



Falling Horseback into a Well

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Article Summary: A homesteader’s 1906 anecdote

Falling Horseback Into a Well

By F. J. COIL

It was the year 1906 and the last Friday in October—a date I shall never forget—when it began to snow and did not let up for three days and nights. A good old-time blizzard, it was. When the sun came out the following Tuesday there was a blanket of from one to ten feet (possibly more) all over the country.

I was batching on my homestead in Dawes County. I had eight hundred lambs, fifty head of cattle and ten head of horses. I had plenty of range but not much hay, and of course everything was covered with snow. So I started out to try and buy some hay. Riding across country my horse stumbled, and the next thing horse, brush, timbers, snow and homesteader were at the bottom of an old well about twenty-five feet deep. It had been covered with rotten timbers and brush—just enough to make a nice drift, and when the horse tried to cross it, down we went. It was a sensation!

The horse went wild, fighting for his life, striking and biting at everything within reach. Around and around in the old well we went, the horse on his two hind legs until finally he got winded.

Then I saw a small root of a tree growing across the wall about fifteen feet from the bottom. During one of those spells when the horse stopped for wind I got up on the front of the saddle and made a jump for the root. After trying several times I caught hold of it. By then my horse was fairly mad, and no wonder. Again and again he tried to reach me with his teeth.

The grass had grown around the well and part way down inside. I was just able to reach it. Fortunately prairie grass is tough. After several efforts I managed to pull myself up and get hold of a pine tree about two feet from the well. That little old pine, along with the grass, saved my life. I got out finally, and though it seemed a year it was probably not over thirty minutes.

The claim of C. H. Britton was about a mile away, and as soon as I could get my breath I walked over there. He and his two sons, Howard and Charles, got a team, block and tackle, and we cut some trees to make a derrick and hurried back to the well. The horse was completely done for and badly bloated, but finally we got the hook under the saddle horn and pulled him out. I left him at the Britton place and borrowed one of his horses to ride home, avoiding the well this time. In a few days I went back after him and found him none the worse for the experience.

It was a thrilling day in our life, but once was more than enough.