



Frontier Folklore & Pioneer Prose from Harvey County

by Darren McMannis

Eulogy for a Cow: Wrong Place, Wrong Time

It was a normal Thursday morning, a routine summer day in 1891. The good folk of Walton were just sitting down to enjoy their lunch, when without warning the dishes began to tremble. Soon everyone in town had gathered down by the train tracks to see the cause of all the commotion.

One cow lay dead. It wasn't her fault; she was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. Her ride from Texas in the 9th car behind the engine hadn't been enjoyable, but it had been safe enough for her and her companions - until she got to Walton, Kansas.

The 5th car of the east-bound Santa Fe freight train suddenly jumped the track at the switch, for no reason that was ever determined. It and the 3 cars following, all filled with wheat, were reduced to splinters within seconds. Bessie's car, the one following the 4 wheat cars, was run off the track and then partly turned over on its side. That action pinned Bessie at the bottom of the pile, and there she met her demise.

The rest of the afternoon, Santa Fe Superintendent Turner and a crew came up from Newton and finally succeeded in getting the cattle car back on the track. The freight was again on its way, minus the wheat and one cow.

One of the wheat cars had struck a west-bound freight train that was waiting to take the track, which broke off the pilot and bruised it up a bit. "It was a very narrow escape for the west-bound engineer but fortunately no one was hurt," one witness remarked. No one, except for poor old Bessie.

No mention was ever made as to her final disposition. It is not believed, however, that any of her Texas companions ever returned to visit Walton again.

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