

WILD OATS

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J. T. VAN DERLIP

STONEMASON AND CONTRACTOR

WAKARUSA, KANSAS

The author is a nephew of "Uncle Chet" Thomas, Am Co. Co.

Wizer's Ranch

"Harlow Wizer desires your presence at a Barbecue and Dance, upon the completion of a new barn at Wizer's Ranch, 142 Creek, Lyon County, Kansas, Oct. 30, 1884.

ORDER OF FESTIVITIES.

- 1 o'clock P. M. Dinner in the New Barn.
- 2 o'clock P. M. Field Sports.
- 5 o'clock P. M. Barbecue.
- 8 o'clock P. M. Dancing in the New Barn.
- Music by Hicks' Orchestra."

There you are, gentle reader. How do you like it? Think it was awful? Imagine that four hundred cowboys and girls all got drunk and made night hideous on that festive occasion? Not by a long shot! That was just the gayest affair that I ever saw on the proud prairies of Kansas, and no intoxicating liquor was allowed to be brought to the celebration.

Our generous entertainer was Harlow Wizer—not Mister Wizer, for Harlow was a good shot, and seldom missed; Harlow never allowed us to call him that.

By this I am reminded of an English Count who held the exalted position of Foreman of Broadmoor Ranch, near Colorado Springs, when I was there some twenty years ago. The Count was so proud of his rank and title, that he required all young Americans under his authority to salute him as "Count," a title of nobility. One morning he reprimanded a laborer for calling him Mister, and the young man replied by saying, "Count me a cornfield canary if I ever address an English hayseed as 'Count.'" The laborer was discharged, but

found employment next day on the Cheyenne Ranch adjoining.

Harlow was a capital fellow, a wealthy bachelor, and quite popular. Invitation cards were out a month previous, and all knew that good order would be characteristic of all the proceedings. There actually were four hundred in attendance, and then some. The guests came from several States and Territories, and some from Canada, Harlow's former home. Everything in sight was just as free as prairie air. Dinner was a feast. The tables were never cleared of good things to eat until next day, when all the guests and musicians "vamoosed the ranch." Three happy colored gentlemen from Alabama roasted in barbecue style a fine fat Durham, and everybody feasted. Field sports were exciting and spectacular. Stalwart cowboys and girls mounted on Texas bronchos and Indian cayuses of the plains practiced throwing lasso, roping cattle, and racing across the level prairie. Mexicans riding bucking bronchos gave grand exhibitions of their daring skill, while kodak fiends everywhere were kept busy taking snap-shots for photographs and illustrations for magazine articles.

The ranch comprised six thousand acres of unbroken prairie, completely surrounded by a stone wall six feet high. The new barn was seventy feet square; a good well was dug in its exact center, and walled with flat stone laid in mortar. No other improvements had yet been made save one office building and a bungalow.

That was the first year of my apprenticeship as a stonemason to C. McNair, the contractor of Wizer's barn. On the erection of the building he employed ten stonemasons, four stone-cutters, ten carpenters,

twelve laborers, and seven teamsters. We began in June and completed the barn in September.

Four years later I was employed by Charles Loveland, a contractor of Keene, on the erection of a store building at Allen for Harlow Wizer, and en route we stopped at the ranch for dinner. At the barn we met Wm. Patton, the foreman. The bell rang, and Mr. Patton remarked:

"That means dine, but just you fellows wait a minute. I want to show you my cowboys. Here they come a-runnin'."

And typical cowboys they were, in leather shaps and high-heeled boots with spurs, blue flannel shirts, silk handkerchiefs about their necks, and on their heads they wore broad sombreros. But one was barefoot, and had strapped his boots behind his saddle.

"What's the matter, Dan?" inquired Patton. "I kept these gentlemen here after the bell rang, just to show them my cowboys, and here you come barefoot. How about yer boots?"

Pat replied, the roguish fellow:

"Fact is, this 'ere chap has worn boots and gone without whisky long enough, already yet."

We laughed heartily at his wit, and Patton commanded him to "Hustle on those boots and go without whisky, or leave the ranch."

The cowboy obeyed quickly, yet muttering in a low tone what the sailor said to his mate, "Long time between drinks."

Wizer's Ranch has been greatly improved since then. Part of the land has been sold to thrifty farmers, and now we find meadows of tame grass, fertile fields of grain, vegetable gardens, orchards of fruit, and vine-

yards, and artificial fish-ponds. Kansas prairie near railroads has become too valuable for the owners to keep as pasture for Texas and Indian cattle, and we may never again expect to see such a ranch as that was in this prosperous and progressive agricultural middle West.