

10-2000

That Old Steer: As Told by Buster Moore

Curtis Tunnell

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ethj>

 Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

Tell us how this article helped you.

Recommended Citation

Tunnell, Curtis (2000) "That Old Steer: As Told by Buster Moore," *East Texas Historical Journal*: Vol. 38: Iss. 2, Article 10.

Available at: <http://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ethj/vol38/iss2/10>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by SFA ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in East Texas Historical Journal by an authorized administrator of SFA ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact cdsscholarworks@sfasu.edu.

THAT OLD STEER: AS TOLD BY BUSTER MOORE

by Curtis Tunnell

The rich fabric of our Texas heritage is reflected not only in the structures, documents, and artifacts left by previous generations, but also in the stories of interesting and important events recorded by individuals in their unique style.

Buster Moore of Huntsville, Texas, is a master East Texas storyteller. Buster has spent his life working with trained dogs and fine horses to recover stray cattle and feral hogs from the deepest woods. He was born in 1920 in Jewett, Texas, and grew up working cattle and hogs. About 1935, he began to do rodeo work for the Old Texas Kid. He had been plowing and working in cotton for fifty cents per day and Texas Kid paid him a dollar a head for riding bucking horses and wild bulls, so he could "eat a lot better." He was one of the only cowboys who successfully rode a wild cow known as Rodeo Queen that had brass knobs on her horns. He even went to Madison Square Garden with the Texas Kid and commented: "That building was a hell of a lot of barn."

In May 1989 I spent several pleasant hours recording a small sample of Buster's fascinating tales. One of his favorites is the story of "That Old Steer." Buster is proud of the fact that he had always lived by his wits, and in this tale he outsmarts one of the educated and wealthy men of the town after the fellow rejected his offer to catch a renegade steer for a fair price. In the end Buster not only made considerably more money on the deal, but even continued to prevail in the matter years later. The lesson to be learned from this story is this: if a skilled craftsman offers you a fair price for accomplishing a difficult task, you would be wise to accept his offer.

Buster begins: "So I went to work ranching down here catching wild cattle out of the old woods and selling them, and making a little money. In one instance, a man down here, Old Man Al C_____ [family names are not crucial to the story] had a big steer down there on the river and they couldn't get him in the lot. So he asked me one day in the Texan Café, he says, "What will you charge me to go catch that old steer?" I told him \$35 dollars. And he'd go: "Owhhhh!" Well, he had married a S_____ and they're real tight. He said: "Owhhhh, too much, too much," and he turned and walked out.

Well, we got a flood in the end of May. He sent a bunch of town people down there to catch that old steer. He didn't want to pay nobody to catch him. They got after him, and he hit that overflow. Twelve cows and three calves and this old steer went into the river. And some people was running them down the river in boats. And they got ahead of them and throwed em out in Otto T_____ 's pasture across the river.

Well, along about Tuesday that week they told me about them running that old steer in the backwater. So Mr. C_____ come back to the Texan Café and he says, "Say Buster, what will you charge me to catch that steer?"

I said: "Oh, \$50 dollars."

"Euwww! My God! You done gone up!"

“Yes Sir, and the steer’s gone too. He done gone down the river over in that rough country.”

He said, “Would you come up to the office and talk with me?”

And I said, “Yes Sir.”

I had a good friend, Owen S_____, who went along. He liked to drink quite a bit, and he wanted to hear the conversation. He was egging it along because he knew I was the only one in this country who could catch the steer and had the dogs and horses and was capable of doing that kind of work.

We met up there and Mr. Al says, “I just—I ain’t going to pay you \$50 dollars to catch a steer. You’re liable to catch him in an hour!”

I said, “I think I would.”

He said, “Well, I’m not going to do that. What would you give for that steer?” And now Owen went to winking at me.

I said, “I don’t know. I guess I’d give \$100 dollars for him.”

He said, “Well, Glen W_____ told me that steer’d bring \$350 dollars.”

I said, “Oh, no Sir. That’s down here in the auction ring. That ain’t down yonder on that river bottom.”

And he studied and he said, “Well, I’m just going to sell him to you, but I want you to sign some papers.” And he had that bookkeeper, Ed B_____, draw up a document that looked like the *Houston Chronicle*. I had to sign every page, so if there was an accident or a dog got hurt, anybody couldn’t come back on that S_____ estate.

So we got through and I was sitting over there with an old broke down hat on, and cow shit all over me, and I said, “Mr. Al, I want you to have that man type me up a bill of sale for one Brahma steer branded 7Y on the left hip.”

“What’s that for?”

I said, “So some of you thieving bastards can’t take him away from me. I done heard Joe S_____ and Bill F_____ and they’re going to try to buy him and kill him—shoot him and load him on a trailer. Winchtruck him and have a big barbeque.”

So he had that man take it all down and Mr. C_____ signed it, and I signed it. I gave him a hundred dollar bill.

And I called my brother, and he come down there. And he came walking in that door one morning about 4:30 or a quarter of 5:00 and had his horse and dogs. And we went over there across the river. That old steer was in Otto T_____’s pasture. And you have to get permission to be on his farm. You can’t just go in there ripping off, you know, without letting him know. But I was a good friend of him. I helped him with cattle. And he met us over there. We went into the bottom and found this old steer. He was a BIG steer, great big steer. He wasn’t all that wild, but he just beat old man H_____ and them town people that he had down on that place.

So we drove him on out there on that field. Otto kept saying: “You better go ahead and catch that steer. He’s going to run off!”

I said, “No, he ain’t going off with them dogs up there in front of him. He ain’t going nowhere! He ain’t going to run off, Mr. Otto.”

And finally I told him, I said, "Well, we'll get him out here and we'll just catch him."

The old steer broke and run and I just stuck the little old pony to him and she run up there and stuck her nose in his rear end and I burnt in on him, roped him, set him up. My brother loped up there and we got a trailer and we snatched him in, and we wuz back in Huntsville at the café by 8:30 and we went in there to eat breakfast.

After breakfast we carried him over there to this locker plant man, Mr. C____. He was to give me \$38 dollars a hundred warm-weight for him. You know, warm-weight and cooled out weight is different. They weigh more when they're hot. Well, I got over there and come to find out his head wouldn't go through that killing hole. So we had to carry him up a ramp. I put two nylon ropes on him, my brother got ahead and went on around them posts, and we take him up and carried him around onto the killing floor. And I shot the old steer and we dressed him, hauled him up and weighed him. He brought me \$385 dollars.

So Mr. Jim wrote me out a check and we all shook hands. And I said, "Say Jim, now I want that head. I want you to put it in a cooler and hold it for me, with that cape and all, because Mr. M____ over at the Sealey auction, he wants a head and it's better than that head he's got hung in his auction sale there."

He said, "I'll take care of it Buster."

So he put it in the cooler and we went on back over to the café and drank coffec. And in a little bit Mr. Al walked in and said, "Say, they say you caught the old steer."

I said, "Yes Sir. I did!"

We was sitting there, me and my brother and two or three of the old hands around the café. He pulled up a chair and says, "Well, by the way, what did that steer bring?"

I said, "I don't know. I don't remember." And I just pulled that check out. Of course, I had it memorized, \$385 dollars. It made me \$385 dollars right quick. But I handed him that check, and boy, he just sat there and just shook like he had some bad disease.

He said, "Wooo! Ohhh!" He said, "My Lord Almighty!" He said, "I didn't know that!"

I said, "Well, I know you're smart and you married a rich lady, and all that, but I want you to explain one thing to an ignorant fellow with a third grade education. Why didn't you give me \$35 dollars to go catch that steer? Look what you would have made."

He said, "That was just too much money. Won't let nobody make that much money!"

And I said, "Now, how in the hell you telling me that you ain't going to let nobody make that much money?" I said, "Now what kind of education have you got?"

Well, we laughed and bulled there about it.

Then he said, "Yeah, Buster, what did you do with that old steer's head?"

I said, "I got it over there in the cooler. Mr. M_____ over there at Sealey runs that big auction barn, and he wants it to go up in his auction barn."

"Oh," he says, "I sure would like to have that." He says, "Gabe would like to have that." That's his son. He says, "I kind of want to keep that steer's head and have it mounted. My son remembers the old steer in the bottom down there."

I said, "Well, I'll tell you how you can get it. You just give me that hundred dollar bill I give you for it, and you can have it back." And he went in his pocket and got that same rusty hundred dollar bill I'd been packing for two years, and gave me that hundred dollar bill back for the steer's head. And so that cleared the steer. He made me \$485 dollars.

But the funny part is, when my boy come on up and got older, and he had seen him a lot of wrecks in that river and nearly drowned horseback, and had roped these old wild cattle. He asked about that old steer head. So I went down to Mr. Al's and drove in there one day and rung the old bell. And finally he come walking out the back door. And he remembered me.

"Get out Buster!"

And I said, "No. I just want to look at this old steer head." I looked up there [on the screened-in back porch] and I saw it, and he hadn't kept it dusted or nothing, you know, hadn't took care of it. And the old hair was beginning to slip on it.

And I said, "Mr. Al, I'd sure love to have that old steer's head."

And he said, "Well, I'm going to give it to you when I die." He said, "You know, that boy of mine, Gabe, don't care nothing about that old steer or nothing like it."

That old steer had awful wide horns on him. So I went back in later years——after Old Man Al passed, and his wife called me and told me to come get that "junk" [steer's head] out of there, she didn't care how much it cost her. So she paid me \$35 dollars just to get that messy old head away from there!"

This story was recorded on tape cassette and transcribed verbatim. Interviewer's questions, comments, and chuckles were eliminated from this draft. We have tried as much as possible to preserve Buster's words and expressions exactly as they are recorded on the tape.

Mr. Moore has my most sincere gratitude for his patience and generosity in sharing his recollections of a unique life. I also want to express my appreciation to Mr. Thomas Anders of Huntsville for arranging oral history interviews in the area and for his untiring efforts to preserve all the interesting facets of our Texas heritage.