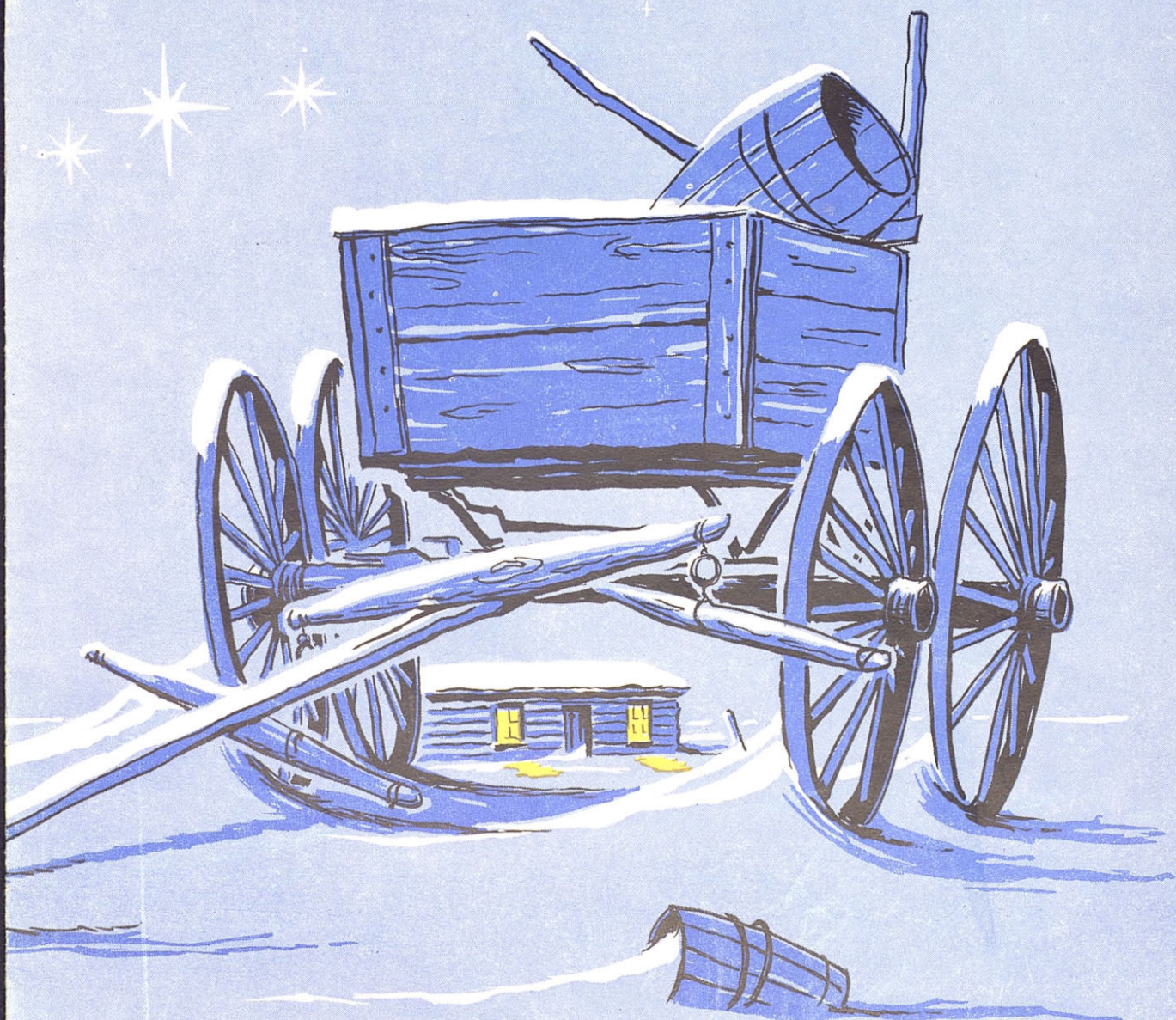


The
SHAMROCK



November-December 1955



To extend its best wishes for the holiday season and the coming new year, Shamrock called on the artistry of Harold Bugbee and the aesthetic pen of J. Evetts Haley to bring you this recounting of . . .

SOUTHWEST COLLECTION
Texas Tech University
LUBBOCK, TEXAS 79409

Christmas on The Range

When the frost has chased the green back to the grass-roots, when the golden leaves of the cottonwood have faded into rustling wraiths upon the ground, and when the stars, in eternal faithfulness, bathe the cattle ranges in a cool and ghostly light, scattered men with mounts still keep lonely vigil over herds.

The cold and severe land about them may hardly suggest the spirit of Christmas. But whatever their condition and wherever they may be, memory inevitably touches poignant heart-strings that are in harmony with the open world about them. Thus alone, in discomfort and deprivation, they bow their rugged heads a little, conscious of that spiritual Benediction born on a bed of grass in Bethlehem among other herdsmen, long, long ago.

Elsewhere happy crowds, in healthy effervescence of spirit and cheer, may be making merry. And merriment and good cheer . . . traditional with the observance of this season . . . are precious qualities of human nature that grow best by being shared with convivial company.

But Christmas without contemplation is meaningless, and contemplation thrives best in solitude. No solitude has been so productive of spiritual regeneration as that imposed by desert ranges, where Nature's God denied material abundance, but compensates with lasting hope and faith . . . with the benediction of the spirit.

Thus it is our season's wish that all Americans . . . like the cowboy on the range . . . unshaken by the cold and sometimes repellent world about, may warm themselves at the unquenchable little fires of spiritual faith, still certain that the eternal stars that guided the ancients in the right way likewise shed their benevolent light on us.

Sparkling company, bright lights and good cheer may be the happy fortune of many, but contemplation and inner harmony, hardihood and courage . . . these constitute the undeniable heritage of us all. What brighter lights could shine on any range! What greater measure could we wish this marvelous land at Christmas!

— J. Evetts Haley

HUFFMAN and THE MONTANA COW COUNTRY

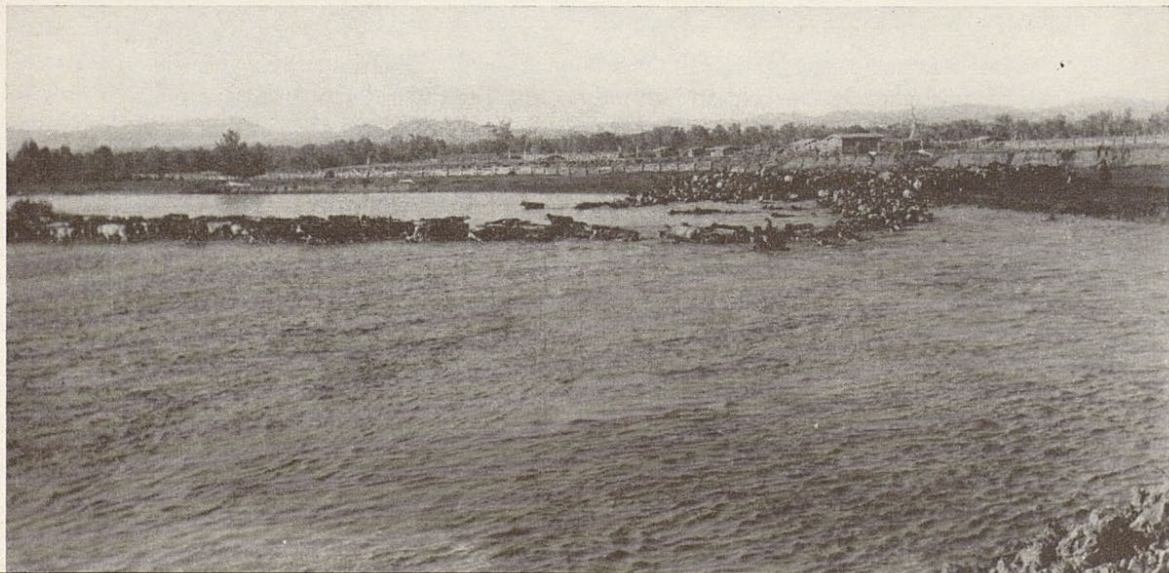
by J. Evetts Haley

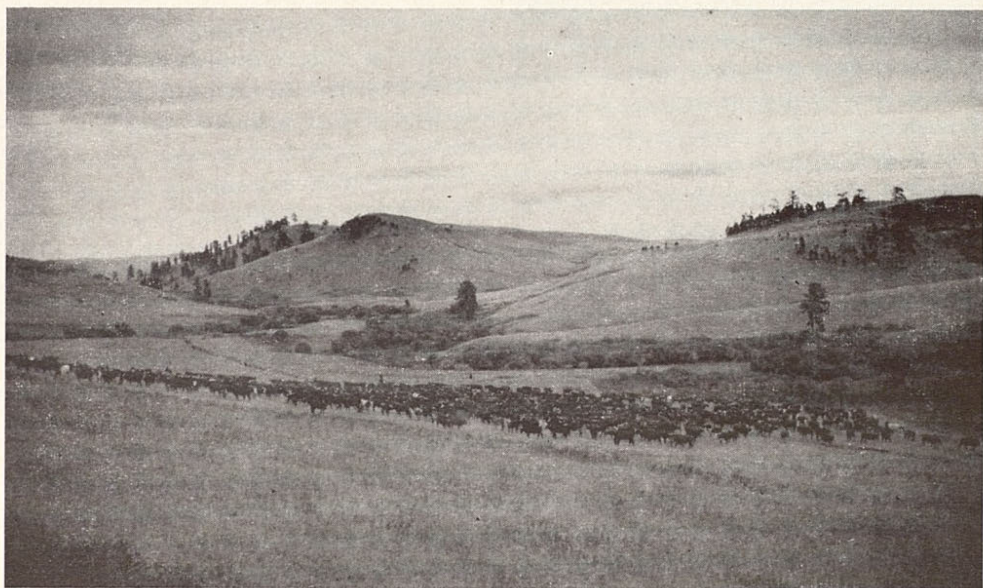
Shortly after the first of this series on frontier photographers appeared in *The Shamrock*, a fascinating and beautiful book on L. A. Huffman and his times, *The Frontier Years*, was released by Henry Holt and Company, thereby placing in cherished form some of the superb work of this unusual man.

Two students of the Western scene are responsible. Mark H. Brown has brought his devoted, careful and detailed research into Huffman's background and period into collaboration with the intimate personal observations and appreciation of an old-timer of the Miles City country, W. R. Felton, to produce a book that must be on all well-stocked Western literary shelves. For Huffman's *Frontier Years*, as well as his remarkable pictures, mark the transition of the tall-grass land of Montana from a genuinely horse-powered past to a less interesting mechanized present.

But there was much hard work and high adventure in this historic process. Only the scientist who knows photography can appreciate the difficult conditions under which these pio-

Among the hazards of the Montana Trail from Texas was the swimming of the rivers, the most dreaded of which was the Yellowstone. Here an N—(N Bar) herd is crossing Powder River.





A trailing Spear Z beef herd on the adjacent Wyoming ranges.

neers with wet plates and "Fifty pound" cameras pursued their work, and with "scientific" certitude even they will often doubt the facts. Yet the scientist, the amateur photographer, the lover of the world of game men and game animals and the casual reader of adventure will find this volume a continual delight.

For the photographers of today, armed with the ultimate in technique and equipment, the disconcerting fact is that these old-timers sometimes surpassed the work that the moderns can

do. In a strictly unique way for their individualistic environment, they "Shot" their way to fame in a fashion that puts the pistoleers to shame. Certainly they had a sense of values and perspective. They understood composition. They knew the effects of light and shadow even when these eluded their plates. While scientifically untutored, they mastered the elementary physical and chemical problems involved.

But what they lacked in science and equipment, they compensated for in infinite patience



Back in the hills lonely cowpunchers kept bachelor camp in log huts like this.

and in an all-consuming ardor for the land and the life they sought to record. They had the unquenchable spirit.

This spirit was bred in the bone of L. A. Huffman. Generations of his people had trod the dim trails of other frontiers before him, and his youthful thirst for the wind of wild adventure was whetted, as he recalled, by "tales told . . . by my grandfathers."

Thus when he reached Montana and first rode out into and was swallowed up by that great range between the Yellowstone and the Missouri Rivers, and really felt, as the authors point out, those twin powerful stimuli to healthy human nature—"it's freedom and dangers," life was never the same again. So, as with the rest of that vigorous breed that thirsted, starved, suffered and froze, it was not for money that they rode, but to feel and enjoy the full power of the frontier spirit that moved them.

Here this slightly built man with a sensitive soul and face, armed with an awkward tripod patched up with green buffalo hide, was in his element. His own race was of that resourceful

breed, we are told, "who put their faith in God—and a long-barreled flintlock rifle."

As a school-boy in Iowa, he later recalled, he had studied less and looked more beyond his books to the "woods that beckoned and stretches of prairie where the native grasses rippled in the breeze." It was natural, therefore, that as a young man on the Yellowstone frontier, he, genially and wholeheartedly, pitched his fortunes with a sometimes less reverent breed whose names are largely unknown but whose lives, as the authors aptly observe, "were rarely characterized by colorless mediocrity."

Nothing about its open ranges and its mountains, its animals and its men, was ordinary. In his own words, Huffman found it a wild, stimulating land, "unpenned of wire and unspoiled of railway, dam or ditch. Eastman had not made his Kodak, but thanks be, there was the old wet plate, the collodion bottle and bath. I made photographs. With crude homemade cameras, from saddle and in log shack, I saved something."

Yet this rigorous, sometimes violently severe land that claimed his affections almost took his life. The authors tell how he was caught in a blizzard alone, while walking across that wilderness of grass between the rivers, leading Crackers, his horse, packed with his photographic equipment. It is a vivid and touching account that is completed in Huffman's own words.

He tells how, for "two days and two interminable nights," he and Crackers huddled to-



After the roundup was worked, the calves were caught in the open and dragged to the branding fire. Charley Marrs, old-time roper on the Big Dry roundup, brings a little fellow along behind an eager horse, while anxious mama trots behind.



gether in a little washout in that "butte-studded, gulch sown, weird, lovely land which teemed with wild life . . . I dare not sleep . . . to sleep meant death in such a temperature." So when not melting snow in an army cup or toasting hardtack for himself and Crackers over a tiny fire of sagebrush—the only fuel at hand—he stayed awake by talking to his horse.

Crackers listened while he told in detail of his hopes to make a great pasture on the "Flat Iron"—the country between the rivers—"to fence it with woven wire," to make it a refuge for its vast and variegated animal life, to put the hide-hunters to guarding its borders instead of killing off its bison, and to hold it inviolate

for God's grass and creatures.

As sub-zero hours dragged, he emphasized how gentle the great herds of game would grow when his dream came true, and how lovely the land would be "when the yellow-green carpet of spring" had taken the place of the deep snows. And thus the two survived.

When the storm had blown itself out, he, barely able to repack his equipment, wearily led Crackers across that frigid land toward Miletown. They passed among herds of antelope pawing in the snow for food, and hundreds of buffalo that, seemingly sensing his friendly nature, would scarcely get out of his path—

The great open range between the Missouri and



"slowly—it seemed mournfully—plodding and grazing."

In view of such suffering as this, his modest appraisal of his work—"I saved something"—is particularly poignant. Of course he never realized his great dream of converting the "Flat Iron" into a game refuge, but he adventured for years among the cowmen pouring their herds up the Texas Trail and converting the tall grass north of the Yellowstone to their productive use. Thereby he saved the earliest and the best photographic record of the vivid moving, colorful life of the Montana ranges.

Fortunately for the historian, Huffman's

appearance on the frontier coincided with the swift expansion of the cow country, from its native home in Texas through its broad and vital sweep northward with its great herds, finally to take in the grasslands from the Rio Grande to the plains of Saskatchewan. Accelerating this dynamic movement of men on Spanish mounts was the interest of Eastern and British investors in what was a little too hopefully called the "bonanza in beef."

The Texas Trail—a movement under way for decades—gradually swung its northern terminus westward to center on and to come to an end in Montana. The XIT and many other great Texas outfits established steer ranches

Missouri and the Yellowstone in Huffman's hey-day.



there. Between 1880 and 1885, as cowman-historian Graville Stuart, one of Huffman's close friends, has pointed out, the conversion of this wild game refuge to a cattle range was complete.

The inimitable Charlie Russell arrived to catch its color and its glory in lasting oils, while Huffman ranged far and wide, big game hunting, prospecting for cattle ranges, and working with the general roundups to fix their vivid characters and life in photographic form. These three close friends, sensitive to the passing scene, left their mark and brand upon their chosen state long after most of the fortunes built on beef were dissipated and gone.

Huffman died in 1931 at Billings. His col-

lection of some 1200 plates, dating from his first shop in a cottonwood picket "studio" at Fort Keogh in 1878, through Indian, buffalo and cattle range time, has been kept intact by his daughter, Mrs. Ruth Huffman Scott, Miles City.

The fortunes were made by others. But his was the great adventure of being a part of that colorful drama being played before the fading footlights of that historic time. After all it may be such as these who really come out ahead—for the heritage they leave is intangible of assessment by the internal revenue collectors. It is a cultural one enriching a period of which—as Huffman's biographers point out—"only the prairies and the mountains and the memories remain," and the memories are the best.

Here again an outfit changes mounts adjacent to the bed-wagon. In the foreground is the cook's wagon and tent; beyond the buckboard is one cowhand being taken to the high country by his bronc on the end of his rope; another cinches up his gray horse near the remuda; while others to the right have their troubles with all too-fresh horses.



176 The Round-up Breaking Camp. Negative Print and Copyright by L.A. Huffman Miles C. Mont. 04.

BOTTOM: Pie-Biter, the horse wrangler, quits his blaze-faced pony and his "A fork" saddle to sample the coffee and a piece of pie beneath the shade of the fly of a pot-rack Montana outfit.

BELOW: Mexican John, famous XIT cook, came up the trail from Texas to practice his art for the appreciation of cowboys at the tail-end of a chuck wagon.

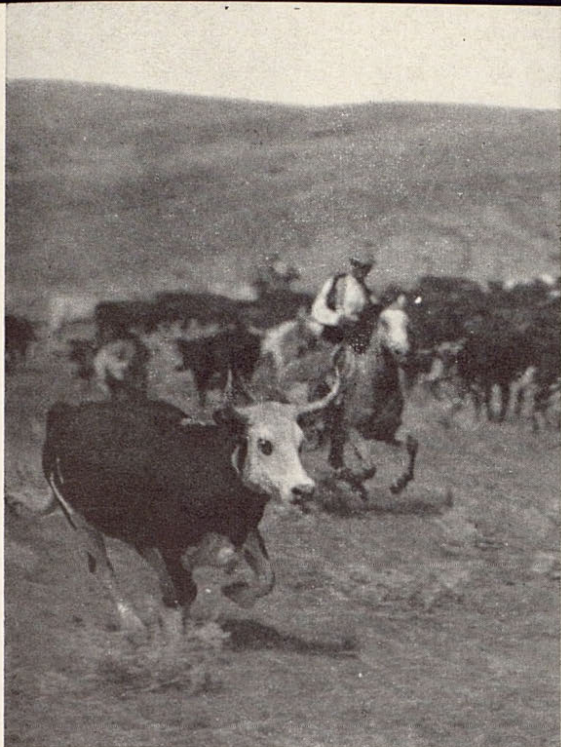




In leisurely fashion another roper drags a calf out by the heels to the flankers, while their idle horses doze in the sunshine.

Settled days were marked by substantial comforts in heavy log houses covered with dirt, like this Hat X cowcamp on Timber Creek, with women tending to the cooking, curtains on the windows, and cow-punchers-to-be playing with ropes or learning to ride on a home-made see-saw mounted on a stump.





Here again the cutting of cattle from a roundup, which has always fascinated men, is caught in closer perspective, with old-time cattle still in background.



BY HUFFMAN, MILES, MONT.

While the saddle horses were herded by the day wrangler, the night-hawk, who took over the job at dark, slid into his bed roll and tried to catch up on his sleep.

This could be the finest range scene ever made. It shows Huffman and the great grass country beyond the Yellowstone at their best. Good, blocky horses such as Russell loved to paint, stepping lightly across the clean sod; easy-riding men, sitting confidently in the saddle; well-kept remudas grazing as they move; other wagons and other herds coming up . . . the general roundup under way! It may have been the bright lights of Miles City for a passing moment, but it was horses and men, and God's grass and the open sky for the long seasons.





This magnificent picture, with man, mount and wild steer leaning into the breeze, seems to suggest why men punched cattle for something besides wages.

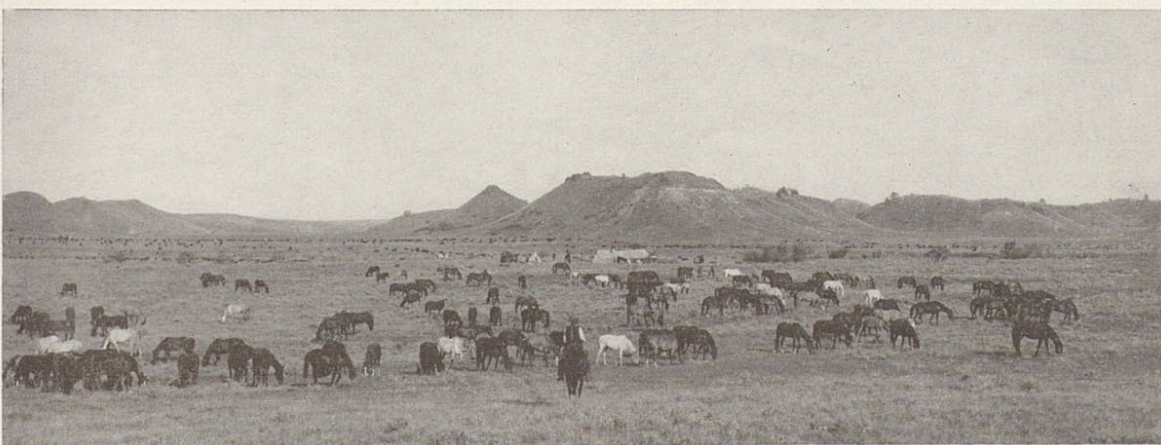
Miles City, Huffman's and the Montana cowboy's favorite stomping ground, is shown as it was when the range country around it boomed at its best in 1882.



MAIN ST MILES CITY.



TOP: Late of an evening the boys change mounts—in a rope corral with the log headquarters of the ranch in the background. The horses at the right stand quietly with dropped reins, "tied to the ground." ABOVE: Fresh horses were caught from a rope corral in the open. Beyond is the wagon piled high with "Montana"—that is cold country—bed rolls. BELOW: From foreground to dim distance, here is the sort of scene that kept men away from the comforts of home and upon the trail and range.



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