

# **One Great Ranch, Three Great Tales**

By George Carmack

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Bonnie and I spent only a day at the Gallagher Ranch. We came away with enough material to write a book. There are three great stories in connection with the 10,000-acre Gallagher Ranch, which is only 23 miles northwest of San Antonio off the Bandera Road.

One is the story of Peter Gallagher – the Irish boy who came to the United States at 17 and became one of San Antonio and Texas’ great pioneers.

His cattle brand - the “Circle G” – was the first cattle brand registered in Bexar County. It is still registered and active.

A stone aqueduct built under his supervision a hundred years ago can still be traced across the land and was used as recently as World War II.

## **Second Story**

The second story is that of the first dude ranch in Texas – that same Gallagher Ranch.

It first became a dude ranch in 1926 and has been host to some of the greatest names in the nation – H. G. Wells, the historian, and Orson Welles, the actor – Lily Pons and Grace Moore of opera fame – famed dancers Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn stars of the Ziegfeld Follies – and business tycoons and public officials and their families from across the nation.

Will James, the great cowboy artist and writer, wrote his autobiography, “Lone Cowboy” in a room there 40 years ago.

The room is a section of the ranch house built by Peter Gallagher. In some of the stone walls there still are rifle slits used in defense against the Indians.

## **Story No. 3**

The third story – and probably the best – is that of friendly perky, active Mrs. Amy McNutt who in her 80’s is still running the ranch.

She is not averse to cooking for a dining room filled with deer hunters if it takes that to see to it that the food meets her exacting standards.

While she is doing this she is handling the financial affairs for six trust and foundations – including the making the investments. She is also an active college trustee and on other boards.

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### **Potash Found**

She and her husband and modestly she gives all the credit to him - in the early 1920's found the great potash deposits near Carlsbad, N.M.

This was the first discovery of potash in the Western Hemisphere.

It led to one of the nation's great mining operations.

### **End of Era**

In a sense an era ended this year.

Gallagher Ranch stopped its dude ranch operations.

It will still be operated as a cattle ranch and hunting operations will be continued.

“Bonnie and I fell in love with the Gallagher Ranch from the moment we entered it.

The ranch road winds among the cedars and the oaks along San Geranium Creek, one of the prettiest of the matchless Hill Country streams.

### **Aqueduct**

Here we had our first look at the unbelievable stone aqueduct Peter Gallagher build about 100 years ago.

The stone wall on each side is about two feet thick and the ditch between them is five or six feet wide. At times the walls rise several feet above the ground.

The house borders three sides of the great yard in the style of a Spanish hacienda.

### **Two Sections**

Two sections of it were built by Peter Gallagher. One long wing was built in early dude ranch days.

Mrs. McNutt took direct charge of the ranch on the death of her husband, Vachel H. McNutt.

She was her own architect and “construction foreman” for additions that joined all parts of the house together.

“We have 35 fireplaces in the house.” Mrs. McNutt reported. “We have cut 650 cords of wood for use this winter.”

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### **Deer Hunters**

There were deer hunters at the ranch Saturday and fires were going in their rooms.

Is there anything prettier than blue smoke curling up from a row of chimneys?

And what can match the unforgettable perfume of burning mesquite!

### **Geologist**

McNutt was a consulting geologist with clients all over the United States and, by choice, they had moved to San Antonio in the early 1920's.

"We had a good friend, Pat Casey, a real estate man and a great enthusiast for whatever idea he had at the moment," Mrs. McNutt said. "One day he came bursting into my husband's office and said:

"Texas has got everything! But did you know Texas does not have a single dude ranch. Can you imagine that! And I know just the place for one."

### **Gallagher**

Casey was talking about the Gallagher Ranch and in time the McNutts owned it.

Casey started the dude ranch part of the operation and later it was taken over by a wealthy socialite from Albany, N.Y.

She brought some of the wealthiest families of the North and East to the ranch.

"The operator was so charming and the atmosphere so carefree that the guest had the times of the life," Mrs. McNutt said.

### **Wealthy**

"Once an extremely wealthy woman came to Gallagher Ranch with her own crepe de chine sheets and her English maid.

"There were two rooms in her second-floor suite and the woman slept in the front room reached by an outside stair. But there was no entrance to the room where the maid slept.

"The lady wanted the maid to wake her by bringing her breakfast in bed. But she didn't want to be disturbed until then.

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### **Solution**

“Finally a solution was reached. Each morning two cowboys would put a ladder up to the maid’s window and then stand by to help her down.

“Here would come the maid – in a long-skirted, formal British’s maid’s uniform – with a cap and even a maid’s veil down her back. She was scared to death, but finally she would make it.

“Then she would get the elaborate breakfast, put it on a silver tray and solemnly march back to her mistress’ room.”

### **Cowboys**

The rich young girls out of the East really fell for the cowboys. Mrs. McNutt continued:

“During this era, there were seven marriages, between eastern socialites and the cowboys.

“Six of these marriages turned out fine.

“The seventh ended in divorce but maybe this was to be expected for the bride had been married four times previously.”

### **Great Days**

The great days of the ranch came after Mrs. McNutt took direct charge in 1936.

“We had some wonderful people helping on the ranch.” Mrs. McNutt said. There were three cowboys named Jones – all related – Heck, Slick, and Sash.

“I remember when Lily Pons was here. Slick who was a great horseman took delight in riding by Miss Pons and swooping her up into the saddle.

“We would admonish Slick – ‘You’re going to drop Miss Pons.’ But she would look up and say in that delightful way of hers:

“Oh, Sl-e-e-e-k is b-e-e-g, he will not drop me.”

### **Generations**

Four generations of at least six well-known families came to the ranch over the years. One was the family of one of Texas’ most colorful oilman, J. S. Cullinan, founder of Magnolia Petroleum.

“At one time we had about 4,000 Angora goats.” Mrs. McNutt said.

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“Mr. Cullinan liked to sit on the top rail of the corral as the goats were brought in and compare certain goats with individuals he knew.”

### **Rocker**

There is a great rocker still at Gallagher Ranch that Mrs. McNutt had made for the late Will Clayton, the head of Anderson-Clayton Cotton Co.

Clayton was once assistant secretary of state and there are those who will tell you he was the actual originator of the Marshall Plan.

### **Authority**

The real authority on Peter Gallagher is C. Stanley Banks, the San Antonio lawyer and Texas historian.

Banks was kind enough to give me some material on Gallagher.

The Gallagher home in San Antonio adjoined the Alamo. The state bought it in 1936 and tore it down to complete the Alamo garden. Part of Joske's is on the grounds of the Gallagher home.

### **Immigrant**

Gallagher, an Irish immigrant, was on the ill-fated Santa Fe expedition in 1841.

He was among those captured and taken to Mexico City as a prisoner.

Gallagher once ran a freight line between San Antonio and Chihuahua. He was active in the early days of Fort Stockton and at his death owned much property, there as well as in the San Antonio area. During the Civil War era he was county judge of Bexar County.

### **Indian Raids**

He acquired the Gallagher Ranch in 1850 – while it was still subject to Indian raids. The 10,000 acres has never been split and today is still the same ranch Gallagher owned.

The story of Mr. and Mrs. McNutt is a saga of the early days of oil.

McNutt was a pioneer in oil geology.

He taught courses in it at Missouri School of Mines when there were only three such courses in the U. S.

In 1912 the McNutts moved to Tulsa where he opened one of the first oil geology consulting offices.

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### **Roam U.S.**

The McNutts then roamed the U. S. on the search for oil.

“As early as 1915 we were traveling over Montana and Wyoming in a Ford automobile,” Mrs. McNutt said. “We carried two planks a foot wide and 16 feet long with us so we could bridge arroyos or get out of mudholes.”

McNutt discovered the first oilfield in New Mexico – near Artesia. While prospecting in this area he found the great potash deposit.

Thanks to his knowledge of minerals and chemistry from his teaching days, he knew what he had when he came on the potash.

### **Ranch Tour**

Mack Green, foreman of the ranch, took us for a tour of the ranch Saturday afternoon.

We saw many deer as we drove through the wooded hills and the grassy valleys.

The ranch also has many wild turkeys and its most exotic animal is the wild Russian boar.

Mrs. McNutt prepared one of her favorite dishes for the deer hunters Saturday night – chili made with venison and Russian boar meat.

### **Horsewoman**

Mrs. McNutt once was a fine horsewoman with champion five-gaited saddle horses and fine harness horses.

The tradition of great horses lives on the ranch.

Green has race horses of the Count Fleet line and Two Bars and Go Man, Go quarter horses.

We saw four of them running gracefully around a corral - a corral built more than 100 years ago of hand-split cedar rails.