

The Buffalo Hunting Reminiscences of Luther Frost

By Leo J. Remiger

Luther Frost arrived in Kansas early during the spring of 1872 when Great Bend consisted of the Southern Hotel and two small houses. His crops of sod corn and garden had been destroyed by the grasshopper plague so in August, he and his neighbors decided to try their hand at killing buffalo.

August 13: We fitted up and started for the present site of Dodge City. While eating dinner near the lone tree on the Arkansas river 25 miles below Fort Dodge, a flock of blackbirds lit down near us and I made a proposition to kill a dozen and have a stew for our suppers as we were out of fresh meat. Some of the boys laughed at the idea of killing a dozen with one shot. I fired one shot and we picked up sixty-two birds and many more were scattered over the prairie that we did not get. We had not finished picking up the birds when the cry of "Indians!" was heard. Everything was packed into the wagons and we started pell-mell for a rocky hill on which we intended to sell our lives as dearly as possible.

After getting in position, we discovered that the supposed Indians were a company of U.S. cavalry that had come down to the river to get water. We were very much relieved, palpitating hearts resumed their natural motion, and trembling nerves were steady as iron.

● Our greatest loss was that of the birds which we had left in our haste to get to a place of safety.

August 16th: Arrived on the hunting ground south of the river and saw a sight new to most of us. As far as we could see, to the east, west and south, was a vast herd of buffalo. We estimated that we could see over 500,000 at one sight. We pitched camp and made preparations for work; cleaned our rifles; sharpened our knives; and prepared to stretch hides by the wholesale.

August 17th: Imagine my feelings as I approached the first herd of old bulls. I could not possibly get nearer than three hundred yards. A natural instinct of danger seemed to keep me at a safe distance. I had read of hair-breath escapes and terrible encounters with these giants of the prairie and was not overly anxious to make a close acquaintance with them. The fact is they looked dangerous; and they would naturally impress a person that they meant business by shaking their heads at him and pawing up great clouds of dust. My first impression was that I had better try my hand at long-range shooting, so if they were inclined to be vicious, I could take a leg ball and have a good start. Shooting at long range did not pan out very well, as my nerves were a little unsettled, and every time I would fire some old fellow would look toward me, lick out his tongue, and shake his head, as if to say "Don't come any nearer; you might get into trouble." I tried several times to muster up courage and crawl nearer; but at last made up my mind to shoot at long range if it took all summer to get our wagons loaded with hides. The result was I fired about forty shots, killed seven buffalos, and crawled clear out of sight of the herd, leaving over one hundred buffalo standing looking at me as I crawled away. I suppose they imagined that I was a cowardly coyote.

We soon loaded our wagons with hides, recrossed the river, and camped on the site of Dodge City. "Now boys, we can take a good sound sleep tonight, no danger of Indians," was the general word.

I had an aching tooth that would not let me sleep. About midnight I heard a horse approaching. It was a dark night and I could just see the outlines of a man on the horse. I did not think strange of this as there were several railroaders camped near us and several loose horses had come to our camp. I took my gun and crawled out to the horses, without awakening the boys. The

fellow rode up within 20 paces, took hold of a picket rope, and commenced drawing the horse toward him. I could not tell whether it was one of our boys or one of the strays. So to be on the safe side and not shoot an innocent man, I said "Look here, my friend!" he put spurs to his horse and was off like a shot. I sent a couple of caliber 50 after him but he made good his escape. All was confusion in camp, "Shoot him!" came from all sides. Several of our neighbor camps lost horse that night. The thieves made a general raid along the line of the road, and but for aching tooth we would have lost our horses.

We finally got home to Great Bend safe and sound. All but one of our party are still in Barton County [1912].

A little incident happened to one of our Barton County boys which was laughable as well as serious. We were out hunting buffalo about seventy miles south of Great Bend. I had purchased a new gun and expected to do wonders in the line of killing buffalo. It was a cold windy morning in November and I could not or did not do good execution. I do not blame the boys for finding fault with me. One of them said that he could do better himself. I gave him the gun and told him to try his hand. He crawled up to a herd of old bulls and knocked three of them down at three successive shots. "That's well done!" the boys said. "He's a rattler! He's after their pelts?" The herd suddenly stampeded. They did not like to see the heels of their companions flying up so rapidly. Our hero followed in rapid pursuit, passing the supposed dead bulls. He had passed them about one hundred paces when one of them rose to his feet and started straight toward our hero. Louy did not hear the approach of his pursuers until the bull was upon him. He turned his head just in time to find himself going one way and the gun the other. The bull paid no attention to him; but kept on his course, to the great relief of Louy and the rest of us. No damage done except a badly torn shirt and coat.

At another time we were camped on the headwaters of the Ninnescah. One morning I took my gun and started to a herd of buffalo that were grazing about a mile from camp. When about a quarter of a mile from camp the boys commenced hollowing at me and motioning me to come back. Before I could get to camp they had the teams hitched up, and were going at a run down the creek to another camp. I finally came up to them, after a run of about half a mile, and wanted to know what was causing such a stir. The answer was we had better be making tracks if we did not want our hair lifted. The red devils were coming, and there was a host of them, with red blankets and banners flying. I just told my companions that I would go back and meet the whole host and see if they were on the war path. So I marched boldly back to meet the enemy, which proved to be an innocent buffalo herd marching quietly down toward our camp. The joke was, I had seen the buffalo coming and an idea that the boys had seen them and taken them to be Indians, so I could afford to be brave while my companions ran away to reinforce another camp. We finally got things righted and had a good laugh over the affair. One of my companions declares to this day that he saw Indians and could plainly see their bows and arrows.¹

1. *Biographical History of Barton Country, Kansas*, Great Bend Tribune Publishing Company, Great Bend, Kansas, 1912, PP 25-27

"How little do my coantrymen know what precious blessings they are in possession of, and which no other people on earth enjoy!" ~Thomas Jefferson

"War is when the government tells you who the bad guy is. Revolution is when you decide that for yourself." - Benjamin Franklin