

## A BIT OF HISTORY OF EARLY WILSON COUNTY PIONEERS

About 80 years ago the old, rugged pioneer, John Sikes lived on the northeast bank of the then beautiful Clear Fork of Sandies Creek, 3 miles west of old Rancho, near the line of Wilson and Gonzales Counties. A mile up the creek on the same side thereof was the Cone home, and a mile further up the creek lived another good family, Mr. and Mrs. Gay, all good friends. In the Steel Branch community east of Stockdale, lived the Steel family. Tidy Steel was left an orphan. The Gays being child-less, adopted her and took her into their home. My mother Martilla Cone, oldest child of J. B. Cone and wife, and Tidy Steel became fast friends, schoolmates, chums.

R. P. McCracken and his pistol came to Rancho from Louisiana and the young roosters of that community had to try out the tenderfoot from back east as usual to see if he was "game" or "yellow". They framed a sham gun battle into which he would plunge if game or out of which he would run, if yellow. The outcome was that he shot one of them and came near killing him, and that established him in the community, made him a force therein.

My parents married in 1871, and R. P. McCracken and Tildy Steel married about that time. My parents built a home just south of the Cone and Gay homes, on a high hill at the north edge of Elm Prairie where we could look north and see Capote Hills on the Guadalupe River; look southeast and see Elm Mounds below Smiley. The McCrackens lived in the home with the Gays and he took over most of the active livestock work, they having more horses than cattle and my father having more cattle than horses, but each helping the other and the two working together in the work. Stock ran on open range and it was necessary to see that they did not get too far away, so it was a daily task to see after them.

Father was experienced at such work, and McCracken was rapidly learning it. Father had a horse that was the best in that section for working the half-wild, mean, spoiled herds of horses. He was fast and could run a long time, and was well trained for that work. McCracken gave father several ponies for that horse. They thought it was a good swap for both, as McCracken had more horses to take care of, and father had more cattle, for which the ponies were about as good as the larger horses.

Gay and McCracken had one bunch or herd of horses that were very hard to pen, drive or work in any way, as the old leaders were fast, long-winded, mean and determined not to go into a pen. They had to pen them on one occasion, so they set a day to make the try. McCracken and a young Negro helper rode by our house that morning on their way to where this band of horses ranged. Father was not quite ready to go, so they said they would go on out and start them. Father was to come on later and drop in on a fresh horse. They started the horses and were chasing them in big circles, coming in hearing of us occasionally and going out of hearing for a time, then back in hearing again. In an hour or two, father saddled his horse and went to join the chase. As he neared their range, he met the Negro coming for help, his horse run down. Father asked, "Where is Bob?" The Negro replied, "Mr. Bony, old Button wanted to go on one side of a tree, and Mr. Bob thought he was going on the other side of it, and he knocked Mr. Bob off, and that horse is running them wild horses by himself, just with the saddle on." Father

asked if Bob was hurt and where he was, and the Negro said, "Mr. Bob's not hurt much, and he is in top of a tree watching that horse run them wild horses by himself."

Father and the Negro went to where Bob was in the tree, then to join Button, and all together they penned the horses.

Written by C. L. Patterson (Bandera) and published in the Floresville Chronicle-Journal January 23, 1948

Compiled by Gene Maeckel from the files of Wilson County Historical Commission Archives. P. O. Box 101, Floresville, Texas 78114. Web site: [www.wilsoncountyhistory.org](http://www.wilsoncountyhistory.org). 3/2011