flat until it merged with the horizon in every direction except in the west where the blue peaks of the distant mountains showed against the sky-line. Unlike the green fields of the east, the parched uncultivated land—crisscrossed by cattle paths and pockmarked with gopher or prairie dog holes—seemed to me to be sparsely covered with drab colored brush and weeds. Under the bright sun of a cloudless sky, it impressed me as a desolate country, devoid of scenic beauty.

With several hundred brood mares, the Springs was primarily a horse ranch. The lake was only partly fenced and besides their horses and a few head of their own cattle, stock in countless numbers from near and even distant ranches used it freely as a drinking place. No one fed these cows—all the cattle were called "cows"—and certainly they were not fat and sleek. Most of them were lean boney "Texas long horns," so named for their long and formidably pointed horns, but none of them looked starved. Later, among other surprises, I was also to learn that the soil about the ranch was rich, that there was an abundance of coarse grass, that the country was called "good grazing range."

The main ranch house, fronting the lake, was an old, one-story, rambling structure with thick adobe walls, a flat roof and low ceilings. Built with two wings like the letter "u," one wing was the mess hall and kitchen. The foreman and his wife occupied the other wing. Between the wings was a long covered porch. Behind the porch was a row of large rooms, the sleeping quarters of the bachelor cowboys and, with conventional Western hospitality, any strangers who might be passing by.

Nearby were several small adobe shacks or cabins used at various times by Mexican employees when accompanied

by their wives and families. Back of the ranch house was an adobe stable and several pastures. Enclosed by a high and substantial fence was the corral, shaped like a circus ring.

The weather was hot. It was a windy country and as the doors and windows of the ranch house were never closed, it was impossible to keep out the dust. The floors were swept occasionally but life was carelessly indifferent. Flies, mosquitoes, ants and other insect pests flew or crawled in and out unhindered but no one complained or was bothered except perhaps a new-comer and then only until he became accustomed or immune to these petty annoyances.

The doctor's visit to the ranch was for the purpose of representing his wife's family at the annual branding and counting of the Spring crop of colts. Preparing for his coming, the cowboys employed on the ranch had rounded up bands of horses from all parts of the surrounding country and herded them into one of the fenced pastures near the ranch house. At dawn of the morning after our arrival, the work started. In the center of the corral, the doctor, the foreman and several cowboys grouped about a small fire built to heat the branding irons. Then from the pasture, other cowboys cut out approximately thirty head—a few geldings, perhaps a stallion but principally mares, followed, of course, by their colts—drove them into the corral and closed the gate. As the frightened animals seeking to escape, milled frantically, the colts were picked out one by one, roped, thrown, dragged to the center, tied, held down and branded. After all the colts in the band were branded, the gate was opened and the horses turned loose. Then another band was driven in from the pasture and its colts given the same treatment.

Happily seated on top of the high corral fence where I could enjoy the spectacle in safety, I kept tally of the animals branded while marveling at the dexterity of the cowboys. They were not giving a show-off performance but their teaming was perfect. When one of them roped a colt by the neck, another would rope the hind feet and it

seemed to me they never missed. The sun was broiling hot, the air was full of dust and the pungent smell of horse sweat, wood smoke and burnt hair but the work proceeded methodically until, on the first day, some eighty colts were branded.

After supper that evening, while all hands were sitting on the porch in the twilight, resting, smoking and chatting, the foreman told how a stray mongrel dog, a huge vicious beast, probably part wolf, was prowling around the ranch and had already fought and nearly killed his two pedigreed grey hounds, valuable animals he had imported from the East to use in colder weather for coursing jack-rabbits. He had tried to shoot it with a revolver but it was wary and he could not get close enough to hit it. Then he had tried to shoot it with the only long range weapon on the ranch, a 45 calibre Sharp's rifle, but had missed it.

While he was speaking, one of the boys pointed and said, "There he is," and in the distance we saw the animal sitting and watching us.

The doctor said, "Let me take a shot at him."

The foreman went in the ranch house, got the rifle and handed it to him. The doctor stood erect and was raising the heavy weapon to his shoulder when the dog, suddenly alert, bounded to its feet and was already running swiftly across the line of vision before, in one quick movement, he coolly leveled the gun, sighted, fired and—the animal turned a complete somersault. Then it lay still.

Unheeding the murmur of applause from the cowboys, the doctor merely said, "A lucky shot." Then he returned to his chair, laid down the rifle, and as if nothing unusual had happened, rolled and lighted a cigarette. He did not speak of the dog again.

Curious to see the effect of the shot, I accompanied some of the cowboys who stepped off the distance. It was more than three hundred yards. The dog had been drilled thru the body directly behind the foreleg. I had never seen a rifle fired but even to my inexperienced eyes it was extraordinary marksmanship. I quite agreed with

one of the boys whom I overheard saying, "The doctor is a wonder with a rifle." At that time I did not understand why he added, "He is as fast and even better with a six-gun. I'd say he is as good as Billy the Kid ever was."

Like every schoolboy in the land, I had read about the exploits of William Bonney, in life notorious as the bandit "Billy the Kid" but now dead and, by the newspapers, already made into a legendary figure, the typical gun-fighting Western bad man. In this crude way, the cowboy was paying the greatest possible compliment to the doctor's skill by comparing it favorably with the speed and deadly accuracy of a young man who, twenty one years old, was reputed to have shot and killed twenty one men.

Recalling that New Mexico was the scene of many of "Billy the Kid's" activities, I asked, "Did you ever see him?"

He answered, "Certainly. All of us knew him. He stopped here often. Many nights, he slept at this ranch."

Emboldened, I questioned him further. "Was he a big man?"

"No, he was a nice quiet little fellow. Everybody liked him and he had lots of friends around here. If let alone, he wouldn't harm anybody."

By the late afternoon of the second day, some fifty more colts had been branded and the wearisome branding job was finished. The morning of the third day, the doctor returned to Las Vegas and the cowboys were assigned to another job, breaking new riding stock. Living all their working hours in the saddle, each had a string of five or six horses. As the work was hard and exacting, many mounts soon outlived their usefulness and had to be replaced.

During the branding in the corral, likely animals were picked and herded into a separate pasture. These recruit horses were wild. None had ever had a rider on its back or even a bit in its mouth.

The "breaking" took place, not in the corral but in the open. A recruit was roped, thrown, held down and after a wicked curb bit was forced into its mouth, it was bridled

and blindfolded with a thick cloth. Then allowed to stagger to its feet, it was held firmly by the head while it was saddled, the girths drawn tight and to aid a rider in clamping his legs around the horse's body, the stirrups were tied together. Now, with everything ready, the horse was mounted by a cowboy equipped with a quirt and as soon as the trembling animal was released, he lashed it about its forelegs. Mounted on another horse, a helper cowboy lashed its hindquarters. Under this terrific punishment, the frantic horse seldom bucked but would dash blindly out on the open prairie. There, quirted front and rear at every step, it would run until, lathered with sweat, it would finally stop from sheer exhaustion. Then, with all resistance beaten out of it, the horse would be ridden back to the corral, the cowboy would dismount, the blindfold be removed and the animal turned into the pasture. The next day, after putting the horse thru the same ordeal, they maintained it was broken and would stay broken.

In using this method to break horses, these men were merely following established custom. They were not naturally cruel. In reality, they were horse lovers. Few used spurs or quirts and, once an animal was broken, almost invariably they looked after it carefully and treated it kindly.

The doctor left me in the care of the foreman and incidentally, when that worthy man's back was turned, at the mercy of the mischievous cowboys who were waiting impatiently for a favorable opportunity to have fun with me. Not that they disliked me but, to them, I was a green Eastern boy still wet behind the ears, a heaven sent victim for their rough practical jokes. They wanted to test me to determine if I was a sissy or a lad with enough courage to take whatever they gave me without whimpering.

In the afternoon, with the foreman gone to look after a horse that was lying sick a few miles from the ranch house, their opportunity came. They started by asking me if I had ever ridden horseback? When I answered "no" and told them I was anxious to learn, they suggested I begin by riding in the corral where, by an odd coinci-

dence, there was a gentle horse already saddled, bridled and waiting for me.

When all the cowboys accompanied me to the corral, it should have made me suspicious. If I had known anything about horses, I would have backed down when I saw it took two of them to hold the mean looking, restive horse they had chosen for my debut as a rider. But I was gullible and too happy and preoccupied to notice how they nudged each other when I neglected to test the saddle girths, how they grinned when I committed a cardinal sin by mounting the horse from the wrong side, how they laughed when, sitting astride the horse, I told them to "let him go" altho they could plainly see that my feet were barely touching the stirrups. They thought the fun was beginning.

Not having been told that all their riding horses were trained to guide by the pressure of the bridle reins against the neck, I attempted to turn the animal by pulling on the bit. Instead of delighting the expectant cowboys by throwing me, the outraged brute elected to spin around like a top, whirling so fast my feet lost contact with the stirrups and I was forced to cling giddily to the high pommel of the Mexican saddle.

Perhaps purposely, the gate to the corral was not closed. Frightened by the dangling stirrups no less than by his clumsy rider, the horse climaxed his gyrations by bolting thru the open gate. Then with the bit in his teeth and completely out of control, he ran at full speed out on the unfenced prairie with me hanging on to the friendly, life-saving pommel, helpless and fervently hoping he would not step in a gopher hole.

The fun loving cowboys had expected to see me thrown on the soft ground inside the corral but aware of the danger of a fall on the sun baked, hard ground outside, they were alarmed. Fearing an accident, they mounted their horses and pursued me. They had a long chase and only overtook me many miles from the ranch when my horse, breathing heavily and covered with lather, stopped of his own accord.

Crowding around me, they asked me if I was scared? If I had realized my horse was running away, no doubt I would have been terribly frightened but when I truthfully answered "no" and told them I had enjoyed the ride, they were mystified. I had done everything wrong but perhaps I was a real rider and, anticipating their joke, had turned the tables on them.

One of them dismounted and had just finished adjusting my stirrups when my horse bolted again, this time heading for the ranch house. Again I clung desperately to the pommel. Again the cowboys pursued me but my horse was fast and the race did not end until he ran into the corral thru the open gate and stopped. Again the cowboys surrounded me and asked if I was scared? Again they were mystified when I answered "no" and told them it was such a fine ride that I wanted to repeat it the next day.

Meanwhile the foreman had returned and heard of my adventure. After supper, he took me aside and told me he had intended to teach me how to ride by putting me at first on a gentle, well trained animal but the cowboys had taken advantage of his absence and thoughtlessly risked a serious accident by mounting me on a wild, half broken horse. When he told me the horse had ran away with me and he was mighty glad I wasn't hurt, I was careful not to let him see I was shivering at the thought of my narrow escape but, later, when he threatened the crew with disciplinary measures, I realized their fate rested in my hands and hastened to defend them. It was a joke and I begged him to go easy with them.

The cowboys had expected a severe reprimand, perhaps to be discharged. When they heard I had not complained but had taken their part, it made me one of them. From then on, there were no more jokes. They were my pals and would do anything they could for me.

The next morning, the riding lessons started. The kindly foreman was not a talker but he was a good teacher. Intent on learning, I was an apt pupil, absorbed his instructions and made rapid progress. Soon I was allowed to ride alone and as I quickly discovered I was not compelled to

give my entire attention to my gentle horse, I began to look about and make observations. Incidentally, I studied the brands on the cattle using the lake as a drinking place.

After supper a few nights later while I was sitting on the porch gossiping with the crew, I remarked that almost all the cows I had seen around the ranch bore the same brand. But as it was not the brand of the family of the doctor's wife, I wanted to know who owned them? The tight lipped foreman had left us and gone to his room to pass the evening with his wife but the boys undertook to answer me. All of them talked, interrupting and prompting each other. It was confusing and after this lapse of time I can remember little of the exact language they used but I have never forgotten the tragic tale they told.

Among the original white settlers of New Mexico was the family of the doctor's wife. One of them, perhaps her grandfather, probably her father, bought an old Spanish land grant that presumably included the springs and lake at Estancia and the land surrounding the lake. Here the ranch house was built. Here, for many years, members of the family lived, raised horses and cattle, and prospered. Their ownership was never disputed until, a few years before my visit, another old Spanish land grant was bought by a man named Whitney, a Boston capitalist with visions of the profits to be made in the cattle business if gone into on a big scale. His purchase included not only a water hole called Antelope Springs, located some five miles from Estancia, but also included—it was claimed—the springs and lake at Estancia and all the adjoining property. To look after his interests, Whitney sent a younger brother, a big blustering fellow, purseproud and egotistical, domineering and ruthless, a man totally devoid of tact, a braggart who imagined he was a wonderful shot with a pistol.

When the younger Whitney arrived to take charge, he was confronted by conflicting titles. Already settled and raising cattle at Antelope Springs was a rancher who had bought the site from the same people who had sold it to the older Whitney. At Estancia Springs, he found the ranch held by the family of the doctor's wife.

To avoid expensive litigation, the rancher at Antelope Springs sold Whitney his herd of cattle and his rights to the site but when Whitney ordered the family of the doctor's wife to vacate the property at Estancia Springs, they not only flatly refused but would not negotiate with him. If he disputed their title, he could bring suit against them in the courts.

While pondering over his next move, Whitney made his headquarters at Antelope Springs. There he employed a foolhardy fighting foreman and began to buy more stock but soon finding the springs would not yield enough water for his augmented herd, his thoughts reverted to the unlimited supply at Estancia. A scion of great wealth, intolerant of opposition and accustomed to take what he wanted, he decided to act without waiting until the validity of his title was adjudicated by the courts and planned a surprise invasion. Needing reinforcements, he hired seven so called Texas gunmen. With them and his foreman, he raided the ranch, drove off the Mexican foreman and the crew of Mexican cowboys who were in charge in the absence of the owners and took forcible possession of the property.

Manuel Otero, the adored brother of the doctor's wife, had succeeded his father as the head of the family. From all accounts, he was a handsome man, kindly, generous and extremely popular, particularly with the Mexicans residing in the territory. They idolized him. He and the doctor were already on the way to visit the ranch at Estancia Springs when the news of Whitney's invasion reached them. They sent for the sheriff who happened to be in the vicinity. They knew he would gather a posse and come promptly to their assistance but Manuel was impatient and would not wait for them. Unwisely he insisted on pushing ahead without him.

At Estancia they were received in the messroom by Whitney, the fighting foreman and the seven Texas gunmen who filed into the room and took seats along the wall.

Manuel and Whitney did the arguing. Their debate started quietly but quickly becoming heated, Whitney sud-

denly delivered an ultimatum, "You must lay down your arms and leave this place," As he uttered these fateful words, he and the foreman drew their guns.

As none of the boys who talked with me that evening were eye witnesses to what followed, the story they told was, of course, hearsay. It was apparent they were partisans and prejudiced. Maybe they exaggerated. I couldn't say. I can only relate their version of the subsequent happenings.

Altho Manuel Otero was armed, he had not made an aggressive gesture but the impetuous foreman was too cowardly to wait until he reached for his weapon. Taking no chances, he shot him in the forehead, killing him instantly.¹

Then pandemonium broke loose. Suddenly panic stricken, the seven gun-toting Texans deserted their employer, yelling, cursing and stumbling against each other in a mad rush to get out of the smoke filled room.

No doubt Whitney had intended to support his henchman by shooting the doctor but he was slow getting into action. Maybe he thought a physician could not be familiar with firearms. Maybe he was unnerved by the tumult around him. Maybe his vaunted prowess with a pistol was a bluff. Whatever the cause, his arm was unsteady when he fired. He did succeed in hitting the doctor in his left arm but it was not until after his intended victim—cool and lightning fast—had drawn his gun and shot and killed the treacherous foreman.

Now left to fight a battle single-handed, Whitney made a sorry showing. With less than a table's width between them, his shots were wild and missed but the doctor's shooting arm, his right arm, was not crippled and he did not miss. He shot Whitney, not once but again and again until the badly wounded braggart dropped his gun, fell on the floor and cravenly begged for his life.

In a few brief seconds, the room was a shambles. Of the four participants, Manuel Otero was dead. His gun

1. M. A. Otero, *My Life on the Frontier*, II, 103 gives the date of this killing as Aug. 17, 1833.

had not been fired. The fighting foreman was dead. He had fired but one shot. Whitney lay moaning on the floor, bleeding from many wounds. The doctor had a bullet in his left arm.

As to what happened next, my narrators differed. Some of them, hero worshippers, contended that the doctor—gun in hand and eager to continue the battle—stood in the doorway and made the Texans surrender their weapons. Others said the sheriff's posse, nearing the ranch, heard the firing, hastened and arrived in time to disarm the Texans and—make Whitney a prisoner.

I was thrilled by the story but, to me, it was not completed and I pressed for more details. "Why did the Texans run out after the fight started?" The cowboys laughed and said no one believed they were real gunmen. Besides they had been in the territory long enough to learn of Manuel Otero's standing, especially with the Mexican element of the population, to know their lives would not be worth a thin dime if they took an active part in his murder.

Then I wanted to know why the doctor did not kill Whitney? One of the cowboys shrugged and answered, "Quién sabe? Who knows?" Another said, "Me, I always reckoned he was saving him to be hanged." But he wasn't hanged. The sheriff did take him to Las Vegas. There he was tried for the murder of Manuel Otero and I can well remember my surprise and indignation when they told me he was acquitted "because he did not fire the shot that killed the doctor's brother-in-law" but more likely "because his rich relatives spent no less than one hundred thousand dollars to clear him."

When I asked what had become of Whitney, they said they heard he had gone away to try to recover from his wounds. They thought he would be afraid to ever come back but his Boston outfit still made its headquarters at Antelope Springs and was still in the cattle business on a big scale. It was mostly their stock I had seen around the lake.

To my question why the Whitney cattle were allowed

to water at the lake, they reminded me that it was only partly fenced. The range was free. Anybody's horses or stock could use the lake for a drinking place.

Finally, when I asked if they expected another raid, they laughed again and said they thought the Whitneys were through with raiding. They had had enough.

With the story of the cowboys foremost in my mind, the next morning I cornered the foreman and endeavored to get his version of the tragic affair. I remember how he answered, "We have a good crew but the boys are young and their tongues wag too much. None of us were here in those days. None of us were in Las Vegas during the trial. I suppose all of us have heard plenty but I know the doctor does not like to talk about that killing or like others to talk about it and I keep my mouth shut." The kindly foreman had snubbed me but he had started me thinking and I was beginning to understand the sadness that lingered in the doctor's home, how the tragedy was a subject the family preferred not to discuss even with their friends.

During the days that followed, the time passed pleasantly. I had no duties to perform and could loaf or ride about the country as I pleased. The food at the ranch was abundant and, after I became accustomed to the Mexican cooking, I thrived on it, gaining weight and strength.

Now accepted by the cowboys, I was enamored with the out-door life they led until, at the urgent request of the line-riders, I visited and spent several days and nights with each of them in turn. These men lived alone in little shacks, miles distant from the ranch house and from each other. Craving companionship and delighted to have me as a guest, I was made very welcome. I found that riding the line from sunrise to sunset was interesting and sometimes exciting but at night, when I realized the line-rider had no one to talk to and nothing to do but eat, smoke and sleep—perhaps read if there was anything to read—I saw the monotony and loneliness of his in-door life and was disillusioned. The glamour of the cowboy faded and I was glad I did not have to remain there permanently but could return to my home and finish my education.

In early September, with the arrival of the doctor in his buckboard, I was quite satisfied to drive back with him, cross-country, to Las Vegas. Not that I regretted the summer at the ranch. I had enjoyed every minute of it and I believe now I would have always felt frustrated if I had not been given the opportunity to see the cowboy, not as the fiction writers made him but as he actually existed in those days.

On the ride out from the ranch as on the ride in, the doctor was kind and friendly but he did not mention the tragedy and I did not have the temerity to mention it to him.

After a few quiet days resting at the doctor's home in Las Vegas, I left by train for my own home in the middle-West. There my parents encouraged me to tell them about my holiday on the ranch but when I started to talk about the battle at the Springs, my father stopped me. He and the doctor were close friends and, as they exchanged letters, it is reasonable to assume my father knew all about the sad affair. I am sure my father sympathized with the doctor to the fullest extent but, like the foreman on the ranch, whatever he knew he kept to himself. I cannot remember hearing the tragedy discussed in my presence. In fact, I never heard the doctor's version of the battle.

I was sent away to college, graduated and was soon engrossed in a business career. At long intervals, fragments of news about the Springs reached me. I remember hearing that the U. S. courts had refused to validate the land grant purchased by the one time head of the family of the doctor's wife because of a flaw in the title. Thus the land covered by the grant became public domain, open to settlement by homesteaders. A few years later, my very slight link with the doctor and his family was broken by his untimely death.

Many years later, I heard that Whitney, after a lingering illness, had died from his wounds. Then when I heard the U. S. courts had refused to validate the land grant purchased by his brother, the Boston capitalist, also because of a flaw in the title, I could not but think of the futility of the battle at the Springs. It would seem that

neither of the combatants had a clear title to the land they claimed and fought over, that the blood had been shed in vain.

I have never returned to the Springs but, with the passage of time, I am told there are amazing changes. Today, where cowboys rode, where great bands of horses and vast herds of Texas long horn cattle roamed, there are productive farms and orchards. Today, the ranch house is gone. Only the lake remains, now the center of the public park of the typical American town of Estancia, a county seat with a fine water plant, railroad connections, paved streets, electric lights, sanitary sewers, public schools, a city hall, a public library and every modern improvement, already the home of more than a thousand progressive citizens. Few among them remember the sanguinary encounter at the Springs. Where a people live in the present and look forward to the future, a tragedy of bygone years is apt to be forgotten.