

BEN KINCHLOW, 91, was the son of Lizaer Moore, a half-white slave owned by Sandy Moore, Wharton Co., and Lad Kinchlow, a white man. When Ben was one year old his mother was freed and given some money. She was sent to Matamoros, Mexico and they lived there and at Brownsville, Texas, during the years before and directly following the Civil War. Ben and his wife, Liza, now live in Uvalde, Texas, in a neat little home. Ben has straight hair, a Roman nose, and his speech is like that of the early white settler. He is affable and enjoys recounting his experiences.

"I was birthed in 1846 in Wharton, Wharton County, in slavery times. My mother's name was Lizaer Moore. I think her master's name was Sandy Moore, and she went by his name. My father's name was Lad Kinchlow. My mother was a half-breed Negro; my father was a white man of that same county. I don't know anything about my father. He was a white man, I know that. After I was borned and was one year old, my mother was set free and sent to Mexico to live. When we left Wharton, we was sent away in an ambulance. It was an old-time ambulance. It was what they called an ambulance -- a four-wheeled concern pulled by two mules. That is what they used to traffic in. The big rich white folks would get in it and go to church or on a long journey. We landed safely into Matamoros, Mexico, just me and my mother and older brother. She had the

means to live on till she got there and got acquainted. We stayed there about twelve years. Then we moved back to Brownsville and stayed there until after all Negroes were free. She went to washing and she made lots of money at it. She charged by the dozen. Three or four handkerchiefs were considered a piece. She made good because she got \$2.50 a dozen for men washing and \$5 a dozen for women's clothes.

"I was married in February, 1879, to Christiana Temple, married at Matagorda, Matagorda County. I had six children by my first wife. Three boys and three girls. Two girls died. The other girl is in Gonzales County. Lawrence is here workin' on the Kincaid Ranch and Andrew is workin' for John Monagin's dairy and Henry is seventy miles from Alpine. He's a highway boss. This was my first wife. Now I am married again and have been with this wife forty years. Her name was Eliza Dawson. No children born to this union.

"The way we lived in those days -- the country was full of wild game, deer, wild hogs, turkey, duck, rabbits, 'possum, lions, quails,

and so forth. You see, in them days they was all thinly settled and they was all neighbors. Most settlements was all Meskins mostly; of course there was a few white people. In them days the country was all open and a man could go in there and settle down wherever he wanted to and wouldn't be molested a-tall. They wasn't molested till they commenced putting these fences and putting up these barbwire fences. You could ride all day and never open a gate. Maybe ride right up to a man's house and the<sup>n</sup> just let down a bar or two.

"Sometime when we wanted fresh meat we went out and killed. We also could kill a calf or goat whenever we cared to because they were plenty and no fence to stop you. We also had plenty milk and butter and home-made cheese. We did not have much coffee. You know the way we made our coffee? We just taken corn and parched it right brown and ground it up. Whenever we would get up furs and hides enough to go into market, a bunch of neighbors would get together and take ten to fifteen deer hides each and take 'em in to Brownsville

and sell 'em and get their supplies. They paid twenty-five cents a pound for them. That's when we got our coffee, but we'd got so used to using corn-coffee, we didn't care whether we had that real coffee so much, because we had to be careful with our supplies, anyway. My recollection is that it was fifty cents a pound and it would be green coffee and you would have to roast it and grind it on a mill. We didn't have any sugar, and very rare thing to have flour. The deer was here by the hundreds. There was blue quail -- my goodness! You could get a bunch of these blue top-knot quail rounded up in a bunch of pear and, if they was any rocks, you could kill every one of 'em. If you could hit one and get 'im to flutterin', the others would bunch around him and you could kill every one of 'em with rocks.

"We lived very neighborly. When any of the neighbors killed fresh meat we always divided with one another. We all had a corn patch, about three or four acres. We did not have plows; we planted with a hoe. We were lucky in raisin' corn every year. Most all the neighbors had a

little bunch of goats, cows, mares, and hogs. Our nearest market was forty miles, at old Brownsville. When I was a boy I wore what was called shirt-tail. It was a long, loose shirt with no pants. I did not wear pants until I was about ten or twelve. The way we got our supplies, all the neighbors would go in together and send into town in a dump cart drawn by a mule. The main station was at Brownsville. It was thirty-five miles from where they'd change horses. They carried this mail to Edinburg, and it took four days. Sometimes they'd ride a horse or mule. We'd get our mail once a week. We got our mail at Brownsville.

"The country was very thinly settled then and of very few white people; most all Meskins, living on the border. The country was open, no fences. Every neighbor had a little place. We didn't have any plows; we planted with a hoe and went along and raked the dirt over with our toes. We had a grist mill too. I bet I've turned one a million miles. There was no hired work then. When a man was hired he got \$10 or \$12

per month, and when people wanted to brand or do other work, all the neighbors went together and helped without pay. The most thing that we had to fear was Indians and cattle rustlers and wild animals.

"While I was yet on the border, the plantation owners had to send their cotton to the border to be shipped to other parts, so it was transferred by Negro slaves as drivers. Lots of times, when these Negroes got there and took the cotton from their wagon, they would then be persuaded to go across the border by Meskins, and then they would never return to their master. That is how lots of Negroes got to be free. The way they used to transfer the cotton -- these big cotton plantations east of here -- they'd take it to Brownsville and put it on the wharf and ship it from there. I can remember seeing, during the cotton season, fifteen or twenty teams hauling cotton, sometimes five or six, maybe eight bales on a wagon. You see, them steamboats used to run all up and down that river. I think this cotton went out to market at New Orleans and went right out into the Gulf.

"Our house was a log cabin with a log chimney da'bbbed with mud. The cabin was covered with grass for a roof. The fireplace was the kind of stove we had. Mother cooked in Dutch ovens. Our main meal was corn bread and milk and grits with milk. That was a little bit coarser than meal. The way we used to cook it and the best flavored is to cook it out-of-doors in a Dutch oven. We called 'em corn dodgers. Now ash cakes, you have your dough pretty stiff and smooth off a place in the ashes and lay it right on the ashes and cover it up with ashes and when it got done, you could wipe every bit of the ashes off, and get you some butter and put on it. M-m-m! I tell you, its fine! There is another way of cookin' flour bread without a skillet or a stove, is to make up your dough stiff and roll it out thin and cut it in strips and roll it on a green stick and just hold it over the coals, and it sure makes good bread. When one side cooks too fast, you can just turn it over, and have your stick long enough to keep it from burnin' your hands. How come me to learn this was: One time we were huntin' horse stock

and there was an outfit along and the pack mule that was packed with our provisions and skillets and coffee pots and things -- we never did carry much stuff, not even no beddin' -- the pack turned on the mule and we lost our skillet and none of us knowed it at the time. All of us was cooks, but that old Meskin that was along was the only one that knew how to cook bread that way. Sometimes we would be out six weeks or two months on a general round-up, workin' horse stock; the country would just be alive with cattle, and horses too. We used to have lots of fun on those drives.

"I tell you, I didn't enjoy that 'court' at night. They got so tough on us you couldn't spit in camp, couldn't use no cuss words -- they would sure 'put the leggin's on you' if you did!"

Uncle Ben hitched his chair, and with much chuckling, recalled the "kangaroo court" the cowboys used to hold at night in camp. These impromptu courts were often all the fun the cowboys had during the long weeks of hunting stock in the



open range country.

"Oh, it was all in fun. Just catch somebody so we could hold court! They would have two or three as a jury. They would use me as sheriff and appoint a judge. The prisoner was turned over to the judge and whatever he said, it had to be carried out exactly. The penalty? Well, sometimes -- it was owing to the crime -- but sometimes they would put it up to about twenty licks with the leggin's. If they was any bendin' trees, they would lay you across the log. They got tough, all right, but we sure had fun. We had to salute the boss every mornin', and if we forgot it . . .! They never forgot it that night; you'd sure get tried in court.

"We camped on the side of a creek one time, and we had a new man, a sort of green fellow. This new man unsaddled his horse by the side of the creek and he lay down there. He had on a big pair of spurs, and I was watchin' him and studyin' up some kind of prank to play on 'im. So I went and got me a string and tied one of his spurs to his saddle and then I told the

boss what I'd done and he had one of the fellows put a saddle on and tie tin cups and pots on it and then they commenced shootin' and yellin'. This man with the saddle on went pitchin' right toward that fellow, and that man got up, scared to death, and started to run. He run the length of the string and then fell down, but he didn't take time to get up; he went runnin' on his all-fours as fur as he could, till he drug the saddle to where it hung up. He woulda run right into the creek, but the saddle held 'im back. We didn't hold kangaroo court over that! Nobody knowed who did it. Of course, they all knowed, but they didn't let on. But nobody ever got in a bad humor; it didn't do no good.

"I've stood up of many a bad night, dozin'. It would be two weeks, sometimes, before we got to lay down on our beds. I have stood up between the wagon wheel and the bed (of the wagon) and dozed many a night. Maybe one or two men would come in and doze an hour or two, but if the cattle were restless and ready to run, we had to be ready right now. Sho! Those stormy night, thunderin'

and lightnin'! You could just see the lightnin' all over the steers' horns and your horse's ears and mane too. It would dangle all up and down his mane. It never interfered with you a-tall. And you could see it around the steer's horns in the herd, the lightnin' would dangle all over 'em. If the hands (cowboys) or the relief could get to 'em before they got started to runnin', they could handle 'em; but if they got started first, they would be pretty hard to handle.

"The first ranch I worked on after I left McNelly was on the Banqueta on the Agua Dulce Creek for the Miley boys, putting up a pasture fence. I worked there about two months, diggin' post holes. From there to the King Ranch for about four months, breaking horses. I kept travelin' east till I got back to Wharton, where my mother was. She died there in Wharton. I didn't stay with her very long. I went down to Tres Palacios in Matagorda County. I did pasture work there, and cattle work. I worked for Mr. Moore for twelve years. Then he moved to Stockdale and I worked for him there eight years.

From there, after I got through with Mr. Moore, I went back to Tres Palacios and I worked there for first one man and then another. I think we have been here at Uvalde for about twenty-three years.

"I've been the luckiest man in the world to have gone through what I have and not get hurt. I have never had but two horses to fall with me. I could ride all day right now and never tire. You never hear me say, 'I'm tired, I'm sleepy, I'm hongry.' And out in camp you never see me lay down when I come in to camp, or set down to eat, and if I do, I set down on my foot. I always get my plate in my hand and eat standin' up, or lean against the wagon, maybe.

"When Cap'n. McNelly taken sick and resigned, I traveled east and picked up jobs of work on ranches. The first work after I left the Rio Grande was on the Banqueta, and then I went to work on the King Ranch about fifty miles south-east (?) of Brownsville. It wasn't fixed up in them days like it is now. But the territory is like it was then. They worked all Meskin hands.

They were working about twenty-five or thirty Meskins at the headquarters' ranch. And the main caporal was a Meskin. His wages was top wages and he got twelve dollars a month. And the hands, if you was a real good hand, you got seven or eight dollars a month, and they would give you rations. They would furnish you all the meat you wanted and furnish you corn, but you would have to grind it yourself for bread. You know, like the Meskins make on a metate. You could have all the home-made cheese you want, and milk. In them days, the Meskins didn't have sense enough to make butter. I seen better times them days than I am seein' now. We just had a home livin'. You could go out any time and kill you anything you wanted -- turkeys, hogs, javalinas, deer, 'coons, 'possums, quail.

"I'll tell you about a Meskin ranch I worked on. It was a big lake. It covered, I reckon, fifty acres, and these little Meskin huts just surrounded that big lake. And fish! My goodness, you could just go down there and throw your hook in without a bait and catch a fish. That was what you call the Laguna de Chacona. That was out from

Brownsville about thirty-five miles. That ranch was owned by the old Meskin named Chacon, where the lake got its name.

"It seems funny the way they handled milk calves -- you know, the men-folks didn't milk cows, they wouldn't even fool with 'em. They would have a great big corral and maybe they would have fifteen or twenty cows and they would be four or five families go there to milk. Every calf would have a rawhide strap around his neck about six foot long. Now, instead of them makin' a calf pen -- of evenin's the girls would go down there and I used to go help 'em -- they would pull the calf up to the fence and stick the strap through a crack and pull the calf's head down nearly to the ground where he couldn't suck. Of course, the old cow would hang around right close to the calf as she could git. When they let the calf suck, they'd leave 'im tied down so he couldn't suck in the night. They always kep' the cows up at night and they'd leave the calves in the pen with 'em, but tied down. But buildin' just what you call a calf pen, they'd set posts in the ground

just like these stock pens at the railroad and lay the poles between 'em. Then again, they would dig a trench and set mesquite poles so thick and deep, why, you couldn't push it down!

"Now, in dry times, they would have a ban-volete (ban-bo-la-te). Hand me two of them sticks, mama. Now, you see, like here would be the well and you cut a long stick as long as you could get it, with a fork up here in this here pole, and have this here stick in the fork of the pole. They'd bolt the cross piece down in the fork of the pole that was put in the ground right by the well, and have it so it would work up and down. They'd be a weight tied on the end of the other pole and they could sure draw water in a hurry. I made one out here on the Anderson Ranch. Just as fast as you could let your bucket down, then jerk it up, you had the water up. The well had cross pieces of poles laid around it and cut to fit together.

"Now, about the other way we had to draw water. We had a big well, only it was fenced around to keep cattle from gettin' in there.

The reason they had to do that, they had a big wheel with footpieces, like steps, to tread, and you would have the wheel over the well and they had about fifteen or twenty rawhide buckets fastened to a rope (that the wheel pulled it wnet around), and when they went down, they would go down in front of you. You had to sit down right behind the wheel, and you would push with your feet and pull with your hands, and the buckets came up behind you and as they went up, they would empty and go back down. They had some way of fixin' the rawhide. I think they toasted it, or scorched the hide to keep it hard so the water wouldn't soak it up and get it soft. That was on that place, the Chacona Lakes. That old Meskin was a native of the Rio Grand and run cattle and horses. In them days, you could buy an acre of land for fifty cents, river front, all the land you wanted. Now that land in that valley, you couldn't buy it for a hundred dollars an acre.

"Did I tell you about diggin' that pit right in the fence of our corn patch to catch javalines? The way we done, why, we just dug a big pit right



on the inside of the field, right against the fence, and whenever they would go through that hole to go in the corn patch, they would drop off in that hole. I think we caught nine, little and big, at one trappin' once. It was already an old trompin' place where they come in and out, and we had put the pit there. But after you use it, they won't come in there again.

"You see, I tell you about them brush fences. The deer had certain places to go to that fence to jump it, and after we found the regular jumpin' place, we would cut three sticks -- pretty good size, about like your wrist, about three foot long -- and peel 'em and scorch 'em in the fire and sharpen the ends right good and we would go to set our traps. We would put these three sharp sticks right about where the forefeet of the deer would hit. You'd just set the sticks about four inches from where his forefeet would hit the ground, and you'd set the sticks leanin' towards the brush fence, and they would be one in the center and two on the side and about two inches apart. When he jumped, you would sure get

'im right about the point of the brisket. He'd hardly ever miss 'em, and you'd find 'im right there. Oh, sometimes he'd pull up a stick and run a piece with it, but he didn't run very far.

"I been listenin' to the radio about Cap'n McNelly and I tell you it didn't sound right to me. In what way? Why, they never was no cattle on the steamboats down the Rio Grande. I just tell you they was no way of shippin' cattle on a steamboat. They couldn't get 'em down the hatch and they couldn't keep 'em on deck and they wasn't no wharf to load 'em, either. I was there and I seen them boats too long and I know they never shipped no cattle on them steamboats. After they crossed the Rio Grand into Mexico, they might have been shipped from some port down there, but all them cattle they crossed was swum across. They was big boats, but they wasn't no stock boats. They shipped lots of cotton on them steamboats, but they wasn't fixed to ship no cattle. They was up there for freight and passengers. The passengers was going on down the Gulf, maybe to

New Orleans. They would get on at Brownsville. The steamboats couldn't go very fur up the river only in high water, but they could come up to Brownsville all the time.

"I was in the Ranger service for about a year with Captain McNeely, or until he died. I was his guide. I was living thirty-five miles above Brownsville. I was working for a man right there on the place by the name of John Cunningham. It was called Bare Stone. You see, hit was a ranch there. McNelly was stationed there after the government troops moved off. They had 'em (the troops) there for a while, but they never did do no good, never did make a raid on nothin.' I was twenty or twenty-one. How come me to get in with McNelly, they had a big meadow there, a big 'permuda' (Bermuda) grass meadow. Me and another fellow used to go in there, and John Cunningham furnished Cap'n McNelly hay for his horses. That's how come me to get in with 'im. Fin'ly, he found out I knew all about that country and sometimes he would come over there and get me to map off a road, though they wasn't but one main

road right there. So, one day I was over in the camp with 'im and I say, 'Cap'n, how would you like to give me a job to work with you?' He said, 'I'd like to have you all right, but you couldn't come here on state pay, and under no responsibility.' I told 'im that was all right. I knew how I was going to get my money, 'cause I gambled. Sometimes I would have a hundred or a hundred, twenty-five dollars. durin' the month I would win from the soljers dealin' monte or playin' seven-up. They wasn't no craps in them days. We played luck too; we never had no shenani-gans, a-stealin' a man's money. If you had a good streak o' luck, you made good; if you didn't, you was out o' luck. Sometimes, I had up as high as twenty-five or thirty dollars.

"One thing about the cap'n, he'd tell his men -- well, we had a sutler's shop right across from our camp, all kinds of good drinks -- and he would tell his men he didn't care how much they drank but he didn't want any of 'em fighting'. He kep' 'em under good control.

"You see, they was all dependin' on me for

guidin'. There was no way for them cow rustlers or bandits to get to the cow ranches after they crossed the river (Rio Grande) excep' to cross that road, for there was no other way for 'em to get out there. You see, there was where it would be easy for me, pickin' up a trail. I would just follow that road on if I had a certain distance to go, and if I didn't find no trail I would come back and report, and if I would find a trail he would ask me how many they was and where they was goin', and I would tell 'im which way, 'cause I didn't know exactly where they was goin' to round-up. He would always give 'em about two or three days to make the round-up from the time that trail crossed. And we always went to meet 'em, or catch 'em at the river. We got into two or three real bad combats.

"The worst one was on Palo Alto Prairie, one of Santa Anna's battle grounds. About twelve or fifteen miles east of old Brownsville. They was sixteen of the bandits and they was

fifteen of 'em killed -- all Meskins excep' one white man. One Meskin escaped. The cap'n just put 'em all up together in a pile and sent a message to Brownsville to the authorities and told 'em where they was at and what shape they was in. They must have had two hundred or two hundred and twenty-five head (of cattle) with 'em. It was open country and they would get anybody's cattle. They just got 'em off the range.

"They mostly would cross that road at night, and by me gettin' out early next mornin' and findin' that trail, I could tell pretty much how old it was. I reckon that place wasn't over thirteen miles from Brownsville and our camp was thirty-five miles. I guess it must have been twenty-five miles from our camp to where we had that battle. We sure went there to get 'em. I trailed them horses and I knowed from the direction they was takin' that they was goin' to those big lakes called Santa Lalla. They was between Point Isabel and Brownsville

and that made us about a forty-five mile ride to get to that crossin', to a place called Bagdad, right on the waters of the Rio Grand.

"We got our lunch at Brownsville and started out to go to this crossin'. I knowed right about where this crossin' was and I says to the cap'n, 'Don't you reckon I better go and see if they was any sign?' We stayed there about three hours and didn't hear a thing. And then the cap'n said, 'Boys, we better eat our lunch'. While we was eatin', we heard somebody holler, and he said, 'Boys, there they are!' And he said to me, 'Ben, you want to stay with the horses or be in the fun?' And I said, 'I don't care! So he said, 'You better stay with the horses; you ain't paid to kill Meskins! I went out to where the horses were. The rangers were afoot in the brush. It was about an hour from the time we heard the fellow holler before the cattle got there. When the rangers placed themselves on the side of the road, the Meskins didn't know what they was goin' to get into!

"The Meskins was all singin' at the top of their voices and they was comin' on in. The cap'n waited till they went to crossin' the herd, he waited till these rustlers all got into the river behind the cattle, and then the cap'n opened fire on the bandits. They didn't have no possible show. They was in the water, and he just floated 'em down the river. They was one man got away. I saw 'im later, and he told me about it. The way he got away, he says he was a good swimmer and he just fell off his horse in the water and the swift water took 'im down and he just kep' his nose out of the water and got away that way. They was fo'teen in that bunch, I know.

"The echo of the shootin' turned the cattle back to the American side. The lead cattle was just gettin' ready to hit the other side of the river when the shootin' taken place and the echo of the shootin' turned 'em and they come back across. Now, in swimmin' a bunch of cattle, if you pop your whip, you are just as liable



to turn 'em back, or if you holler the echo might turn 'em back. It'll do that nearly every time.

"After the fight, the cap'n says to the boys, 'Well, boys, the fun is all over now, I guess we'd better start back to camp.' And they all mounted their horses and begun singin':

"O, bury me not on the lone prairie-e-e  
Where the wild coyotes will howl o'er me-e-e,  
Right where all the Meskins ought to be-e-e!"