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HOME ON THE RANGE

By RUTH TRESSMAN

IF a woman is considered a necessary component of a home, I homes on the range were almost non-existent in the early days, say 1860-1880, in the Great West. Nor were such homes as were established on the plains and farther west made by the women the movies usually give us as "the Western type." Though there eventually came to be many kinds of range women as there were many kinds of range men, one is at a loss to find one—even a half-breed—lying around in sexy poses on any table, divan, or rock that is handy, as Jennifer Jones did in "Duel in the Sun," or one who made an analogy between breeding children and breeding stock in the free terms used by the girl in "Red River," nor does one find many as glamorous as Jane Russell nursing Billy the Kid.

The few good women of the range were luxuries the average cowboy only dreamed he some day might afford. They came sometimes from Kentucky, Tennessee, and other Southern states, occasionally from families with aristocratic traditions. Later, to ranches on the Great Plains, came women from families that moved west from Illinois, Missouri, eastern Kansas. For the most part they came from conventional, God-fearing families, and though necessity forced them to adopt some independent attitudes, they did not try to change to "Western" types. In fact they clung as tenaciously as environment would permit to the old ways in a new land. In the South West the Spanish taught them a way of living suited to the climate of Arizona and New Mexico. On the

Great Plains danger from Indians and lack of materials largely determined the type of house they lived in, but on the whole, their basic concepts, the guides by which they lived, changed very little.¹

No matter what the location or financial state of the ranch wife, her resourcefulness was taxed by difficulties of travel and by isolation and loneliness. The woman who lacked buoyancy, adaptability, and some resources within herself did not belong on the range. Even given these qualities, her life expectancy, so the census of 1860 indicated, was shorter than that of a man on the frontier.² At present the life expectancy of an American woman exceeds that of the men by several years. However, 1860 is a very early date. Things changed rapidly in the West. Hence, if a woman had the stamina to endure her first years on a ranch, she seems generally to have gained satisfaction from her life, an ability to take things in her stride.

Most chronicles written by range women are optimistic. For example, a traveler to Greeley, Colorado, in 1871, tells how women in that locality seemed happy and laughed at commiseration in spite of the still present fear of Indians.³ Another traveler, Meline, in 1866, reported the same attitude held by a ranch woman near Colorado City.⁴ In like vein Mrs. Sophie Poe, describing life in New Mexico in the 1870's and 1880's, indicates contentment and love for the country.^{4a}

There was reason for this perhaps in the very geography of the Plains-Mountains country. Something expansive about life in this region may have counteracted any tendency toward melancholia. Furthermore, the range woman practically had to be objective in her thinking. Usually there was

1. Nancy Wilson Ross, *Westward the Women*. Henry Holt & Co., 1944. Many examples cited.

2. William F. Sprague, *Women and the West*. Christopher Publishing House, Boston, 1940, p. 113.

3. A few women who have written their reactions to range life say that it made them broader minded, but one of these women was obviously scandalized by the fact that a neighbor plowed for a woman other than his wife. cf. Clarice A. Richards, *A Tenderfoot Bride*, p. 59.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 107. This was, be it noted, before the terrific winter of 1866 which led many Colorado ranchers to leave their ranches. Some of their deserted shacks may still be seen in Western Colorado.

4a. *Buckboard Days*. Caldwell, Idaho, 1936.

not time to be otherwise. Also she gained satisfaction from the respect with which she was treated in a country where women were rare. At any rate, the life seems to have been interesting and vital for women strong enough to endure the physical strain, and the homes they created no doubt benefited from this fact.

As has been said, a home of his own was something the average cowboy dreamed about. What he called "home" might be a large ranch house, headquarters, or a bunk house, or a dugout he called his own. But a real home, so his songs said, might necessitate his quitting his cowboy's life and was likely to be left to some distant, happy future. As the song, "The Old Chisholm Trail," has it,

When I thought of my girl, I nearly would cry,
I'll quit herdin' cows in the sweet bye and bye.

If later in life, he came into some money or his boss gave him a stake, he might marry. Many range men never married, or if they did, they moved back East or to town to a more sheltered existence.⁵ However, a few wealthy cowmen whom luck, or the government, or the gods of free enterprise had favored did have homes, generally speaking stable and happy ones. The houses they owned varied greatly. Men from the East or from foreign countries generally built better homes than the typical Westerner. Some of these were "display" houses: There are, for example, the Maxwell house at Fort Sumner, New Mexico,⁶ the Kenedy house and others of Spanish style near the Rio Grande in Texas.⁷ But these are the exceptions, not the rule of the range.

The lone cowboy waiting for a break does not seem to have worried much about the home he could provide for a girl—if he got the girl. His songs, very sentimental, tell of the kind of girl he thought he wanted. "Snagtooth Sal" and "Pretty Little Black-eyed Susan" were apparently both popular. Sometimes the cowboy was sensible, like the one who made up the song about "Biscuit Shootin' Susie," the waitress

5. Tom Scott, *Sing of America*. Thomas Y. Crowell, 1947, p. 79.

6. Illustration in Sophie Poe, *Buckboard Days*, p. 100, and Wm. A. Keleher, *Maxwell Land Grant*. Rydal Press, Santa Fe, p. 88.

7. Illustration in C. L. Douglas, *Cattle Kings of Texas*. Dallas, 1939, p. 99.

at the station. Sometime he bragged about all the girls he knew—wishful thinking—and cast his vote for an outdoor type rather than a “lady.”

But, Lord, they're all ruffles an' beadin'
And drink fancy tea by the pail;
I'm not used to that sort of stampedin'
Longside the Santa Fe Trail!⁸

Again he wanted her “all over gol-durned fluffs.”⁹

The cowboy was not always considered such a good matrimonial bet by families back east. One ballad sung by Lomax warns the girls not to be fascinated by uncouth cowboys who can only lead them to a hard life, and, when they come a'-courtin', will look them over and have nothing better to say than “Your Jonny-cake's burned.” One cowboy rationalized such a situation:^{9a}

Her parents don't like me, they say I'm too poor;
They say I'm unworthy to enter her door.
I've no wife to quarrel, no babies to bawl;
The best way of living is no wife at all.¹⁰

Sometimes, of course, the cowboy got the girl. And when he did, he treated her well according to his lights. Just how the girl who was “all over gol-durned fluffs” managed if she married the cowboy is another story. One thing is certain, the saying that a trousseau is what the bride will wear for the next five years was even more true on the early-day range than now. A Sears-Roebuck trousseau, which by careful choosing could be had for twenty dollars, was likely to have to survive dust storms, insects, possibly a dirt floor, and possibly a sod roof from which the mud trickled down in a really good rain. Ole Olson, the slow, prosaic Swedish carpenter back in Minneapolis, did much better by his wife in the matter of housing than the “romantic” cowboy.¹¹

Shelter did vary greatly, though, according to section and

8. John A. and Alan Lomax, *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*. The Macmillan Co., 1947, p. 310.

9. P. A. Rollins, *The Cowboy*. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936, p. 73.

9a. I do not believe in communal ownership of the ballads, so I see the author as a definite individual.

10. Lomax, p. 165.

11. Sprague, p. 106.

means. There were the cabins and the great houses of Texas, the sod house of Kansas, and the adobe house of New Mexico.¹² Because of this variety of types, houses will need discussion by areas, though many other factors which made up a ranch woman's life were the same everywhere.

Texas ranch houses varied greatly. The earliest were on ranches near the Gulf and the Mexican border and were rather pretentious places worthy of feudal estates. There was a great house related in type to the plantation homes of the deep south on the Kenedy ranch, established by Captain Miffin Kenedy in the 1850's. Mexican influence prevails in the house on the San Ygnacio ranch between Laredo and Brownsville. This is a two-story house one-room deep with balconies. It was built in the 1870's. An example of Mexican brick work dating from mid-nineteenth century is the Carmen ranch house near Brownsville.¹³ A typical ranch house evolved near San Antonio has been described as having been

rectangular, one room deep, two or three rooms long with a pitched roof extending over a porch or porches. The entire house was raised off the ground (not a dugout), but was never more than one story in height. Stone construction was used almost entirely, often stuccoed or whitewashed; shingle roofs and long porches across the front were further characteristics. There were fireplaces of stone, simple mantles, plastered and white-washed walls and ceilings of wide boards.¹⁴

In Northwest Texas, where materials were scarce, houses were even less pretentious. Pictures of Captain Doan's house at a crossing of the Red River show an adobe home with a long porch and fireplace, a shelter hardly adequate, which was in its day a stopping place for senators and governors as well as cattle men.¹⁵

In Western Texas and in the Panhandle a dugout was likely to be the first headquarters house of a new ranch. But women, then as now, objected to an underground existence.^{15a}

12. Carl Coke Rister, *Southern Plainsmen*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1938, pp. 58-69.

13. *Antiques*, 53: 439 (June, 1948).

14. *Texas*; American Guide Series. Hastings House, 1947, p. 152.

15. J. M. Hunter, *Trail Drivers of Texas*. Nashville, Tenn., 1925, p. 776.

15a. Perhaps, eventually, men will have to solve the problem of control of the atom bomb because women will simply refuse to live like moles in indefinite anticipation of atomic war.

One woman won this battle against an underground existence. The story goes that when Mrs. Henry Campbell, wife of a manager on the great Matador ranch, arrived at headquarters in 1878, she refused to live underground; so a two room shack was built from lumber hauled hundreds of miles from Fort Griffin to Palo Duro. The shack was called the "White House" because it was the seat of government of the cattle empire.¹⁶

Various headquarters houses on the 3,000 acre XIT ranch, also in the Panhandle, were comfortable frame homes, surrounded by cottonwoods, very unpretentious. A two-room cabin served as the first home of the Charles Goodnights, though a larger home, built later, is the one existing today. In contrast to these shelters for native Americans, a great stone house was built for Goodnight's Scotch partner, Adair.¹⁷

What of the women, when there were any, who inhabited these houses? Texans seem to have been most successful in establishing ranch homes in the 1860's and 1870's and most reticent in saying anything about them.^{17a} Men have written world histories and in writing them have neglected women. Hunter's collection of short autobiographies, *Trail Drivers of Texas*, contains scattered references to wives and homes, along with a few eulogies. However, it tells us very little about what the women thought or how they fared. In the 1850's and through the early 1870's there was some danger of Indian raids. A woman could pack a gun. She could also brave the elements. Mrs. A. Burks, following the trail with her husband, says she did not have a difficult time. She liked camp, liked having the men in camp rival each other in finding delicacies for her.¹⁸ A few women pictured in Hunter's volume flourished in the later period of range history, when Texas was rather less "hell on women," and seem always to have been materially well off. But these women, remember,

16. Frank King, *Wranglin' the Past*. Trail's End Publishing Co., Pasadena, 1935, 1946, p. 85.

17. J. E. Haley, *Charles Goodnight, Cowman and Plainsman*. Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1936, p. 314.

17a. Perhaps Texans were actually less negligent in this matter than men generally.

18. Hunter, p. 29.

were the wives of the owners or managers of ranches, not of the hired men on horseback. Their history, however, is one part of our story.

Most famous among Texas ranch women was Mrs. Charles Goodnight, who was a favorite among cowboys throughout the Texas Panhandle. Mrs. Goodnight was a southern "lady" and remained so. She supplied tact and understanding when those qualities were needed. Even though the Goodnights were at one time very wealthy, they made no display of wealth. Mrs. Goodnight sat at a table with their cowboys and gave them berries she picked herself. Her home at the JA Ranch headquarters for some years was a two-room cabin. There were dugouts for the boys and a bunk house, a mess house, and corrals.¹⁹ Of Mrs. Goodnight's isolation more will be said. Just now let us look at other ranch homes.

Charles Siringo mentions several such homes, among them that of Shanghai Pierce, by whose wife, Nanny, he had been mothered in his youth. From what we know of Shanghai Pierce's dominating personality and loud voice, we wonder whether Nanny ever raised her voice above a whisper. We can be quite sure she did not lack material comforts, Pierce having had a way of having money even when everyone else went broke, but all we really know of her is that she lived at Rancho Grande headquarters.²⁰ Siringo tells also of a trail boss who married a farmer's daughter he met on a trip and adds that, "The journey to the Panhandle of Texas was continued with a new girl cook to dish up the grub." For this girl for a while a range home was the whole great outdoors. Siringo himself, one of the greatest cowboys of them all, "retired to a town" during the years of his marriage.²¹

On a large ranch there were men cooks, and one does not often get a picture of an overworked wife slaving for the boys. We have, however, one account of Texas ranch life by the wife of a man not so prosperous. Mrs. Kruse, wife of a trail driver, speaks of having moved into a little vacant

19. Haley, p. 314.

20. Charles Siringo, *Riata and Spurs*. Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1931, p. 11.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

shanty near a spring in Hayes county, without either floor or chimney, chinked with mud which fell in when it rained. Her husband built a chimney and floored the house. His wife, meantime, baked thousands of biscuits for his trips up the trail.²²

Colorado ranch houses might be of either type, the dug-out introduced by Anglo-Americans, or the adobe introduced by Spanish Americans. The far greater number of temporary ranch homes were crudely constructed dugouts. A dugout in flat territory, if built in a conventional way, consisted of a hole about four feet deep and walls built up about three feet with sod. A ridge pole was placed across the center and smaller poles were laid across these. On the poles were placed brush, a layer of sod, and then a layer of earth.²³ Even after permanent buildings of adobe or stone were provided, dugouts were still used as winter homes by line riders and stock tenders.

In New Mexico, Spanish influence and climate often led to the building of adobe dwellings by American settlers. Some of these houses are the precursors of what the present-day architect calls the "ranch-type" house. Among these are the house of the famous John Chisum near Roswell and the headquarters house on the WS ranch near Las Vegas. Chisum was a bachelor who kept a woman relative on the place to make it a home, so his establishment fits my definition. The house was long, low, rambling with long galleries. On pictures, it looks like a frame house, but it is an adobe one with wooden trim and picket fence. The furniture and everything in it, Chisum said, cost "a sight of money." But this, remember, was his acquisition after forty years of sleeping "on old mother earth's bosom." At any rate he made it a home to be remembered by giving an occasional big dance and making it generally known for hospitality.²⁴ This home, somewhat remodelled, still exists and is now the property of Cornell University.²⁵

22. Hunter, p. 16

23. *Texas*, American Guide Series, p. 154.

24. Poe, pp. 161-165.

25. *New Mexico*, American Guide Series. University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, p. 153.

Other men besides Chisum wanted the best in homes and home furnishings when fortune permitted. I have mentioned the Maxwell House, a very pretentious place with rich furnishings, whether the inmates thereof were happy or not. The Dorsey ranch near it was described in the *Las Vegas Gazette*, April 26, 1884:

The Ranch of Dorsey is a large unpretentious adobe building situated in a wide, shallow arroyo, bordered by cottonwood trees and surrounded by wire fence. Inside, the ranch is furnished magnificently, especially the parlor, Dorsey's sleeping room and the guest rooms for visitors, of which the house has several and which are in constant use. A piano stands in the sitting room, which also contains a well selected library and a completely appointed sideboard.²⁶

Other homes were less pretentious. Mrs. Poe describes her own first home on the VV Ranch ten miles from Lincoln, New Mexico, a cabin the smallness of which at first dismayed her. "A room on the north, another on the south, with the kitchen between; all so low that even I, barely five feet two inches tall could stand upon a chair and touch the ceilings." Each room had but one window. However, there were pine planks on the floor because this was a log, not an adobe, cabin. Each living room had a large fire place, the kitchen a large wood-burning range with a large reservoir for water heating. There was a long table, for guests must always be fed.²⁷ Mrs. Poe mentions having seen other small ranch dwellings between Las Vegas and Roswell in 1883 and having wondered about the women who lived in them, for this section at this time was being divided into smaller ranches.

Agnes Morley Cleaveland describes the ranch home of a family that started out with some money. Her mother, widowed from her first husband, and soon to be separated from her second, built a ten-room ranch house on a side hill. There were gray shingles, white veranda pillars. Into it went a piano, wagon loads of books, some pieces of fine furniture brought from Iowa. Though the Cleaveland ranch was anything but prosperous at times, the cultured mother continued

26. Quoted by Keleher, p. 139. A picture of the WS Ranch is in J. J. Cook, *Fifty Years on the Frontier*. New Haven, 1943, p. 162.

27. Poe, p. 217.

to create, somehow, a home in which English was correctly spoken, children were expected to go to college, and a feeling of family pride and solidarity prevailed.

Several accounts of the difficulties of bringing pianos across the desert for the cultural advantage of young daughters attest to the rancher's desire to maintain some culture and some of the graces of life in his Western home. He learned, too, to provide his wife with an excavated store room—a cellar to Northerners.²⁸ The average woman in an adobe dwelling wanted most of all a floor, and she got it. So, with a great effort, the women brought some of the amenities of life to the Southwest simply by insisting on having them. In fact, as nearly as one can tell from pictures and written accounts, they fared rather better than their sisters farther north in the 1880's.

In general plan the typical ranch headquarters of the Northwest was not so different from that of the Goodnights in Texas. Granville Stuart mentions "a few log cabins comprising a bunkhouse, a cook house, blacksmith shop, stable, corral, and hay land enough fenced to cut tons of hay."²⁹ Hough says that if a ranch house was very modern, it might have shingles, with a porch and veranda taking the place of the midway hall.³⁰ It might have a huge fireplace, a big "cannon" stove, and rough bunks lining the walls on either side.³¹ Pictures of these ranches in the Northwest are depressing. Roosevelt's famous ranch in the North Dakota Bad Lands was no exception.³²

An employee on a ranch often lived in a sod house, considered good enough for an "old batch." In the way of a dwelling he had very little to offer a woman. Suppose our man is a line-man working for an absentee owner. Emerson Hough describes his possible home:

Linecamps or out-dwellings for the men would still be of the old style—the walls perhaps of logs or sod, the roof being perhaps laid with rude half-tiles hollowed out of divided saplings and laid so that

28. Mary Kidder Rak, *A Cowman's Wife*. The Macmillan Co., 1938, pp. 9-11.

29. Granville Stuart, *Forty Years on the Frontier*. Cleveland, 1925, II, 239.

30. Emerson Hough, *The Story of a Cowboy*. Appleton-Century, 1938, p. 39.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Briggs, p. 248.

they "broke joints," the edges of two convex ones fitted in the hollow of one concaved, so that the water would thus be carried off as it is on a tile roof so fitted. Over this might be a covering of small logs, willow boughs and grass, and over all, dirt.³³

The homesteader's home was likely to be like this, too; a popular ballad asks for a girl to share "the little old sod shanty on my claim."³⁴

At least one Montana ranch wife, young and possessed of a gay heart, has left us a record of the particular home she had, which she considered better than most. She had a log cabin and a spring house, which gave her perpetual running water, and extra tents for overflow cowboys and guests. This was in 1887. She wrote back home to Illinois:

You ask what I do with my washing. Why I wash it, iron it, wear it, and wash it again. I have every convenience, and I do not lift a pail of water or turn a wringer or clean up. We have splendid water under the spring house. My kitchen is large and I have no trouble providing for all the men by putting the two tables together. There is no need of furnishing napkins for G— and I and Ed are the only ones of the crowd who ever saw one. I made four cream pies and a cocoanut pie yesterday, and how quickly they vanished before the hungry boys.³⁵

If the Southern ranch wife was better off in the matters of housing and climate, the Northern woman could more easily provide a balanced diet for her family. The Montana ranch woman mentioned above said that she had plenty of milk and eggs, that neighbors brought potatoes and other vegetables, that meat included beef, antelope, rabbit, wild turkey, chicken, and venison. She mentions a dinner of hot biscuit (she had baking powder and white flour), and venison steak, tomatoes, cream pie and coffee. She added happily that her guests "thought they would call again when they got hungry."³⁶

On the ranches of the Southwest little food was grown, so a woman had to work harder to accomplish less in a culinary way. A New Mexican diet was likely to consist of meat,

33. *Ibid.*, p. 346.

34. Lomax, p. 405.

35. William M. Thayer, *Marvell's of the West*. Henry Bill Publishing Co., Norwich, Conn., 1888, p. 608.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 615.

potatoes, beans, sow-belly (salt pork), dried fruit and canned goods. Cakes were baked somehow for parties, eggs or no eggs. The woman who could bring around a recipe for an eggless cake was a blessing to her neighbors, for eggs were rare. We hear of "jerky"—a kind of home-dried beef the beginnings of which do not sound appetizing. Indians from Santa Fe sometimes peddled fruit to settlers farther south.³⁷

In Texas and on the Southern Plains generally cornbread and molasses were staples of the diet, as were also bacon and beans. White flour was a luxury anywhere, costing as much as \$25 a barrel or more.³⁸ In summer, camp fires provided a good means of cooking. Bread could be baked in a Dutch oven and corn pones on heated rocks of the hearthstone.³⁹ Women soon learned to bake sour-dough biscuit, a masculine invention born of necessity.

About clothes the range woman was chronically conventional and feminine. She persisted in wearing what were then considered lady-like clothes, even when these clothes were clumsy and out of keeping with the life she led.⁴⁰ She wore a skirt and rode side-saddle, or she split the skirt moderately if she straddled her horse. She made clothes if the nearest store offered any cloth. The Sears-Roebuck catalog kept her fairly well informed about style—Sears-Roebuck version. (In fact, the catalog took the monotony from many a quiet evening with the family and so contributed much to the stability of home life on the range.)

Sophie Poe tells of a visit from a younger sister from Illinois, who brought the first bustle to one section of New Mexico in the 1880's. Sister's bustles were stuffed with old newspapers, but since newspapers were rare in New Mexico, wire contraptions were soon concocted to make the bustles bustle properly.⁴¹ The Western woman did not want her clothes to be different from those of her Eastern sister. She just had a harder time coming by the latest fashions, and

37. Cleaveland, pp. 159-164.

38. Hunter, p. 876.

39. Rister, pp. 74-75.

40. Look Magazine's volume of pictures, *The Santa Fe Trail*, shows styles of the West.

41. Sprague, p. 175.

she was likely to have too much sewing to do for the children to worry about her own dress.

Another function of the pioneer ranch home was nursing the sick in one's own or a neighbor's family. The subject is worth a paper in itself, so I shall mention here only a few of the remedies that might be administered. To purify the blood, there were sulphur and molasses, sassafras and sage tea. For snakebite one used chicken entrails, if one had the chicken, to draw out the poison. Wet earth served for bites and stings, sunflower seed soaked in whiskey for rheumatism.⁴² There are tales of using whiskey for smallpox (it killed), and tobacco (Bull Durham) and onion leave for gangrene (it cured.) In addition, the endless patent medicines were on the home shelf. Every household felt its responsibility to a neighbor in times of illness, for doctors were few and usually far away.

Nor were women the only dispensers of remedies in a ranch home. When a woman was ill, we are told, cowboys brought every kind of kill-or-cure medicine they had ever used for anything.⁴³ Why more people did not die from the cures I do not know, except that range constitutions were strong. Suffice it to say here that these attempts at doctoring evidence the feeling of responsibility for one's neighbor which was a definite part of ranch life.

So much has been said about the hospitality of the ranch home that more seems superfluous. Everyone knows about cowboy dances, in hall or home, to which men and women rode fifty miles, each woman bringing a cake and possibly carrying a fresh dress in a flour sack attached to her saddle. There was also the day-to-day hospitality which might necessitate the preparing of three dinners in one day if friends or strangers happened in in sequence and not simultaneously.⁴⁴ Friend or stranger or even enemy, whoever happened by, had to be fed.⁴⁵

Whether the ranch woman really worked with cattle depended on the circumstances and the woman. If she were

42. Cleaveland, pp. 146-148.

43. Rollins, p. 73.

44. Ross, p. 174.

45. Thayer, p. 610.

alone, a widow possibly, she might have had to do so. Sometimes she did so from choice.⁴⁶ Usually she was not expected to do rough work, but emergencies might demand it.⁴⁷

Children on the range were financial assets. At an early age, fourteen or younger, a boy could rope a steer. Even younger children could ride many miles for mail or to deliver messages. Children could spot a maverick or a cow ear-marked but not branded and could report cows that had "bogged down." The average ranch home was a good home for a child, partly because he was an economic asset rather than a liability, as he or she sometimes is in our cities. Such a child took responsibility young, but he also felt secure and "wanted" in his home. Nor was a ranch child likely to be nagged or over-protected. A boy might stay away from home all day.⁴⁸ He might have said, like Robert Frost's farmer, "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in." At any rate the ranch child learned early to be observing and to rely on himself.

Much—possibly too much—has been said of the loneliness and trials of range life. Careful dating is necessary in any account of such hardship and loneliness on the frontier. Some of our earliest accounts of frontier life were written by wives of army men and by travelers. In Texas the Rangers preceded the ranchers. The account of experiences of an army wife on the Santa Fe Trail in 1847 by Susan Magoffin, though illuminating, is not a ranch woman's experience.⁴⁹ Nor is the diary of the beautiful and ill-fated Narcissa Whitman,⁵⁰ wife of a missionary to the Indians, representative of a ranch wife's experience. Pamela Mann, famous for having put General Houston in his place, was the aggressive hotel manager produced by a boom town.⁵¹ Though accounts of these women give some picture of life in the West, they be-

46. Cleaveland, p. 26.

47. Mary Kidder Rak, writing of life on an Arizona ranch in the 1900's, says she preferred work with cows to indoor work.

48. Cleaveland, pp. 103-104.

49. Susan Magoffin, *Down the Santa Fe Trail*. Ed. by Stella Drum. Yale University Press, 1926.

50. Bernard de Voto, *Across the Wide Missouri*. The Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1947, p. 252.

51. Frank J. Dobie gives an account of her in *The Flavor of Texas*. Dallas, 1936.

long to days earlier than the great days of the range. Not that hardship, loneliness and danger were not real in ranch history. They were so. But our range country developed so fast that in making any generalization one must know whether one is talking about the 1860's or the 1890's and whether the date was early for a given section.

In early days in any section some women were likely to be alone for long periods of time. Mrs. Charles Goodnight was almost entirely alone for six months in 1876-77, her nearest neighbor having been seventy-five miles away. Mrs. Thomas Bugbee, also of the Texas Panhandle, had a similar experience.⁵² Mrs. M. Looscan, an early settler in Texas, considered that the strength needed in the early days was against "invisible" danger—just a fear of what might happen with no one near.⁵³ Agnes Morley Cleaveland comments, "It was this deadly staying at home month in and month out keeping a place of refuge for their men when they returned from their farings forth that called for the greater courage, I think."⁵⁴ She cites the example of a Mrs. Eugene Manning, alone with a small son for many months. Sophie Poe mentions lack of company in her first ranch winter, except for her dog and an occasional visit to her nearest neighbor, Mrs. Pat Garrett, a Spanish-American woman with whom she could not speak.⁵⁵ Even a man could be long without company of his own type. May Rhodes quotes her husband: "For years I was the only settler in a country larger than the state of Delaware."⁵⁶ But these days passed. Mrs. Nannie Alderson, who had minded being left alone at roundup time in 1883, says that by 1906 in Montana "loneliness was a thing of the past."⁵⁷

Whatever may have been the experience of the earliest settlers (Narcissa Whitman was apparently breaking under the strain before the Indian massacre), one hears very lit-

52. Haley, p. 459.

53. Mrs. Looscan is quoted in D. G. Wooten, *A Comprehensive History of Texas*. Dallas, 1938, p. 649.

54. Cleaveland, pp. 156-157.

55. Poe, p. 221.

56. May D. Rhodes, *The Hired Man on Horseback*. Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1938, p. 27.

57. Nannie Alderson, *A Bride Goes West*. Farrar and Rinehart, 1942, pp. 59, 271.

tle of mental difficulties brought on by loneliness in later years. One reason is that the woman who went west was a young woman full of optimism. Ranch life was hard—yes. But the West was developing so rapidly in the 70's and 80's that by the time the thrill of newness and the enthusiasm of youth had worn off, the nearest neighbors were closer. Children, too, contributed to the sanity of their mothers. Just try brooding over your state some day with a four-year-old child around! Again be it remembered, a ranch woman gained security from the esteem in which she was held. All sources agree that after the danger of Indian attacks had passed, a woman was safe in the Cattle Country. Though now and then a stranger or a pilfering Indian might give rise to some real apprehension, a ride across the average ranch in 1889 was probably safer from masculine interference than a walk down a big city's street on an evening in 1950.

To a woman's sense of importance and security in the West may be attributed the Western woman's early interest in Women's Rights,⁵⁸ paradoxical as that statement may sound. For one thing, the Western woman wanted a better world and was trying to build one. For another, operating socially as she did in a "seller's market," she could afford to think and talk independently without danger of losing favor with the men in her social group. So in the later days of range history ranch women took active interest in things outside their family and neighborhood circles. That all this made her home happier would be hard to prove. One can say there is more companionship where people can talk things over on a more equal basis. However, one simply cannot measure the spiritual and social qualities of a home as one can its physical dimensions. In general, what broadens the interests of any member of a family, if it can be shared, makes for good human relations; but in the ranch family good human relations had always existed—or else the men and women who were poorly adjusted to their environments just did not write memoirs.

58. Anne Ellis tells about this early interest in *Plain Anne Ellis*. Houghton-Mifflin, 1931, pp. 188-194.

Family life on the range was likely to be stable—if there was money. This sounds mercenary. However, in reading of pioneer families generally, one finds that the unstable ones were those in which money and goods needed for some measure of security were absent. A woman might look for a better provider for her children. A man might get into a shooting fracas and just leave. But usually there were family stability and tranquility. Ranch families belonged to a stable class. In Colorado, for example, people like the Iliffs and the Snyders were a conservative, almost puritanical, element in the population. They were people of good social standing, interested in schools and roads and in their own and their neighbor's children. Perhaps the most characteristic thing of them is that they had time to help each other and in doing so contributed to their individual and family well-being.