

TOM HOWARD
GRANDSON OF JOHN DEWEES

John Dewees was one of three partners of the historic Dewees Ranch which encompassed, at one time, almost 100,000 acres in Wilson, Karnes, and Atascosa Counties. John O. Dewees was one of the best known cattlemen in South Texas during the longhorn trail driving times after the American Civil War. In 1876, John and his partners are reported to have trailed over 100,000 longhorns up the trails to the northern rail heads.

John Dewees married Miss Irvin February 12, 1899 in Guadalupe County, Texas. The bride was a daughter of Captain John Tom's sister Sara (Tom) Irvin. John Dewees died June 10, 1899 and was survived by his wife and their daughter, Alice. Alice married Captain H. L. Howard and from this union, one child, Tom Howard was born on May 15, 1903. His birthplace was in the Howard's home in San Antonio in the Hemisfair area close to the present Tower of the Americas. Tom's mother's health was frail and she died death three years after his birth.

The responsibility of raising Tom was assumed by his maternal grandmother at the Dewees Ranch. Since the passing of his grandfather, his grandmother became the ranch manager which consumed almost all of her time. A Mexican seamstress from Matamoras who was living on the ranch was given the duty of caring and raising young Tom. She in effect became his foster mother but she spoke no English and as Tom later related, he grew up thinking he was Mexican until he was seven years old and had to start school. To help him learn English, he was sent to San Antonio to live with relatives where an older colored woman was assigned to tutor him in English. This proved to be unsuccessful. Against his will he was enrolled in a private school where two old maids, fluent in English and Spanish were able to teach Tom a passable level of English. After finishing his preliminary education in public school he was enrolled in San Antonio Academy at the high school level for a period of six years. His reason for this extended period in high school was because his interest was more in ranching and raising horses and cows. It seems at the Christmas break he would always develop some type of sickness and spend the rest of the term working on the ranch. He finally was able to graduate from high school but in the end he still lacked two credits. Instead of having him return for another term, the school administration gave him these two needed credits much to the relief of his instructors.

The idea of being a cowboy was an obsession to him and he became totally involved in ranching activities. So after finishing high school he immediately began working as a cowboy for \$25.00 a month on his grandmother's 14,000 acre ranch in Wilson County. His grandmother, Mrs. John Dewees had recently gone into a partnership with George Monkhouse to develop a steer raising operation. In addition to the 14,000 acres owned by Mrs. John Dewees the partners leased an additional 25,000 to 30,000 acres. Fat steers from this operation would be shipped by rail to such markets as existed in Fort

Worth and Oklahoma City. Two to five railroad cars of steers would be shipped weekly on Wednesday and Saturdays. Two groups of cowboys managed the ranches. One group would work the pastures and herd the steers to holding areas. The second group would separate the steers in the holding pens into herds for shipping to the markets and trail the herds fifteen miles to the rail shipping point in Poth, Texas.

Tom Howard was in his late teens when he was assigned the responsibility to lead the ranch hands trailing herds to the shipping pens. These trail drives ended when the cattle market crashed causing an end to the steer raising operation for the Dewees and Monkhouse partnership. The ranching operation continued to decline and was discontinued. Mrs. John Dewees moved to Floresville and Tom Howard worked to support her and help pay the outstanding debts against the ranch. Mrs. Dewees later deeded her two sections of ranch land to Tom which were mortgaged. He then traded the equity in one section for 25 head of heifers to begin his own ranching operation. He then found a cattle company with O. F. Burney, a Floresville attorney and leased additional ranch land and accumulated additional cows and calves. Later, after a buying trip to Charlotte and Big Foot, he gathered a herd of 300 head and trailed them to Jourdanton. The herd was penned that evening in pens belonging to a local doctor. Not long after the herd had been bedded down, a strong Texas norther blew in and caused the cattle to stampede and demolish a fence section of the pens. By the next morning, the stampede was controlled and the trail drive was continued to the ranch. The intent of this ranching operation was to fatten the steers and market them as fattened beef. The operation proved to be unprofitable and the partnership was dissolved with the partners taking a huge financial loss.

Tom Howard continued ranching on his own and was able to profitably earn some income by trading and raising calves. However, at this time the U. S. Economy was in depression and the calf business only generated enough revenue to cover the land debt requirements. To supplement this income, Tom Howard took a job as a tick inspector but this work was very unpopular with the cattlemen as it required ranches to dip all their cattle in a solution which would kill the ticks. The government required that all cattle be dipped every 14 days to eliminate the fever tick. It was the tick inspector's duty to insure all cattlemen complied with this requirement. Many of the cattlemen resisted this requirement because of the cost and time involved. Tom Howard developed an art of negotiation to help the ranchers avoid fines and future problems were eliminated. The tick inspector position was no longer required and Tom Howard reverted to law enforcement.

As a deputy, he developed a close relationship with Atascosa County Sheriff McAda. Again, Tom Howard's ability to relate with people helped him solve problems and resolve conflicting issues without resorting to jailing or court action. After Sheriff McAda's death, Tom Howard became sheriff of Atascosa County. This occurred during World War II.

After Tom Howard's retirement as the Atascosa County Sheriff in 1945, he opened a meat packing plant in Pleasanton and operated it until it was sold in 1960.

During his years of cowboying Tom Howard became intimately knowledgeable of the top cowhands of South Texas. He obtained his basic cowboy training from Bennie Roberts an African American cowboy who was working the ranch when he was born. He taught Tom how to ride in the brush country. Even though Roberts wasn't a large individual, he wasn't easy on Tom. During his apprenticeship, Bennie always saw to it that Howard was up front when it came to chasing an animal through the brush. At times, Tom would try to slow down but Roberts would be right behind him lashing his pony with a rope to keep it moving at full speed. Two other top cowboys were the African American Walker Brothers from Floresville. Both were all around top hands and were always in demand on South Texas ranches. Another great cowboy was Harry Kennedy who was perhaps the smoothest and fastest cowboy around in Tom's time. For a period, he was foreman on the Dewees ranch during Tom's early days.

On November 6, 1978, Tom Howard died quietly in his sleep at the age of 75. His final services were held in St. Andrew's Catholic Church in Pleasanton and he was buried in St. Andrews Cemetery No. 1.

Compiled by Gene Maeckel from information in the files of the Wilson County Historical Society Archives, P.O. Box 101, Floresville, Texas 78114. 2/5/2010 Web site: www.wilsoncountyhistory.org