



EARLY FREIGHTERS WERE BRAVE & HARDY

by Joe Herring

We take things for granted. Take, for example, grocery stores full of groceries, clothes stores with racks and racks of clothes, hardware stores busting with nuts and bolts. Consider the problem of filling those shelves if your only way to transport goods to a store involved a wagon and mules or oxen.

Such was the case in the 1850s when many hill country communities had their beginnings. “It was a real accomplishment for a freighter to haul a load of several thousand pounds on two or three wagons trailing one behind the other for a distance of a hundred miles or more,” writes Bob Bennett in his excellent history of our county. “During rainy seasons it was a real problem to keep Junction, Rocksprings and other towns supplied with the necessities of life. These inland communities often ran short of flour and other staple food items because the freight caravan was marooned somewhere on a muddy road en route from Kerrville.”

Kerrville, because it was connected to markets by a railroad in 1887, became the supplier of most of the outlying towns nearby, a role it continues to play even now that the San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railroad is gone.

When the interstate highway came through town in the 1970s it helped our community retain this niche. Before the railroad came to Kerrville, freighters hauled goods to Kerrville from San Antonio and even to “old Indianola” on the Texas coast. Again, from Bennett: “In the early days the wagons were pulled by ox teams, often several yokes to the wagon. Later mules and horses supplanted the plodding oxen. Teams of horses and mules ranged from two to twelve. That was before the day of highways and it required expert teamsters to handle a team over the rough and steep hill roads. “L. F. Pope was a colorful teamster of the

pre-railroad era. He started in the days of freighting from San Antonio and continued westward when the railway terminus reached Kerrville.

Old timers said Pope could hitch a team of several horses by the time others less versed in the vocation could hitch two horses. “Bells were often used on the lead horses in the teams and the wheel horse – the one that knew his business – helped to hold back the heavy load on steep downgrades. The team, or the gentle animals in the team, were hobbled out to graze on the countryside at night.

“The old-time freighter braved all kinds of weather and other obstacles, but he overcame them all. He was a picturesque character who served his day and generation well.”



Joe Herring has a reputation as, “Kerrville’s Historian.” Joe has been collecting historical anecdotes and images for years and has been sharing them with the Hill Country community. If you want to see the evolution of Kerrville and the surrounding area as a rail head for sheep and cattle ranching to the modern town it is today, Joe is your go-to man. Join us each issue as Joe brings Texas history to Heart Beat’s pages.

joeherringjr.blogspot.com