



[American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1940](#)

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[J.L. Tarter]

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*{Begin handwritten}*Folk Stuff - Life on a Range*{End handwritten}*

Gauthier, Sheldon F.

Rangelore

Tarrant Co., Dist., #7 *{Begin handwritten}*[41?]*{End handwritten}*

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J. L. Tarter, 75 living at U.G.M. Hotel, Fort Worth, Texas, was born [Nof,?] 24, 1862, in Pulaski Co., Ky. Silas **Tarter**, his father, owned and lived on a farm located near Somerset, Ky. which was 40 miles from a railroad. Silas **Tarter** accepted employment as immigrant agent for the Ohio and Miss, Railroad in 1875, and moved his family to Texas, where his duties demanded his presences. **Tarter** located his Family on a tract of land in Williamson Co., where they cultivated some land and engaged in ranching. **J. L. Taylor** entered the cattle business in the early 80's, locating his ranch six miles N. E. of Taylor, Williamson Co., Texas. He lost a large number of his herd in 1883, due to 10 days of rain and sleet which left the range covered with ice. With the return of mild weather, heflies appeared in large numbers which caused an additional loss. He handled hundreds of cattle, under contract with the I.G.N. Railroad, which arrived in Taylor unfit for farther shipment. He saw many shooting affairs in Taylor and saw the gun fight which took place in Richland, in [189?] during the Jay Bird war. After terminating his range career he entered the printing [basin?] and is now (1938) connected with the Glove Prints Co., of Fort Worth.

His story of range life follows:

"I was born 75 years ago, Nov. 24, 1862, at my father's S. **Tarter**, farm located in Pulaski, Co., Ky. The farm was located near the little town of Somerset, 40 miles from a railroad.

"Father farmed during his early life and while in Ky. he raised particularly everything the family consumed and wore. There were eight in the family. There were six of we children, three boys and three girls.

"So that one may know how we made our living, I shall explain what and how we did, which was typical of country then in that section of Ky. *{Begin handwritten}*C12 - 2/11/41 - Texas*{End handwritten}*

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"Father had very little money, but what he had was in excess of his family needs.

"We raised and sold a few cattle, mules, hogs, sheep, chickens, geese and geese feathers. We grew apples and sold a little of those both green and dried. Also, we raised and sold some wheat and oats.

"Mother and sisters knitted woolen socks and mittens, from yarn grown and spun by them, and sold hundreds of pairs.

"We lived on the supply of food produced on the farm and the clothes we wore was made from cloth that was spun and weaved from material produced on the farm.

"Father and the oldest boys trapped and hunted, and we made [winter?] caps from the animals hides, also, coon and other skins were sold.

"Judging from what I have mentioned as sold by the family, one may think there was a large income, but the contrary is the fact. For instance, eggs sold for five and ten cents a dozen. A pair of hand knitted woolen socks sold for 25¢ and all other articles accordingly. However, as I have stated, we didn't need much money, because what was bought did not cost much and about the only things money was spent for were sugar, coffee, thread and buttons, and bees furnished the major portion of the sweets.

"Our Winter clothing was made from wool carded, spun and woven into cloth, by my mother and sisters. Our Summer clothes were made from flax, which was grown on the farm. The flax was prepared by pulling it at the proper time and spread on the ground to cure. The process which we termed curing was to let

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the husk deteriorate. After the curing process was completed, the flax was placed in a breaker and by frailing the husks were pounded loose. The frailing left the flax free from the husk and readying for the spinning and weaving process.

"Our shoes were made from the hides of cattle raised on our farm and tanned by the neighborhood tanner. The neighborhood shoemaker made the shoes. Our hats were, likewise, made by the local hatter. All of them craftsmen were paid corn, wheat and other produce of the farm.

"The wheat and other small grain was harvested with a cradle and reaphook. The thrashing was done by frailing the grain on a canvass. To separate the chaff from the kernels, the grain was poured from pails, while held in the air, letting the wind blow the chaff away.

"The amusements, for the most part, was husking-bees, logrollings for the men and quilting for the women, and once a year regularly the revival meeting for all.

"The first school I attended was in a log building, of one room, the teacher was paid \$18. per month and board. The teacher received board by going home each evening with a different pupil of one of the families

until he had made the rounds and then could start at the first again. That system the teacher followed throughout the three month term.

"There were many whiskey stills. Of course, there was no law regulating whiskey making nor any tax and many gallons were made and drank by the good people.

"I have often heard people speak of the good folks of the

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early days. Well, in our section of Ky. the folks drank a great many gallons of liquor, shot each/ *{Begin inserted text}*other*{End inserted text}* when they disagreed. The language them folks used was full of cussing and vulgarity. By the time I was eight years old I had heard everything that the human mind could think of pertaining to cussing and vulgar words. I have herad nothing new since.

"The only disadvantage a still operator had to contend with was his inability to be accepted into the church. All other folks were saved regularly each year. Occasionally a still operator would decide to quit making whiskey and join the church. Then [great?] rejoicing would take place among the brethren and sisters. Well, the still operator would have all his wealth in whiskey and the still and he could not be expected to destroy the produce and leave himself destitute. Therefore the brethren would gather at the converts house to arrange for distillers livelihood, after the liquor was destroyed, until the party could rearrange his affairs.

"I accompanied father to a couple of the meetings when the brethren were supposed to destroy the whiskey and provided the distiller with goods in the place of the produce. The brethren would discuss the converts change of heart and express their pleasure over the happy event and then take up the matter of disposing of the whiskey. Some of the brethren would state that their wife needed some good whiskey to make bitters used for stomach disorders, some needed whiskey to make rock-and-roy which was used for coughs and there would various ther remedies mentioned for which whiskey was needed. [?] the act of tasting

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the whiskey stored in the various kegs was the next procedure. The brethren would take a sample drink of the whiskey in each keg and repeat the act several time to be sure which keg's whiskey was the best. By the time the brethren had [? ?] the sampling process, everyone was in the mood for a good revival. The brethren would [?] for the distillers whiskey to be used for medicinal purpose only, because none of them had any other use for it, but the amount bought for making bitters and other medician, indicated that there was a great amount of sickness in the country. Some distillers had to be saved each year, but the brethren did not seem to object.

"When I arrived in Texas there were frequent shootings affairs, but these were nothing new to me. I had became use to shooting scraps in Ky. Arguements were settled according to who was the best shot in the Somerset section of Ky. the same as those were in Texas during the early days.

"I recall one [?] play, which I shall relate, and a typical illustration of the people's demeanour.

"Two men, All Cooper and [?] Dalton, had some disagreement and [?] Dalton decided to settle the

argument during church service. My folks were sitting near Al Cooper and the congregation was listening to the preacher when a voice was heard at the entrance saying, "Al Cooper, I've come to get [ye?]." Of course, everyone looked around and they saw [?] Dalton with his gun leveled on Cooper. Cooper picked up a child whom he held before him thus sheilding himself. Dalton ordered Cooper to put the child down or be responsible for the childs death, because he, Dalton, was going to shoot. However, other people became active and disarmed Dalton.

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The church members insisted that Dalton and Cooper settle their argument at some other place, because they did not want their children to witness a shooting.

"My father accepted a position with the Ohio Miss, railroad in 1879 as the company's immigrant agent. He was sent to Texas and I went with him. Father moved his family to [?]limison] co. in 1877. [?] located the family on a tract of land six miles N.E. of Taylor. We fenced a small tract for cultivation and, also, entered the cattle businesses, using the free and open range for grazing our animals. We ran various amounts of cattle. Some times we had 3000 and then might drop to 1000 head, because we bought and sold at all times. In 1880 I operated as an individual owner and went into the business more extensive. My first foreman was Luther Flynn and then George McGee became my foreman after Flynn quit to go west.

"I spent my time trading and left the range work in the hands of my foreman. I bought whenever I could find a satisfactory buy and sent cattle to the market often as I could.

"George Pierce was an extensive drover those days and I put my cattle in with his herd, whenever he was driving north. I would check in my cattle and receive my pay after delievery.

"I was making money and building my cattle business constantly until 1883 at which time I had a set-back. During the month of Feb. we had a 10 day period of rain, snow and sleet. When the weather cleared there was around four inches of snow and sleet crust on the ground, which cut the cattle [?] the grass. The weaker animals died from the exposure and the lack of grass and by the time the crust had thawed I had a 25 percent loss. When mild weather returned

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there appeared an unusual large number of hell-flyes, which caused an additional lose and reduced my herd to 50 percent of the number I had.

"The heel-fly is death on stock. The fly will attack the animal on the heel and when the fly hits the animal becomes crazed from being worried by the fly. The animal will start running for a water hole or bog, in fact, anything where it may submerge its heels. Following the thaw, after the snow, there were a great number of water holes and bogs into which the cattle could run. Being weak following the iced range, a large number of cattle became bogged and died before we could rescue the animals.

"While on the subject of weak cattle, I shall relate another experience I had handling weak cattle. I think it was in 1883, that the grass became exhausted in the Rio Grande valley and thousands of cattle were shipped

out of there. The I.G. & N. railroad hauled a great number of the cattle into Taylor and there the animals were transferred to the Katty railroad. However, the Katty officials refused to accept any cattle which were weak and liable get down during shipment.

"I took a contract with the I.G. & N. to take all the critters refused by the Katty. There were a large number which arrived at Taylor to weak for further shipment. I received my pay from the hides. Those animals I skinned and [?] of the carcasses by throwing those in a trench.

"During that period Jack Taylor, a resident of Taylor who had about 200 hogs on a farm near the town, came to me with a proposition to deliever the carcasses at his hog farm. He wanted

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the carcasses for hog food.

"Taylor was very close with his money and as a rule would not deal unless he received two for one. After considerable dickering I made Taylor sign a contract agreeing to take all the carcasses at 50¢ each. What I did was to drive the animals to the hog pasture and there do the skinning. The 50¢ received was clear profit. Well, just about the time I entered into the contract with Taylor, the railroad started to turn over to me on an average 26 head each day. During the first 10 I operated under the Taylor contract. I placed 200 carcasses in Taylor's hog pasture. Of course, the hogs could not make a dent in the beef by their consumption. The results were a very offensive odor, which came from the decomposing meat, and hundreds of buzzards began to flock into the pasture. The pasture was a mess for sore eyes, but I had a signed contract and continued to deliever carcasses according to the agreement. Taylor began to beg for a release from the contract, but I had him hooked as he had hooked many other persons and I would not allow the contract to be vitiated, except according to my terms. I made him pay me \$50. for a release.

"I continued in the cattle business until 1893. When the panic sat in and I quit before I became submerged in debt. The prices began to drop and continued to do so until the animals would not sell for enough at the markets to pay for transportation. There were more cattle on the range than the market could use and the buyers would not bit.

"The panic caused the financial ruin of many cattlemen,

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especially them which had borrowed money. The money lenders began to call in their loans, which action caused a rush of cattle to the markets and the depression of prices to such extent that cattle did not bring enough to pay the loan value.

"After quitting the cattle business I engaged in various kinds of enterprises, but finally entered the printing business in which I am still engaged.

"Now, I shall reminiscently talk of people and happenings in and around Williamson, Co. for the purpose of conveying some idea of the customs and the nature of people living there during those early days.

"I recall Print Olive, who delt in horses extensively. He drove horses to Kans and Neb, where he sold the animals. Print had a brother who did driving for him and while on one of the trips Print's brother was killed during a gun fight. Print went on a hunt for the killer, spending a year or more and, it was estimated, more than \$10,000. He finally caught the man and burned the fellows while tied to a stake. Print was arrested, tried, convicted and pardoned.

"A typical Ky colonal came to Taylor. He wore the usual Ky. [board?] and carried himself as an aristocrat. He had brains and intelligence, also, had corage and was the kind of a man needed in Taylor as its Mayor, to handle the rough and ready ways of the people. The man's name was Dan Moody and he was elected Mayor of Taylor. He handled the office well and had some very ticklish matters to deal with.

"Dan Moody was unmarried when he came to Taylor, although in

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he was in middle-life. Dan joined a church after coming to Taylor and married a woman with red hair and about his own age. She was a relative of J. Robinson, former law partner of [?] Governor Hogg. There was a male child born to the union, in due time, and the parents named him Dan. He was red headed and while he grew up his young friends called him "Red" Moody. "Red" studied law and was admitted to the bar. He was elected to the office of City Attorney. He later, was elected and served as County Attorney, District Attorney, Attorney General of the State of Texas and served as its Governor two terms.

"How to return where we left Dan Moody Sr. After he became Mayor of Taylor, he sponsored the election of Tom Smith to the office of city Marshal. Smith had the reputation of being able to handle bad situations. He had several notches on his gun and had handled himself in excellent style during one of the battles of the Jay Bird war, which was fought at Richland. In the Richland battle Smith stood up in face of heavy firing and did elegant execution with his gun, even after he had received a couple wounds and was given credit, for winning the battle.

"The sheriff was John Olive, who was among the most promanent sheriffs in the State and the time. He had established his reputation when two men cornered him on the highway and drew their guns suddenly. Olive beat them to the draw and killed each of the men. The constable was [?] Burwise and also a man who would not back away from a fight if it was his duty to stand up to the fight.

"Therefore, Moody had himself surrounded with good officers.

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"One of the first real test the city officials had to face was in a matter with Ed Rosoux, who came to Taylor from Bastrop co. He opened a saloon in Taylor and was building up a good business. Rosoux would not allow anyone to take a person out of his saloon if the person was drunk. He was a native of Ky. and came to Taylor with a reputation of being tough. He had killed a couple men in Bastrop co. However, he was an elegant looking man and carried along with his fighting ability, intelligence and polished manners.

"There came a time when the officers wanted a man against whom there was some misdemeanor charge.

Deputy constable Morris was handed the warrant to execute. The party wanted was drunk and in Rosoux's saloon. Deputy Morris entered the saloon and led the man out of the door before Rosoux happened to notice what was taking place. When Rosoux realized what the deputy was doing, he stepped to the door quickly and demanded that the person be turned loose. Morris refused to comply with the demand and Rosoux, without further words, hit the deputy on the jaw, knocking the him into the ditch. Rosoux then took the drunk back into the saloon.

"When Rosoux's act was reported to the Mayor he issued a warrant promptly for the arrest of Rosoux. Tom Smith served the warrant on Smith, but let him go on Rosoux's own recognizance. The trial was called in Mayor Moody's court. The city attorney presented the city's evidence and then the Mayor called the defendant to present his evidence. When Rosoux arose to his feet and made a short speech to the court which was as follows:

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'So far as this Kangaroo Court is concerned, it can go to hell". Following his speech, Rosoux walked out of the court and returned to his saloon.

"Rosoux' action toward the Mayor's court tightened the position considerable and things became tense. There was a citation issued for Rosoux to appear instanter and answered to a charge of contempt of court.

"With a [chavietion?] on a charge of assault and battery and interfering with an officer standing against Rosoux and in addition the contempt citation, the officers were compelled to take charge of the man. Tom Smith was given the papers to serve and take Rosoux in custody.

"With Rosoux having the reputation for being one of the best shots in the state, and there was no doubt about his courage, and Tom Smith with an equal reputation, the people were all set to see a high class gun fight.

"When Tom Smith started for Rosoux's saloon to arrest him. Smith had an audience of citizens who wanted to see how good their marshal was with the gun and the amount of his courage. Smith entered the saloon and found Rosoux playing. He walked up to Rosoux and said:

"Rosoux, I've come to talk with you a bit"

"That you may do to your own satisfaction, start talking" he invited.

"Well, you have made bad matters worse by walking out on the court. I have come here to suggest that you and I go to the court and see if the situation can be fixed up".

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"Smith, I am not going with you or any other man to satisfy that bunch of kangaroo jobbers", was Rosoux's reply.

"I advice you to do so Rosoux", Smith pleaded. Because it's things like this that lead to gun play".

"When I get ready to pop you shall know it and if you don't stop molesting me it will not be long", Rosoux stated while he laid the pool cue down.

"I am ready now; Smith replied and at the same instance he fired his gun at [Rosoux?].

"The bullet entered [Rosoux?] side, but he leaped over his bar, [quick?] as a flash, and drew his gun. He fired, but dropped to [the?] floor while shooting and died in a short time afterwards.

"Rosoux had a great number of friends [and?] they felt that Smith [took?] [?] [?] advantage of the saloon man. That feeling was the [case?] for Smith's defeat at the following election. Willis Johnson was elected and that defeat injured Smith's pride considerable.

"Smith and I were living in the same house at the time and he would frequently talk to me about the [towns?] yellow bellied [marshall?]. He would harp on Willis Johnson constantly when he had a few drinks. He lived at the edge of town and one day, while we were driving in, he said to me, 'if I was shot in the heart [I?] could still run a block to shoot Johnson'. [We?] stayed in town most of the day and Smith did considerable drinking. He drank himself to the stage where he was cocking his hat to one side of his head and then to the other. He kept making [?] remarks about Jonson, in a loud voice {*Begin inserted text*}[?]{*End inserted text*} voice on the streets.

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He, in fact, became a nuisance, but Johnson was evading trouble and keeping away from Smith. Smith became more noisy and finally was hollering, 'Taylor has has now marshal, [where?] is Willis Johnson? I want him to arrest me'.

"Smith's action arrived at a point where Johnson could not allow it to continue and he called on Mayor Moody for a warrant for Smith's arrest. Moody refused to issue the warrant. He took [the?] [position?] that if he did it would mean one or both of the men would be killed.

"The square was crowded with [people?] waiting for the fight they thought would surely take place, but they were disappointed. Mayor Moody walked among the people telling them he had refused to issue a warrant and had forbade Johnson to make the arrest. Moody then went to Smith and told him the following. 'Johnson has come to me and reported what you are doing and I forbade him to arrest you. I did so, [because?] I wanted these folks to see just how big a jackass you can make of yourself'. Moody's [statement?] to Smith cowed him immediately and he was ready to start for home. The mayor's good judgment saved Johnson's reputation and a killing.

"During the late 70's and early 80's, a bunch of desperadoes would frequently visit some small town and close it up. That is, force all the business houses to close the doors. The first and only such visit [Tay?] or received was in 1879. The desperadoes had forced all the places to close but one. When they came to Tom Bishops he met the men at the door and sent three of them west, but Tom went west also

"I shall tell of one more shootings affair and let it be the conclusion of such [tales?].

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"Ben Thompson was elected marshal of Austin [and?] [Jack?] Harris was the manager of the theater at the time. Prior to Ben's election the two men had trouble and were on the watch for each other.

"One day Ben shot Harris while he, Ben. was [?] the theater. He claimed that Harris was standing in the foyer with a gun watching for him. Ben claimed he saw Harris in the mirror. Thompson was tried and [exonerated?] in another county on a charge of venue.

"When Thompson returned home from the trial he was met at the depot by a large number of [citizens?] [?] staged a parade of welcome. Some time after the welcome parade Thompson and King Fisher, a cattleman with extensive [holding?], [were?] [sitting?] in the theater and a shot from the gallery hit Ben Thompson in the back and killed him. Who fired the shot was never learned.

"The first fence [enclosing?] a farmers land, outside of the cultivated tracts, caused great excitement in Taylor. Highways those days ran on the line of the least resistance and not on the section line. [A?] [farmer?] living a few miles from Taylor fenced his land according to his section line. By so doing he fenced in one of the principal [roads?] [leading?] to Taylor.

The [businessmen?] of Taylor held a meeting, headed by the then Mayor, John Tradwell, and discussed the road situation. The men decided to cut the fence and according to the decision a large number of men, armed with [?], rode out to the fence and cut the wire so it was of no further use. Then the farmer hired a lawyer and filed suit for damages, also, filed a petition asking for damage [?] [?] [?] be enjoined from further molesting of his

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property. The farmer won his case after [considerable?] litigation. The business were [asest?] damages and cost of the [trial?].

"The cattlemen began to move their herds west and plows began to break the ground for cultivation. After the range gave way to the plow, one could see many of the old Casedy [?] plows pulled by four to six ox teams breaking the land in a few years cotton was crowing where the longhorn grazed.

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