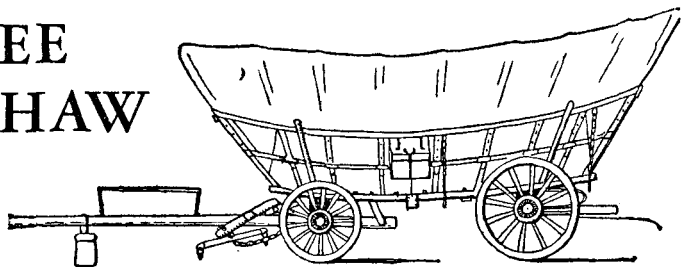


W • E • S • T • W • A • R • D

by GEE
and HAW



AFTER a tasty and well served luncheon in the diner, I returned to my seat in the observation car of the Rock Island "Rocket" en route from Memphis to Oklahoma City. This was luxury personified.

My eyes dimmed as my mind went into retrospect. Suddenly I was a little boy again, a long, long time ago — taking a far different train ride. I was with my parents and we were crossing the state line from Arkansas, just west of Blackfork, into the old Indian Territory. The roads were rocky, little more than trails. We had a railroad car all right, but there were no windows through which to view the surrounding beauties of nature. It was, in just plain words, an old covered wagon.

We were drawn by two oxen, Ball and Bright. They made pretty good engines, about the only kind of power usable then. Our fuel was corn and grass when we could find it, which was usually between moun-

BY MILBURN C. HARPER

tains where it was greenest. Our speed, instead of 70 miles an hour, was an average of about 12 miles per day, sunup to sundown, weather permitting.

We had no hot boxes, but we did run short of fuel — food to maintain our oxen. And over the rough terrain our wagon tires would expand and fall off the wheels unless the felloes were kept well soaked.

I strutted along the road with my gun and good old hunting dog, Nick, as the oxen pushed their necks into the yoke — moving their heavy load at a slow, steady gait. We were headed "out west," the place I'd heard my folks talk about so often. When I halloed "westward bound," my echo would rebound from a nearby mountain. And when father would crack his new ox whip, the keen crack would bounce back like a rifle shot from the mountainside.

We had a train, all right, but in-

stead of 12 or 15 coaches, or 75 to 100 freight cars, we had two wagons. Our passengers numbered six — my maternal grandparents, my parents, my sister Annie and myself.

Grandpa had a light team of white oxen so had to have a light wagon. Our oxen, however, were heavier and so was the load. The roads then were steep and winding, and when we ascended a mountain, the oxen strained every muscle — almost falling to their knees. Every few feet they had to rest. My very important job was to walk behind the wagon with as big a rock as I could carry and scotch the wheel to prevent the wagon from rolling backward. Going down the mountain roads was almost as hazardous. Then we had to chain the wagon wheel to the brake beams and go very slowly.

THERE was another job I had as a lad of twelve, that of supplying meat for all of us. I had a double-barreled, muzzle-loading shotgun and my well-trained hunting dog, Nick. I seldom shot anything but squirrel, although deer was plentiful and sometimes we had venison. There were other animals, too — lots of big timber wolves which chose the night for howling, and I can remember how they made my hair stand on end.

The most treacherous beasts, however (and we had plenty of them), were the panther-cougars. They were fierce and hard to kill, and we would keep a fire burning all

night against them. They were stealthy yet cowardly. At night they would slip into camp, climb a tree, and leap upon any person who passed under it. That was why we kept a fire all night — they were afraid of fire.

I remember once we heard the shrill cry of more than one panther too near our camp, so father spent a good part of the night keeping watch and stoking the fire. I had been warned about these dangerous animals.

Everything was quiet when we pulled camp the next morning and I was perhaps 300 yards down the road when the wagons started. Suddenly I noticed old Nick bristling and scenting something. Then he began a peculiar bark. (Nick had a different bark for practically all the game he scented or jumped.) All at once he rushed to a tree that had a large limb out over the road.

I looked up and saw a panther stretched flat on this limb, within 40 yards of me. Nick meanwhile was leaping against the trunk and making a terrible racket. Leveling my gun, I thought I'd shoot it with my load of squirrel shot, perhaps making it climb down and run away or climb still further up the tree. My shot knocked it off the limb and when the beast hit the ground it came toward me with a vicious snarl. I knew better than to run and I knew I must use my emergency load of buckshot.

When he was within 15 yards of

me, I let him have the load of buckshot full in the face. It was evident that I had blinded him but even so he came weaving toward me with a maniacal growl. I was helpless, for I had used both loads in my gun. Fortunately my father had heard the two shots and knew from the second one that my emergency had been used. He grabbed his rifle and arrived just in time to shoot the panther through the heart. I was a scared kid, but a lucky one.

A couple of days later I got some choice eagle feathers. Grandpa spotted a big bald eagle eating the carcass of a gray wolf. As we approached it, the eagle — being too full to fly well — raised its wings in a fighting position. Having driven oxen all his life, Grandpa was very accurate with his whip. He popped its head off and from this monster, which measured seven feet from tip to tip of its wings, I got my eagle feathers.

One advantage in camping out in the mountains was there was plenty of fuel. Pine knots were plentiful. We would find, if possible, a spring or creek coming out of the mountains. And my job, of course, was to gather armfuls of pine knots before dark to keep a blaze all night.

We had hardly finished supper one evening when we began to see red eyes reflected by the light, glaring at us. Father remarked: "I expect you will have to do the driving tomorrow, son. Looks like I'm going to have to sit on this wagon tongue

all night to keep these varmints away."

Pretty soon something came close enough for him to distinguish it as a young cub bear. When it drew closer, Father killed it, and then I helped him and Grandpa drag it near the fire. That cub's hindquarters sure provided us with savory meat. Next morning we had fried bear steak for breakfast, stretched the hide on the side of the wagon, and were on our way again.

WHEN we reached the prairie, I experienced for the first time the difficulties of shooting quail and prairie chicken. They were too fast for me. I improved with practice, though, and managed to supplant our squirrel meat with both quail and prairie chicken. Turkey and deer were plentiful along the streams where there was timber, but we seldom killed either as we were not well equipped for keeping or cooking them.

We did not see much prairie country until we reached Paul's Valley. Indian huts through that country were scarce, but once in a great while we found a squaw man. These characters usually cultivated a lot of land. In those days all the land you could put a fence around was yours if you were an Indian or a squaw man.

We once ran out of grain for our oxen and drove all one day without finding any. Next morning Grandpa and I started out ahead to find some

feed. The Indians therabouts had only little patches of corn, which they would pull and put up in a rail pen — just about enough to winter two or three Indian ponies. We went to these huts and asked for corn, but always met with “Me no savvy.” Then they would just shake their heads and point down the road.

Finally about dark we found a squaw man with a field of corn who said we could pull as much as we needed. I hurried back to meet Father and tell him, while Grandpa found a place to camp near a creek. We three waded into that field of corn and, believe me, the oxen fared well that night and all next day, resting and eating.

Our ox wagon route — through the Kiamichi, Ouachita, Winding Stair and other mountains — was many years later replaced by Highway 270.

Just a few miles east of old McAlester we met head-on the first real blizzard of the season. Our round-houses were wagon yards in those days. If weather or other conditions prevented camping out, travelers tied up in the “wagon yard.” We whipped our oxen and hurried to make the wagon yard at McAlester. Owing to the weather, other travelers had flocked to the yard and not

even standing room was available.

The wagon yard master was very courteous, but informed us there was not a cabin left — and not even room in the yard for another wagon. We “Arkansas Travelers” felt about whipped, as there was a bitter wind of about 40 miles an hour and it was snowing. The yard master told us there was a draw and creek bottom about a mile and a half south. Our best chance, he said, was to get down there behind the hill and locate a place to camp.

The camping place was pretty bad, little timber and no wood. We unyoked the oxen and tied them up in the shelter of a little knoll. Then we all wrapped up in the wagons and somehow managed to get through the night. After the wind abated and the sun came up, we pulled stakes and headed toward Paul’s Valley, when —

“Oklahoma City next stop. Don’t forget your packages.”

My eyes opened and my mind came to with a start. Had I been dreaming as I relived the old covered wagon days of my childhood? It seemed so real, as but yesterday.

“Dust you off, sir?”

I looked into the smiling face of the porter. “Yes, indeed. I’ve come a long, long way.”





The Social Security Swindle

by
FELIX WITTMER

ARE YOU willing to accept what in practice amounts to counterfeited money? This is what happens when you cash your Social Security check. But no one will be prosecuted, for the government itself supports the confidence game. Perhaps you don't care to learn that your government's unscrupulous manipulation of the people's savings is going to ruin our economy unless we revolt against it. After all, it is so pleasant to receive a check every month.

You are reasonably honest, aren't you? Why, then, dare you accept Social Security benefits? Why then don't you take just a little time to find out how Federal Social Security works, or rather doesn't work, and

what it does to the country's prosperity?

Let's tackle the problem with a concrete case. Did ever anyone dream that he might get \$16,000 for \$127.50, not at the race track but as a legitimate payment from our government? Pie in the sky! Nothing is too much to please the voter. You pay \$127.50, in easy installments, become 65 and from that time on get your \$80 per month, and the wife, once 65, gets her \$40 and, if she survives you (which she probably will), \$60 per month. Pretty good, you say?

Try to get this deal from the private insurance companies. They will inform you that the investment of