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Horsetrading: An East Texas Study in Establishing Context

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Rushing,

Jon Rhett

1991

**HORSETRADING:
AN EAST TEXAS STUDY IN ESTABLISHING CONTEXT**

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Folk Studies
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Jon Rhett Rushing
July 1991

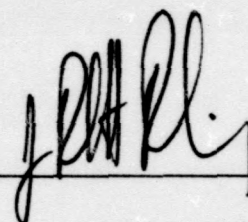
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Horse trading:
An East Texas Study in Establishing Context

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**HORSETRADING:
AN EAST TEXAS STUDY IN ESTABLISHING CONTEXT**

Jon Rhett Rushing July, 1991 83 pages

Directed by: Michael Ann Williams, Erika Brady, and F. E. Abernethy
Department of Folk Studies Western Kentucky University

Scholarship to date on the subject of horsetrading and horsetraders has been primarily narrative collections with a minimum of attention paid to the cultural context within which the horsetrader lives and works. This thesis focuses on the lives and dealings of several horsetraders in a five county region in middle to southern east Texas.

Beginning with a discussion of the merits and failings of existing scholarship, I outline the historical background leading to the unique regional context and strong sense of independence in my area of study. A combination of early isolation, radical economic and political swings, and a strong southern Baptist presence work to give this region a particular character that both condemns and supports a number of horsetraders.

Long ethically suspect, the horsetrader here has evolved from the travelling gypsy trading stock over vast areas into a fixed, though feared member of the community. The question of ethics arises in a flexible duality on the community's part as they teach and preach against all that they believe the trader guilty of, yet continually suspend these ethical values as they enter into the trader's world and attempt to beat him at his own game. A vast bank of community narrative exists to warn of the trader's deceptions, yet should a community member ever best the trader, his social status skyrockets with David and Goliath-like fame.

In order to grasp the nuances and subtleties of the trader's craft, I then describe aspects of the horsetrade in light of current folklore theory. There are elements of both folk drama and gaming in the verbal dueling and strategy of the trade, but nothing that can affix the interchange to either genre. Next I explore many of the deceptions for which the traders have become known, and more often, have become victims of themselves.

My final concern is with the changes that have taken place in the trader's world. Agribusiness that no longer relies on animal power coupled with widespread urbanization has depleted the market for horses in many respects. A new class of customers now acquire horses for specific, convenient needs, and often these are only temporary. The horsetrader has been forced to adapt to these changes or retire completely.

In summation, the region and people I studied are responsible for a unique environment that both shuns and supports horsetraders. The community depends upon the reputations of the traders to serve as examples of improper behavior and lifestyle, yet applauds the individual who can enter their ethical hinterland and return successful, (i.e. having suspended acceptable ethics). The duality works on several levels, and pervades the region and the trades, forming the very context within which the trader exists.

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Introduction

East Texas, though only one of many regions within the state of Texas, is still a big piece of earth. From the rivers of the north through the pines and red dirt, down through the Big Thicket and into the lowland swamps and coastal areas, East Texas covers a distance roughly equivalent to a trip from New York City to Washington, D.C., with at least as many culturally and geographically distinct areas in between.

Horses have figured prominently in the settlement and working of East Texas soil for the past three hundred years. Prior to the advent of mechanized agriculture, horses were the mainstay of farm power and transportation. A farmer's success or failure depended heavily upon the quality of his livestock, and the ability to upgrade and improve livestock ensured the continued success of the farm. Horsetrading stands as an obvious extension of this desire to improve, and as the practice grew, a few specialists emerged. With the coming of industrialization and the mechanization of lifestyles throughout East Texas, horsetrading dropped in economic significance, yet retained a particular mystique still valued in my region of study.

My research with these specialized horsetraders in the southern half of East Texas (see figure 1) covers five counties (Newton, Jasper, Liberty, Hardin, and Nacogdoches) and begins with an historical insight to the peculiar realities of life in this region. It is this historical overview that guides the rest of my research.

Map courtesy of: Texas State Department of Highways and Public Transportation, Austin, Texas

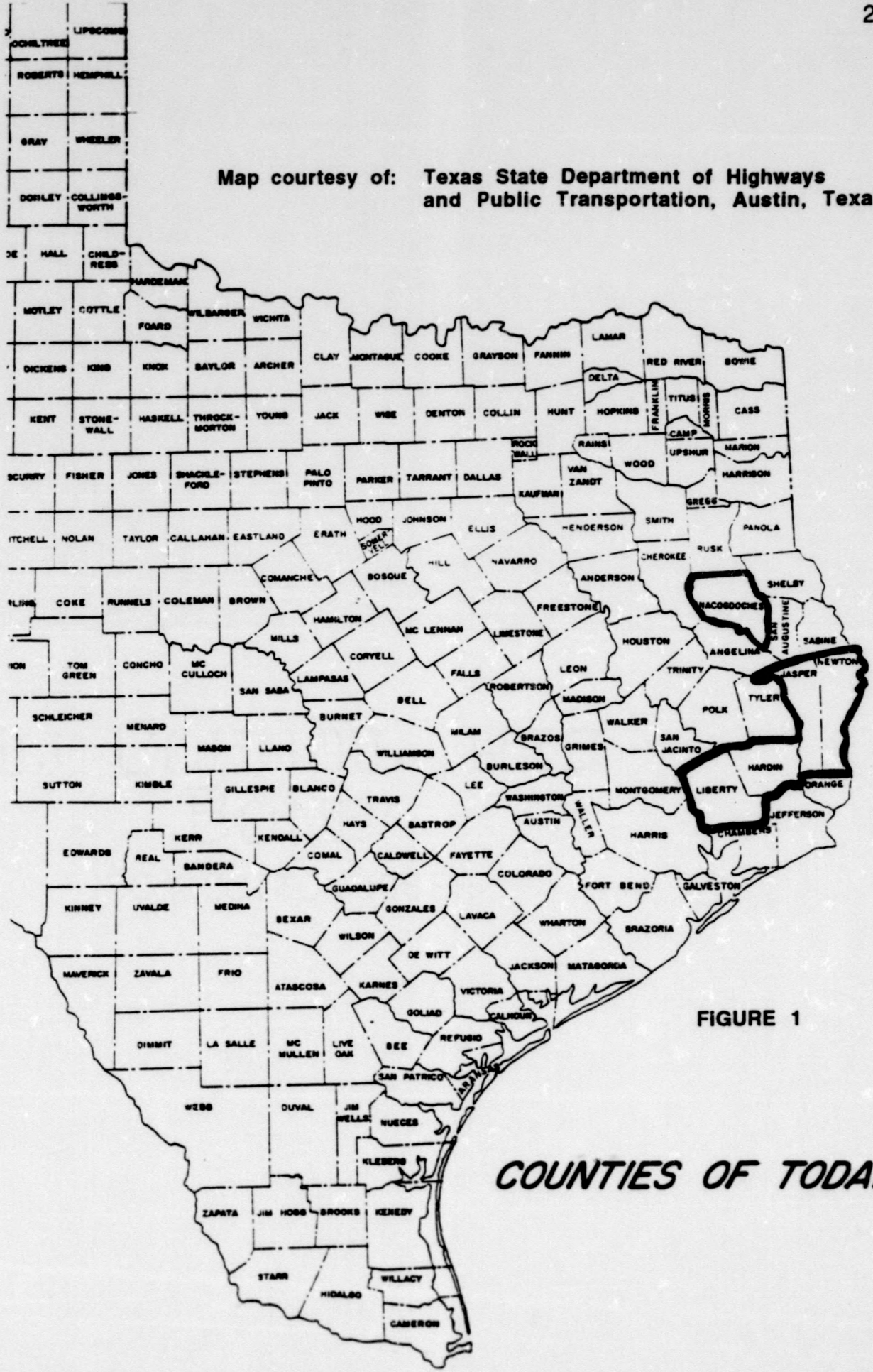


FIGURE 1

COUNTIES OF TODAY

Many other members of the communities in my study, like the horsetraders themselves, retain a sense of values and lifestyle associated more with a time horsetrading held greater economic and social significance. This is not to label rural East Texas as backward or resistant to change, but suggests a deeply religious and conservative system of values and ethics.

The community surrounding and supporting a horsetrader and his practice has as much to do with the horsetrader's craft as the horses he trades. All transactions take place within the social constructs set forth by the community, and any scholarship concerning horsetraders without detailed attention paid to the context established by the community would be negligent.

It became clear in my research that community values and ethical systems not only determined the hows and whys of the horsetrader's business, but actually utilized the trader's mystique and storied reputation to define those systems. From the interviews and information I collected, the significance of the trading context began to emerge. I felt it more important to document and describe the context in which horsetrading in these four counties of East Texas occurred, than to amass reminiscences over bygone days of old, or another amusing collection of horsetrading narratives.

My informants in this project were all men in their mid-to-late sixties who were raised within one hundred miles of where they were currently living. This evidence of near-permanence within a particular region supported my hypothesis concerning the inseparable relationship between community and horsetrader. Although I found only one horsetrader per community, each trader

moved freely among neighboring communities throughout the four-county region. Most of my informants either knew or knew of the other traders in the region, and many had actually traded with the others. Each informant freely told stories about other traders, and it was this network of trading narratives that began my study. The nature of my research required that I move from event to event and from trader to trader as the contact and interview network grew. By working with one informant and then following his leads, I found myself in a loosely supported system of horsetraders and their shared experiences. These men had travelled and traded well beyond the boundaries of East Texas, but I held my focus to those responses within the southern half of East Texas.

My fieldwork took place during the summer of 1987 while I was working as an intern for the University of Texas' Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio. The Institute provided me with a modest expense account and an attention-getting white station wagon with "Property of the State of Texas" emblazoned upon the doors. Though a real savings on personal expenses, this vehicle presented me with several difficulties.

At the time of my fieldwork, several teams of federal investigators had recently made a sweep through the Sabine River bottoms in search of marijuana farms and drying sheds. Working with informants in areas somewhat sensitive to official government, my first duty was often to address the raised eyebrows brought on by the station wagon. In a region whose history has been filled with illicit trade and racial tension, anyone official was suspect.

After establishing initial contact, my next challenge was to gain permission to tape-record their information. All interviews took place at the homes or places of business of my informants for reasons of privacy and comfort. Taping sessions lasted two hours on the average, with some follow-up sessions to double check information.

At this point I wish to interject a statement addressing any ethical issues I may have encountered. One goal of my fieldwork was to enter into and deserve the confidence of my informants. Such a rapport could at times lead to information well beyond the scope of my research, thereby prompting me to edit carefully and limit access to my findings. All tapes recorded during my fieldwork are stored in my personal archives. Due to the sensitive nature of some of the material contained on the tapes, I am forced to limit public access, but scholastic use of the information I collected is encouraged with written permission.

All my informants claimed to be retired. This proved very important in my grasp of the trader's mindset, for only one informant actually admitted making his living as a horsetrader. As these men retired from some other line of work, each drew a monthly social security check and were not allowed to supplement their federal incomes beyond a certain point. Exploiting the legality of fifty years of unreported incomes or other questionable practices is not the duty of this project. I focus instead on the peculiar framework within which these traders live and operate.

Looking at the nature of horsetrading in my region of study through the particular lens of community context, I began to see the

essential interdependence between community and horsetrader. Due to the unique contextual elements present, horsetrading and horsetraders were both feared and revered, and somehow essential to the identity of the community.

I wish to thank Dr. James C. McNutt with the University of Texas' Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio for his continued support; my informants and their families for such wonderful hospitality; Dr. F.E. Abernethy at Stephen F. Austin State University for his influence and editorial patience; my committee at Western Kentucky University, Drs. Michael A. Williams and Erika Brady for their flexibility; and my wife Brenda and my family for their continued drive and support. This work is dedicated to my father, Paul D. Rushing, and to the memory of my grandfather, L. L. Rushing. The sins of the fathers were never so joyously visited upon the sons.

"You can't fall in love with them." - Bobby Eubanks

Setting the Table: A Review of Literature and Description of Methods and Informants

Every journey begins with a first step, and my study of the horsetrading context in the southern half of East Texas began in libraries and book collections across the country. As the grandson of a horsetrader, I had grown up hearing the stories and gleaned a sense of pride from one person's ability to outwit another in a trade. This interest led me to printed collections of other traders' narratives and to the discovery that very little in the way of scholarly research had ever been attempted on the subject.

The late Ben K. Green, a veterinarian from Cumby, Texas, spent his youth trading horses all across the country. His trading experience began in and around the wagon yards and stock barns once common near the major railhead cities in turn-of-the-century America. Though Green wrote of several trades between individuals, most of his narratives concerned the "live-buying" and shipping of hundreds of animals at a time. He spent years as a contract buyer for stock barns in Chicago, Fort Worth, and all over Mississippi and recorded personal narratives emphasizing the magnitude and number of his deals.

Green's collections of tales were published primarily in the books Horse Tradin' and Some More Horse Tradin' (Green 1967, 1970).

He provided an excellent picture of the contract animal buyer in the 1920s and 1930s and offered a limited grasp of the national horsetrading market of the time. Unfortunately, his humorous reminiscence is strictly a pleasant gathering of anecdotes, with few clues as to the context in which the trades occurred. Green's goal was to provide entertainment through fond remembrance, and he acknowledged the inevitable demise of horsetrading as he had practiced it by tagging his collection of narratives "Hoss Trades of Yesteryear" (Green 1967: xi).

Ben Green's miscellanies did offer the scholar an insight into the mindset of the early twentieth century horsetrader and shed light on several negotiating techniques and deceptions common to horsetrading narratives. His classifications of trader types (road traders, live buyers, and barn traders) proved helpful to my understanding of the relationships between horsetraders and their communities, as he introduced the distinction between traders based on proximity and permanence.

It is important to note here that Green did little if any trading in his home community. Most of the stories in his collections dealt with great distances travelled and people from all over the country. In two stories, however, Green proposed the idea of barn traders that were impeccably honest because of their permanence in the community. In trades with members of their home community, there could be no doubt as to a trader's honor, but strangers and road traders passing through were fair game. It is here that Green introduced the concept of a duality in the pervading ethic of horsetrading. He did not present the concept in his own words, but

related a string of anecdotes with ethical duality as a common theme.

In 1981 Roger L. Welsch edited and released a collection of horsetrading narratives gathered in 1930s Nebraska under the Federal Writers Project arm of the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Welsch presented the narratives according to categories of his own devising and added several historical updates and explanations for the somewhat scholarly reader. Since Welsch did not collect the material himself and was only able to interview the former director of the Nebraska Writers Project, his material is secondary and static (Welsch 1981: xi). Having been hidden among courthouse records for four decades, these stories provide interesting reading, yet lack the personal contact necessary to assess the context of their telling or of the events which inspired them.

Welsch did comment on the numerous dualities that frequently appear in horsetrades and horsetrading narratives. He noted that neither party in a potential trade could appear eager, for fear they would be taken advantage of or their animal assumed faulty. He also brought forth the apparent contradiction of a "universal and pervasive spirit of honesty that dominated these crooked deals" (Welsch 1981: 5). Welsch's guiding assumption that a horsetrader went through life a disreputable outcast without friends or respect reflected a bias irresponsibly brought to the editorial table. Welsch made the distinction between road traders and barn traders in terms of permanence and degree of honesty in his introduction, then proceeded to juxtapose the two with his generalizations throughout

the work. His implied thesis dealt with the ethical duality of horsetraders, yet the only dualities he presented were between the types of traders themselves. To Welsch's credit, he presented a brief look at the trading narratives concerning structural elements. In a comparison to a chess game, Welsch described the trading event in terms of "moves"--delicate and cautious in the beginning, but quick and dramatic in their conclusion.

The reader must remember that the static collection of narratives from which Welsch drew were not recorded on tape or even in shorthand, but written down days and sometimes weeks after the interview. Welsch gave credit to the chronicler, Harold J. Moss, for his skills and memory, but the methods were inaccurate by current fieldwork standards. Moss may have used all the resources available to him at the time, but Welsch, forty years later, cannot rely on secondary memorates to be exact representations. Without a level of certainty concerning field data, proper analysis becomes guesswork at best. The reader must also recall that the focus of my study is horsetrading within the regional context. Discussion of the trading event is secondary to contextual examination and serves only to provide insight into the greater context as a whole.

Another effort came from Leroy Daniels of Iowa. Daniels traded all types of stock from the beginning of this century until his one-hundredth birthday in 1982. From his retirement, he recounted his memoirs to an eager relative with a tape recorder. This tome is a labor of love and little else. There are any number of amusing anecdotes about Indians and working cattle in freezing weather, but his descriptive accounts of horse and mule buying for the Allied

Armies during the first World War remind the reader of Ben Green's "live-buying" tales.

Begun in 1967 and published in 1987, Daniels' book did anticipate the changing nature of horsetrading across the country. As the nation became increasingly automated and mechanized, Daniels had the foresight to shift his trade to luxury stock. Purebreds, registered horses, and show animals replaced plowhorses, while racing stock remained ever-popular. The alluded-to "Golden Age" of horsetrading prior to the widespread acceptance of the tractor and the automobile ended with the Depression and the beginning of the second World War, and Daniels was able to change with the times. My grandfather was considered a consummate trader because he was willing to deal in "anything he could make a nickel on" (Bishop 1987: 0025). Daniels' flexibility in a changing market and his open-minded approach to trading certainly included him in that category.

William Ferris has interviewed, studied, written about and filmed muletrader Ray Lum for two decades. Ray Lum traded and travelled throughout the South for most of his life, and Ferris took great pains to document his peculiar language and style. In his film "Ray Lum: Muletrader," Ferris used every possible situation to display the verbal agility of the trader's craft. Strictly an occupational folklore study, Ferris emphasized the importance of linguistic ambiguity and patter in making a trade.

As Ferris explained in his article "The Horse Trader in Anglo-American History," the trader depended upon humor, deception, and veiled truth in doing business. Ferris went on to suggest that

successful traders tended to be good storytellers and that each trader interviewed had his own initiation story of a first trade gone sour. All traders paid for their lessons with financial or emotional embarrassment, and began a lifetime of alertness to the duplicity of trading.

Ferris appeared interested in only the history and verbal agility of horsetrading and horsetraders, and his thorough documentation left little room for scholarly advancement. From his article in North Carolina Folklore, "Ray Lum: Muletrader," Ferris offered thirteen pages of documentation with only two pages of summary and scholarship on verbal agility (Ferris 1973: 105-119). As reference material, Ferris's works provided valuable comparisons and thorough collections, but lacked in theoretical substance.

In 1981 Richard Bauman published "Any Man Who Keeps More'n One Hound'll Lie to You" and presented some of the finest scholarship to date on the context and performance of trading. His focus on the negotiations of dog traders at Canton, Texas, highlighted the perceptions and expectations of lying as part of the event. As a performance-oriented folklorist, Bauman worked to illustrate that lying was an important and expected part of the dog trade, and might possibly be more responsible for a gathering of interested parties than the prospect of a trade (Bauman 1981: 82). As both Ferris and Welsch discovered, the trade itself held an addictive power over those who participated. Bauman dissected the trading event into elements and assessed value to each aspect (Ferris 1978; Welsch 1981; Bauman 1981).

Bauman emphasized lying, and the extreme efforts on the part of the trader to prove himself otherwise, were anticipated at the heart of any trading event. He proposed that Americans expected traders to be both quick-witted and shrewd and implied that such deceptions were not only natural, but absolutely essential to the proper performance of the trading event (Bauman 1981: 85). Lying, whether merely exaggeration or willful deceit, became implicit in any trade.

Dick Heaberlin, in an unpublished paper presented at the Texas Folklore Society's 1989 meeting, reiterated the horsetrader's concern for the truth, or for the disguising of it. A "snide," an animal with a serious hidden fault, often brought the knowledgeable trader the best financial results (Heaberlin 1989: 3). In passing off defective stock, the trader could usually expect to hear from the buyer when the fault was discovered. When anger subsided or peaked, the duped buyer would generally backtrade and settle for a percentage of his money returned, paying a token amount for the lesson learned at the hands of an experienced trader. Green, Daniels, and Ferris all comment on snides and the act of "sniding" a buyer, while Welsch claimed that backtrades were the most common plot in trading narratives. All sources dealt with the unscrupulous trader that purposefully retained a good snide horse--frequently referred to as a "taw" or "meal ticket"--that would be traded over and over again (Green 1967, Welsch 1981, Daniels 1967, and Ferris 1978).

Heaberlin argued, like Welsch, Green, Ferris, and Bauman, that the trade itself was often the horsetrader's motivation, and not the acquisition of new stock. Heaberlin's informant, his father,

approached the trade as a very serious game, and the score was kept by the money that changed hands. The concept of "boot," money offered to make up the difference in an unequal trade, was common to all my sources and was almost always the measure by which the trader kept score (Heaberlin 1989: 4).

At some point, each of the references I found covered much of the same ground. It became clear that participants and researchers alike found horsetraders and horsetrading to be rife with specialized knowledge, verbal ambiguity, trickery, a grand sense of passionate gamesmanship, and a powerful reputation for all of the above. Horsetrading was no avenue for amateurs, though each narrative collection dealt with episodes of duping the novice.

Several sources alluded to a sense of staging and overt performance--even play--in a horsetrade, but these assessments fell short of current scholarship. The greatest discrepancy in any attempt to label horsetrading as performance centered upon the simple fact that a horsetrade never happened the same way every time. Granted, by definition folklore must exist in variation and be free from a static text, but horsetrades remain unpredictable well beyond the scope of simple variation. The staging, scripting and elements of dramatic performance in a horsetrade are better understood in comparison to current folk drama scholarship and will be addressed in a later chapter.

There are elements of folk drama in each horsetrade--some role-playing (mimesis) and some scripting (patter and repeated phrasings)--but the outcome is not known in advance to all members of the cast, there is no fictive role distribution differing from the

participants' normal selves, and there is no consistent audience. To paraphrase Thomas Green, the inclusion of certain activities, though they might reflect a sense of staging, as folk drama would only result in an unwarranted extension of the genre (Green 1978: 844).

There are also elements of play and gaming present in each trade and trader. The previously mentioned passion for playing is present, but nothing is noted that could be categorized as *ludus* or pure play, and since there are few accepted rules to a horsetrade, nothing that could be considered a folk game (Knapp and Knapp 1976: 17). The same argument applies to any similarities between the horsetrade--even the first horsetrade--and an initiation experience. In a true rite of passage, the performance is ritualized and quite significant to the community. The novice must undergo separation from society, an ordeal, and the reincorporation into society as a changed person (Van Gennep: 1908). The simple duping of a novice in a horsetrade or the loss of an individual's gullibility does not significantly affect the community.

With so few substantive published works on the subject of horsetrading, and no easily compatible genre studies, I looked to my interviews and observations for any pattern they might offer. The traders themselves were keenly aware of their standing in the community and were able to express the context within which they operated, although not in an academic vocabulary.

L. E. "Buddy" Bishop of Timpson, Texas, traded a pig for a .22 rifle when he was seven years old. Born in Pickton, Texas, in 1923, Buddy has been a horsetrader all of his life, though he disguised it by working at several other jobs. Buddy left East Texas to serve in

World War II as a gunner on a tanker ship in the Pacific, and upon his return, went to work in Houston for the railroad for the next thirty years. He constantly traded horses and mules while he worked the railroad job and eventually opened a feed and tack store in north Houston (Bishop 1987: 0000-0235).

Up until his death, L. L. "Luke" Rushing had been a business partner and mentor for Buddy, and when Luke passed away, Buddy took over all aspects of the trading. Upon retiring from the railroad, Buddy dedicated himself to the feed and tack business until he took a personal retirement and moved to Timpson (Bishop 1987: 0315-1565). At the time of this writing, Buddy still dabbled in a little trading now and then, and never missed a horse auction.

Bobby Eubanks was born in Bay Minette, Alabama, before moving with his family to Beaumont, Texas. He first traded a yearling calf for a bicycle, then the bicycle for a mustang pony. He then traded the pony for a wild horse in the trainyard under the condition that his father would approve. Bobby kept that horse until he went into the Navy at the age of sixteen and sold it for ninety dollars. Upon his discharge he settled in Deweyville, Texas, and resumed the horsetrading he had practiced as a kid (Eubanks 1987: 0000-1255). Bobby lived on the Sabine River and spent most of his time trading horses and hunting feral hogs from horseback through the swamps and thickets near his home.

H. C. Long, Jr. of Silsbee, Texas, was my only informant that was a horsetrader by birth. Each trader I interviewed told me stories of Mr. "Hub" Long, H. C.'s father, and how that H. C. could do nothing but trade horses for a living. As is often the case with the

son of a famous father, H. C. grew up in Hub's shadow and admitted feeling that he always had to contend with the memory (Long 1987: 0000-0495).

Whereas his father had been a friend to all, H. C. was reclusive and private. He drank heavily in my presence and offered little information about his personal life. He willingly told stories of his own trades, but refused to talk of his father's reputation. At the time of my interview, H. C. had been divorced ten years, but had recently married Roberta, the mother of his three children--ages 14,12, and 8 (Long 1987: 1005). The Long's lived in a mobile home on the family acreage just north of Silsbee and spent a good deal of their time travelling from sale barn to sale barn to trade.

C. C. Brown lived just north of Kirbyville, Texas, and was considered a fixture at auctions throughout the region. Having lived in the area for eighty years, C. C. had bought and inspected stock for the Army, travelled as a buyer for a soap factory in Fort Worth, and made saddles and bridles for sale until his hands became too arthritic (Brown 1987: 0000-1325). C. C. passed away in the summer of 1987, just twenty days after I had the pleasure of interviewing him.

Each of my primary informants had traded stock since early in their lives and claimed to have never slowed down. Continually cautious and aware of their standing in the community, each was careful to avoid any discussion of money or income. All were equally, and at times painfully, aware that horsetraders carried a reputation for dishonesty and deceit, but each man felt strongly that he had never intentionally done anybody any real harm. There are

stories on my tapes involving trades with customers and other traders that are clearly deceptions on the parts of the traders, but each story was always qualified with enough information to make the customer appear deserving of a raw deal.

Each informant also knew several physical and chemical methods of changing a horse's appearance. Though they often claimed to have had these tricks pulled on them and had since learned what to look for, they gave detailed descriptions of the processes as if they were experts. Horsetrading, especially in their part of East Texas, was certainly replete with ambiguity and deception. The peculiar history of the region seemed to encourage the practice.

Historical Approach to Context

The history of East Texas has long been one of tentative possession and repeated abandonment. There have been many claims upon the territory, but until 1865, no particular group has been able to commit the necessary resources to secure it. At times Indian, Spanish, French, American, Mexican, *Tejano*, Texian, Texan, American again, Confederate, and currently American, East Texas has long been fought over without being properly defined.

The Sabine River becomes the modern Texas-Louisiana border at the Toledo Bend Reservoir, and its immense pine forests and vast lowland swamps render the area physically and culturally distinct. Both refuge and resource, the physical properties of lower East Texas have long played a major role in defining its character.

Since Antonio Nunez Cabeza de Vaca's shipwreck on the Texas coast in 1528, Spain and people of Spanish descent have laid some form of claim to the northern lands of what is now the American southwest (Hodge and Lewis 1985: 5). Six years before, Hernan Cortes had conquered the Aztecs in Mexico City, and the government of New Spain established their headquarters on the site of the former capital. With political and trade centers located hundreds of miles in the interior of Mexico, the northern possessions were visited by rare missionary efforts and treasure explorations. The Indians along the way were occasionally hostile, and the distances

to the frontier were too great for New Spain's resources to cover. For the time, the Spanish were content to claim the land without trying to occupy it. After all, before 1680 there was no threat to their monopoly.

By late August of 1680, New Spain's hold on the northern lands suffered a major setback. Far from East Texas in the desert mountains of present-day New Mexico, five heretofore separate and distinct Puebloan tribes revolted against the Spaniards and destroyed almost all of the Spanish effort. Shocked and humiliated, Spain withdrew from most of their northern holdings to formulate a plan for future occupation. It was at this time that conquering the docile, farming Caddoan Indian tribes of East Texas looked much more appealing than hostile Puebloans. Missionary plans were begun, colonists were recruited, and the Spanish made preparations for their move into Texas.

With LaSalle's landing and attempted colonization of Matagorda Bay along the upper Texas coast in 1685, the French occupation threat became instantly real, and the Spanish hurried to respond. LaSalle's expedition failed miserably for a variety of factors unimportant here, but it did gain the competitive attention of the Spanish (Abernethy 1987: 2).

What followed for the next fifty years was a rather redundant system of occupation and desertion of the East Texas border zone. In 1690, a Spanish attempt at colonization near the Neches River lasted barely three years (Heaton, Liedtke, and Wyatt 1985: 3). A second attempt in 1716, the Ramon expedition, came with four missions. The French, who had established a trading post within a

half-day's ride of the proposed site, shortly grew tired of the Spanish presence and destroyed whatever the Spanish tried to construct (Heaton, Liedtke, and Wyatt 1985: 3).

Under protection of the Aguayo expedition of 1721, the third attempt at colonization consisted of provisions for two presidios and one hundred soldiers, thirty of whom brought families (Abernethy 1987: 40). It was then that the Spanish built the Presidio Los Adaes, which became the provisional capital of the Texas province of New Spain from 1729 through 1773 (McCorkle 1984: 3).

Spain's war with France ended in 1762, thereby ceding the Louisiana Territory and alleviating Spanish concerns over border holdings. For eleven years an illegal trade developed across the border that no laws or lawmen could discourage. Los Adaes was just too close to the border and too far from the authorities (McCorkle 1984: 8). The colonists continued their daily routines and put down roots in the area. It was not until May of 1773 that the effects of Governor Ripperda's New Regulation of 1772 reached Los Adaes (Heaton, Liedtke, and Wyatt 1985: 9). With the French threat along the border removed, the Governor felt no need to maintain the presidio and expense of a community so far from the source of command. Los Adaes was deemed an unnecessary expense and was ordered evacuated and relocated to San Antonio de Bexar, nearly four hundred miles away.

Many of the settlers of Los Adaes had been there fifty years or more, and attachments to the land had grown strong. As the mass exodus wore on, several of the families resisted and turned back,

reclaiming their farms and the area near present-day Nacogdoches (McCorkle 1984: 4). Life far from the controls of New Spain had created a strong sense of independence in this isolated pocket of settlement. The colonists worked hard for their freedoms and the sum of their experience at Los Adaes led to a refusal by some to submit to the dictates of Spanish policy (McCorkle 1984: 5).

Between the establishment of Nacogdoches in 1778 and the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, France managed to regain the territory, resurrecting Spanish fears along the border. Compared to the trade-only policy of the French however, the Spanish were better off with the old border than they were when the Americans moved in and changed regional politics forever.

The swamps, thickets, and dense marshes of the Sabine River provided refuge for anyone passing through. With such a vast territory and so many places for an enemy to hide, no armies could effectively patrol the area, and any police entered at great risk. The French, who formerly occupied the region, were interested only in trade and commerce, not landholdings and agriculture. The Americans that ventured into the thickets were often running from the law. For those with a criminal past, the Sabine River meant escape and a new beginning.

For as long as there had been two sides to argue, the border between the Louisiana Territory and Texas had been hotly contested. When the United States officially entered the picture in 1803, New Spain negotiated a buffer zone of security between the two powers, leaving a strip of unclaimed hinterland between Natchitoches and Nacogdoches south through the Big Thicket area for anyone willing to

live there. Free from laws and inspection, this regional gray area of East Texas developed a spirit of independence that would continue to the present day.

The year 1821 brought a Mexican declaration of independence from Spain and a revolution to prove it (Weber 1982: 1). Immigration from America had been legally halted for several years as the Spanish government realized a growing independence in the northern possessions, but the revolution opened the flood gates. No longer under the long-distance domination of Spain, and with the new Constitution of 1824, the fledgling nation of Mexico was headed for growth of immense proportions.

Several principle characters then came into play, all with Mexican permission and approval. Stephen F. Austin became a land empresario, bringing several hundred colonists through East Texas to an area granted him by the government. This scene repeated itself over and over again for the next ten years. With the promise of free or very inexpensive land in exchange for conversion to Roman Catholicism and allegiance to the Constitution of 1824, almost anyone could acquire plenty of Texas for his family (Weber 1982: 162).

As would be expected, a criminal element entered the picture. Imposters selling fake land script to settlers passing through to the real empresarios farther west were stationed in the border zone of East Texas. They would engage the immigrants along the main roads and take them for all they had. Other, less imaginative, hoodlums were drawn to the highways full of travelers carrying the sum of their worldly possessions and merely robbed or killed them, running

off into the protection of the swamps and forests to count their loot.

Amid the immense immigration, General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna came to the Mexican presidency and declared himself dictator. The Constitution of 1824 was suspended, and he set his sights on the growing population to the north. Conflicts abounded and laws changed overnight--all to stop immigration and trade in Texas. It seems that the Tejanos were not paying all the tariffs and taxes that they should be. They were not becoming Roman Catholics, and they were certainly not complying with the General's demands (Weber 1982: 243).

Public opinion got a rapid boost when enough Tejanos gathered at San Antonio de Bexar to defeat the Mexican garrison there under General Cos. The citizens had taken open and aggressive action in an attempt to restore the 1824 Constitution, and the seeds of independence were beginning to bloom. Delegates to a convention of independence were selected and sent to Washington on the Brazos. Santa Anna was outraged when he heard the news and mobilized the Mexican army for Texas.

Santa Anna and his troops arrived by February 23 of 1836. They laid siege to the Alamo for thirteen days as the distant delegates declared independence and the main army of Texas scrambled to assemble elsewhere. On March 6, 1836, the Alamo fell, and the war for Texas independence became a chase. It ended on April 21 when General Sam Houston defeated and captured Santa Anna at San Jacinto. Texas was a free republic, and the border problems were now their own.

After the war, Texas experienced an immense flood of American immigrants. Cheap land and a friendly government were all that was necessary to triple the existing population in eight years. The pockets of populated East Texas grew steadily and, though still fiercely autonomous, were now beginning to stabilize politically, until the Civil War.

Texas joined the Union in 1848 and grew peacefully for awhile, but enough Texans fell in with the enthusiasm to vote for secession before the Civil War broke out (Ramsdell 1910: 17). Although thousands of Texans fought all over the South, only four battles were fought on Texas soil--one before the news that the war was over reached Texas. As a very important result, there was no damage to existing Texas resources. Farms and livelihoods had been destroyed all across the South, and with the carpetbaggers grabbing up land for back taxes, Texas once again became a place of escape and a new beginning (Ramsdell 1910: 23).

Settlement patterns followed much the same tendencies as pre-war migration, with those from the upper South stopping in the wooded regions of East Texas while those from the lower South took to the sprawling Gulf coast (Ferris and Wilson 1989: 538). From Florida westward, many barns and buildings left standing carried the famous "GTT" or "Gone To Texas" in whitewash--a testimonial across the South to hopes for the future in a new land (Ferris and Wilson 1989: 659).

Reconstruction in Texas was no easier than anywhere else in the South. Actually, many argue that it was actually more violent and more painful in Texas due to the intense belief that Texas itself

had not lost, while the rest of the South had. General Grant appointed E.J. Davis as Reconstruction Governor, creating immediate and painful problems (Ramsdell 1910: 200).

The issues that caused trouble throughout the South also created discomfort in Texas. Suddenly black men were no longer the property of their owners, and could vote, hold office, and own land just like any white male (Ramsdell 1910: 44). Money was nowhere to be found, and a great deal of land changed hands to those who came down from the banks of the Northeast (Holland 1984: 9). The big plantations along the lower Brazos and the Gulf were divided and sold, while the small farms of East Texas were fiercely defended and few changed owners.

It was during Reconstruction that the independent spirit of East Texas re-emerged. There were violent reactions to the changing social status of blacks, as there were throughout the South, but it was the violence directed at the Reconstruction government itself that stands out in history (Ferris and Wilson 1989: 659).

Governor Davis depended heavily upon his appointed "police" to carry out his directives, and in most of Texas they were not welcome. Vigilantism arose as a recourse to the actions of the police, and two equally vicious groups known as the "Regulators" and the "Moderators" emerged. At first, the former group began as a protection against the evils of the police, but in their overzealous efforts they often became too thorough and extended their vision of justice beyond the parameters of tolerance. The second group grew out of a need to "Moderate the Regulators" so to speak, and the

violence escalated. All in all, the pattern of East Texans' intolerance of outside interference continued to spread.

Prior to the turn of the twentieth century, life in East Texas improved. Reconstruction of the 1870s not only applied to social and governmental functions, but it began a literal application as well. Building and rebuilding began throughout the South, and East Texas had several thousand square miles of virgin pine forest. Sawmills and lumber yards sprang up all through the woods of East Texas after the turn of the century. Lumber jobs were easy to find, and money flowed for the first time in forty years. Once again, a great migration took place, and the wide-open boomtowns centered on the lumber industry lead East Texas into another sense of security.

It did not take long for the open opportunity to fade, and by the mid-1910s all the timber rights that could be bought or stolen had been acquired by one of several major companies operating in the pine forests (Richardson, Wallace, and Anderson 1981: 325). Company towns and company money or "script" replaced prosperity, and the equivalent of "lumber sharecropping" evolved. The brief sense of economic security collapsed, and what labor stability the big companies didn't kill, the advent of mechanization did.

The late Twenties and early Thirties brought confidence in another boom, and this time the end seemed nowhere in sight (Richardson, Wallace, and Anderson 1981: 326). The East Texas Oil Field brought in more natural energy than anyone had seen before, and it was only one of many huge fields discovered within a short time. Jobs abounded, and money poured into the region faster than

people could spend it. Thousands flocked to the fields for jobs in all phases of oil production, and the oil refining industry was born. For another ten years the area experienced a level of prosperity like never before, and as the Great Depression arrived, East Texas felt less of its sting than most of the country.

The oil fields lasted another forty years before most of the mineral rights had been bought up by the big companies that emerged from the boom. The economy was secure until the big oil bust of the 1970s. East Texas is feeling the repercussions still.

The patterns of boom and bust in combination with the independence and regionalism so prevalent in East Texas, spawned several protected and largely isolated communities throughout the forests and swamps of the lower Sabine. Towns like Lufkin, Diboll, Lumberton and Woodville grew to maturity with the lumber boom, while Beaumont owes most of its existence to oil discoveries. The region developed its own particular sense of propriety and order, and derived its own sense of place. Every character element within each community exists and is supported by a traditional expectation born of the fluctuations of history, economics, and migration upon this borderland.

Such a history of repeated occupation and abandonment--of economic boom and bust--left a weathered population committed to self-reliance and independence. Still located in somewhat insular pockets and communities, much of the population in my study area has held stoically to fundamental religious and social values and has evolved a sturdy network of close-knit relationships. The

independent spirit of my informants and their communities nurtures
a context ripe for the horsetrader.

"Among the items included in the forbidden commerce were wine, brandy, horses, and Indian trade goods" (McCorkle 1984: 8).

The Horsetrader's Place

The previous chapter demonstrates that cycles of prosperity and poverty have long been the history of East Texas, yet despite economic and political swings, the region has managed to retain much of its traditional character and flavor. Such a preservation of regional character reflects a cultural defense mechanism still evident, and nothing mirrors this concept like the presence of horsetrading. The context in which horsetrading occurs reflects and involves the most typical and consistent qualities of my region of study.

Prior to the first third of the twentieth century and the advent of mechanized agriculture, East Texas was entirely dependent upon animal power. The animals of choice were horses, for oxen were often too big for work in the pine forests and too heavy for work in the swamps and marshes. Few could afford to own horses purely for pleasure and a strong Baptist presence kept racing to a minimum. In a society of subsistence-plus agriculture, animals either earned their keep or were disposed of in some way (Green 1967: ix). There was no dog food industry in the area prior to the 1940s, and soap was frequently made at home, so the only way to profit from broken-down horses was in trade (Bishop 1987: 2245).

When a member of the community needed tools, the blacksmith was an obvious target. When staples or clothing were in order, the dry goods store emerged to fill the need. Since horseflesh was the primary source for most of the region's labor, horse traders were always tolerated and in constant demand. Though farmers have always traded among themselves, the "specialist" evolved within the local barter economy. With such a vivid history of economic booms and busts, an underlying barter system managed to keep the economy stable. As with any successful barter participant, the horsetrader required a special knowledge that only frequency and experience could teach. Those who handled stock more often became better equipped to determine quality or spot flaws in an animal. Such an advanced degree of knowledge certainly gave the trader an advantage in any trade, and as an extension of this advantage, the trader was able to disguise physical and behavioral flaws in any animal (Ferris 1978: 6; Welsch 1981: 3).

Accompanying such special knowledge was the responsibility to use it with discretion, for formal limits and guidelines on the horsetrader's sense of fair play were non-existent. Only a trader's personal motivation might dictate his sense of business propriety, and if that motivation was solely for profit, buyer beware! Naturally, not all horsetraders operated in the same manner or with the same degree of profit motive. Several factors contributed to the nature of a trader's ethical calling, and in many cases, proxemics and permanence were every bit as important as profit.

Three distinct types of horsetraders existed in East Texas history, and these divisions are based entirely upon the trader's degree of interaction within the community (Green 1967: viii; Welsch 1981: 11). Road traders lived in wagons with a packstring of animals (trading stock) trailing behind them. They travelled across large regions during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries doing business along the way, rarely stopping in one place any longer than it took to trade a few animals and make a few dollars. The road trader tended to pass through an area once every two or more years, though there was always the possibility that he may never return. This cast an element of finality over all transactions (Welsch 1981: 11).

That sense of finality really meant that whatever a member of the community traded for was going to be his for a long time, with no hope of reconciliation or remonstrance. Trading narratives, from the point of view of the non-professional trader, often the victim of an unscrupulous trade, are almost always protests or complaints, and rarely boasts of conquest. Ethical or not, the road trader was, in fact, a practicing professional much more likely to know the nuances of the animals and the arts of trading than the farmer or fieldhand.

Extreme mobility and a reputation for blatant dishonesty often characterized the road trader, and his success drew largely from the insular nature of the communities he happened through. Starved for entertainment and rising to a test of wits and skill, many rural farmers forfeited animals and money to road traders over and over again (Welsch 1981: 4). Horsetrading was a risky business, and the inexperienced often paid dearly for lessons.

Another not-so-endearing quality often associated with the road trader stemmed from his habit of pulling his wagon and stock train off the road for the night in close proximity to a farmer's corn field. Cutting down on feed bills at the farmer's expense kept operation costs low, but often doubled the farmer's frustration upon discovery of a bad trade coupled with the loss of a week's feed (Welsch 1981: 34). Arguably, the road trader kept mobile for reasons of personal safety as much as for searching out new markets.

The next classification of traders belongs to the live buyers. From the opening of rail markets and major stockyard centers in the nineteenth century up until the end of World War One, these men travelled the region and often the country, filling orders to be shipped back to sale barns and auctions at major railheads and agricultural centers. These men rarely bought on speculation and often dealt with huge quantities of stock. More often than not, they were agents or owners of sale barns. When the United States Army or a broker from out of the state or the country would place an order for a thousand head of three-year-old mules around a thousand pounds each, there was little room for dickering and subterfuge (Green 1970: 190; Brown 1987: 2175).

These men bought big and rarely haggled. They were interested only in quality stock, and if they were ever crossed or deceived by a "slick" local trader trying to put some lesser stock off at a premium price, these buyers were not likely to return. These live buyers were considered the most honorable and straightforward of the horsetrading fraternity, if in fact those moral judgments apply in

generalization, and their occasional visits to the community were always welcomed. These buyers were obviously not members of the community with which they dealt. They bought and shipped stock by the thousands and finesse rarely entered the negotiations as they travelled from region to region. They were in effect purchasing agents, hired for their judgment and not their verbal dexterity and linguistic ambiguity. They do not exactly fit into the realm of "traders," because any contact with a certain community was always brief and seldom challenging. They bought across the board and did not attempt to sell stock in the communities. As a matter of course, they never sold to individuals or at least never sold individual animals (Green 1967: ix).

The third category of horsetrader had the greatest degree of community interaction because he lived within the community in which he worked. His situation was many times more difficult for he made his living daily on the fringes of the community and community acceptance. According to Welsch, the home-based traders or barn traders "were usually livery stable owners who not only housed and rented animals, but also sold and traded them. While the barn trader was always regarded as a shrewd businessman, there was also the reality that he had to live in his community and would have to face again, year after year, the people with whom he did his trading" (1981:11). L. E. "Buddy" Bishop expressed the importance of a home-based trader's standing in the community with this metaphorical narrative:

"I've never told a man that I had a 'kid horse' [an animal so gentle that children were safe on it at all times]. I've got horses out here that kids are riding, but no 'kid horses'. If you sell a man a horse that will hurt his kid or his wife, you done made an enemy and that's something you don't need in any business. A horsetrader is judged a crook and a liar . . . always has been. I think there are exceptions to that" (Bishop 1987: 3380).

The home-based trader evolved from a combination of the turn-of-the-century barn trader and the old roader. He needed to be close to attend to the community's horse needs--changing from work to sport and pleasure after World War II--while having to travel in order to bring new stock back to his home market. Home-based traders stayed alive in business with savvy and sensitivity to public opinion. Certainly ethical breaches occurred in horsetrades, but the trader living so close to the community had to beware of both behavior and the explosive narrative tradition present. Any ethical infractions had to be minor in order to maintain whatever liminal standing the trader had, yet that same community standing allowed --even expected--a certain degree of infraction on the trader's part. The trader became a necessary evil, supported and shunned by the same community.

"There is nothing in which one is so easily deceived, or that dealers are so expert in deceiving, as in the horse market" (Ferris 1978:19).

"A poor old horse trader has the hardest time of anybody in this world. There's nobody believes him. Everybody says 'Oh he's the biggest liar in the world" (Queen 1977: 245).

Ethics and Community Expectation of the Modern Horsetrader

The source of the ethics and values that govern a particular community, derived from all the varied influences and needs within the group, are constantly in flux--ever evolving and changing. Standards of behavior are established by mutual consent and acceptance, and continue alongside or even in spite of existing laws. In my region of study, a strong protestant (Southern Baptist) religious presence exists and exerts a great deal of influence over community behavior. From birth, most of the residents are indoctrinated with the Ten Commandments and a very literal biblical interpretation. Values are seemingly clear cut; however, this is also a region historically associated with game poaching, moonshining, and the Ku Klux Klan. For each and every positive value-determining element present, there are equal numbers of negative influences which also serve to define the communal sense of ethics. Preachers

in the pulpits throughout East Texas had plenty of sermon fodder at hand, and by focusing on what is not acceptable, that which is acceptable becomes clearer.

The community sense of value-assessed ethic can be defined by those things clearly outside the realm of acceptable behavior. The communal ethic can therefore be determined and reinforced by pointing at the actions and practices of those agreeably beyond the accepted norm. Alan Dundes explained: "It is impossible to speak of sameness without reference to differences. There can be no self without other, no identity of group A without a group B" (1984: 149). In short, define a communal ethic by what it is not. Welsch summarized that "for the horsetrader, who lived in the demimonde between respectability and dishonesty, the distinctions [between good and evil] were much more subtle" (1981: 34).

Recognizing, often to the point of reliance, the ethically dubious nature of horsetrading and the horsetrader, the community will respond by trying to eliminate the trader's advantage of skill and experience. The common practice of trying to "get back at" or "trick" the trader results in an obvious suspension of the communal ethical standard of fair play. The rules were clear and once an animal changed hands the trade was final (Ferris 1978: 6).

The simple negotiation of price or trade becomes far more complex when one side is trying to "snide" the other with inferior or faulty trading stock. As one Georgia horsetrader put it, "if anyone's got somethin' that's wrong with whatever animal they've got, they'll hunt a horsetrader to put it on" (Queen 1977: 245). This suspension of a traditional ethic would seemingly contradict the standards of

value and belief among those in the community, but with horsetrading it is not only accepted, but common enough to be encouraged.

The trade itself often served to define status in the community. Ferris observed that the "trade was a pact among men and one emerged with honor or ridicule depending on his judgment" (1978: 18). There are instances of novice community members winning in a trade with an established horsetrader, thereby leading to a great deal of prestige in community eyes for the novice. Such rarities are at times the subject of trading narratives and always the primary goal of the negotiant.

In order for a trade to take place, both parties must attempt to get the better of the other. Ferris noted that "both trader and customer knew their 'limits' and presented their cases with courtroom seriousness. Both remembered their trades, and more importantly, were judged for them by the community for years to come" (1978: 18).

Since the community expected the trader to be devoid of ethics, then any member of the community doing business with the trader must knowingly suspend usual communal value systems upon entering into the fray. This suspension of ethics lead the community member into the liminal area or hinterland that was the trader's world.

Horses have figured into the legal and ethical gray areas of East Texas trade for as long as the region has been populated. Instead of ignoring any preconceived notions or attitudes about horsetrading and especially horsetraders in the interests of

objectivity, one must address them currently in a straightforward manner. Without question, horsetraders have always been ethically suspect, but Roger Welsch's assumption that "the horsetrader tended to be a solitary figure, trusted by no one, trusting no one. He did not enjoy much respect while he was practicing his trade--and it must be admitted, usually with good reason" does not address the true depth of modern community feeling for the horsetrader (Welsch 1981: 15).

Respect, as Welsch uses the word, implies a near puritanical ethic derived from an abstract sense and assessment of "good" and "bad." The community in which the trader operates is the only acceptable source of any applicable ethic and this particular region of Texas holds a view quite different from that of Welsch. The fact that a community can be both wary and proud of the horsetrader indicates a duality within the ethic itself, or as I have previously mentioned, a temporary suspension of Welsch's sense of the ethic when dealing with the horsetrader.

A person may abhor a rattlesnake or fear a loaded gun, but that person will respect that snake or that gun for its potential (Brown 1987: 1440). Welsch seems to confuse respect with admiration, for the horsetraders in my study are most certainly noted for their potential. Any entity with such an elaborate system of warning and suspicion built around him by the community is certainly respected.

Community opinion is derived from repeated contact and dealings with the trader. Each time anyone in the community has an experience with the trader, the resulting episode is told and retold before being logged into the communal memory bank. These entries

are frequently in the form of one-sided opinions and often are significantly altered through their repeated telling. Over time, a trader's reputation within his community has stockpiled hundreds of such episodic entries, and a core of belief and expectation emerges.

Remembering that the trader is a professional and deals daily with the tools and techniques of his office, his level of skill is often well in excess of those who venture to do business with him. It is easy to see that in any contest where one side is vastly superior to the other, the victory will most often follow the superior skills. Following the same line of thought, there must also be a loser in every contest, and no matter how willingly the loser entered into a contest as the underdog, feelings of anger, frustration, and remorse often follow.

For any trader to be successful, he must either win or break even on a majority of his trades. This also means that a majority of the people will depart from dealings as losers. Hob Duvall of Georgia explained that "anytime that somebody out-trades you or outwits you, you don't think as much of them as if you can outwit them" (Carpenter and Dye 1976: 224). Any successful horsetrader that remains near a community for several years will develop a following or reputation based upon the collective community experience, and any future associations with, or references to, the trader will be in terms derived from those experiences.

It is here that a phenomenon, arising repeatedly in my fieldwork, deserves mention. When a man may have traded horses in the community for fifty years, how is it that people will still come to him and try to cheat him or "better" him? Obviously the local

trader has been both successful and fair in order to survive community opinion for so long, yet with all but one of my informants, people from the community continually attempted to pawn off bad animals, or trade them for better ones. The deep convictions held in stereotype obviously are strong enough to motivate the locals to step beyond parameters of accepted behavior held within the community and move out into their perception of the horsetrader's world. Such a move from the security of the community belief system is as much physical as it is an ethical maneuver.

This phenomenon brings to mind a comparison with the achievement of mythological or legendary hero status. As Hercules would have to leave his brothers' kingdom in order to prove himself exceptional, or Gregorio Cortez, who left his home to make his fortune and became a hero by duping those in a hostile land (Paredes 1958), it seems that some in the community feel it necessary to seek the horsetrader just outside of town to prove their skill. In the trading situation, endings are far less frequently happy.

The community-held belief system not only views horsetraders as slick tricksters never to be trusted, but as a potential challenge to be tested and possibly bested by those who dare. At times during my fieldwork travels, there was even a sense within the community that some needed protection from the lifestyle and element of the horsetrader, and usually these challenges were taken up by several men in the area. It is not within the scope of this discussion to address psycho-sexual beliefs and attitudes, nor am I qualified to attempt such a discourse. I would like to mention that almost all of

the narratives I collected, all of the traders I met, and all of the levels of conquest and deception I encountered were based entirely upon men in competition with other men, in an area they strongly felt was reserved for men only.

As for the sense of community respect for the trader, this is two-fold. At the onset, respect need not be defined as admiration, but can and does encompass a sense of wariness and even fear. Much as an athlete might respect a competitor, the community member seeking to deal with a professional trader must know what he is facing.

The secondary sense of community respect for the trader dives deeper into the communal psyche. Strict religious and legal messages agreed upon throughout the community are effective teaching tools, but rumors and tall tales have an equally emphatic place in the learning experience. Authority figures within the community have long recognized the value of teaching by pointing out those things unacceptable. In a sense, horsetrading fills that niche. As a tool for teaching what is not acceptable or expected ethically, the community can strengthen its boundaries around what is preferred. The horsetrader becomes the model for what not to be and thereby becomes essential to the community as a standard of ethical measurement.

One final note on the community expectation of the horsetrader involved the location of the trader's place of business and the community attitude toward that location. In the case of every informant interviewed, each man had his barn and livestock pens north on the main road and just beyond the edge of town. I

understood this originally to be a factor of simple health laws and propriety, but each trader I visited was situated in roughly the same place in reference to the community. Since each community the traders lived near was arranged the same way, I began to see a pattern of liminality emerge.

My greatest measure of this was in the asking of directions from the local residents. My first trip (July 11, 1987) to Timpson, Texas, found me a little lost at a roadside cafe in the heart of town. I asked a group of men having coffee for the directions to Buddy Bishop's place. Almost in unison they pointed north and explained I could take the first road west off of the main road "just out of town." This scene repeated itself often enough that I began to stop on purpose just to get the repeated response. In Silsbee, Kirbyville, and Deweyville, instead of getting road numbers and specific instructions, every time I asked for assistance I received the same answer, "Just out of town on the main road."

The tone and attitude of the community members gave away two important elements. The first was a sense of mild disdain for the trader in question, and the second was a curious sense of apprehension as to the nature of my business with the trader in question. Their curiosity over the mention of the trader came forth eloquently in their word choice (remarkably consistent), and their surprise at my interest in the trader left them unsure just how to answer. (Note: I do believe that my "State of Texas" vehicle had something to do with local confusions.)

"Hoss tradin' . . . knows no bounds top or bottom, side nor hind, and a common law among traders has so far agreed not to have no law" (Welsch 1981: 135).

Framing Devices and Trading Strategies

Everything about the horsetrading context appeared framed and forecasted. As discussed, historical context established the practical and economic necessity of a barter situation to provide both farm power and social station in the primarily agricultural region. It followed that a ritualistic pattern would accompany such a traditional system of mimetic exchange (role-playing) to police or protect communal expectation.

The community held certain expectations for the resident horsetrader, and understood that any dealings with him meant the virtual abandonment of community security and normality in order to do business in his realm. Once traditional ethics had been dropped at the border and the novice entered the liminal zone of the horsetrader, behavior took the form of role-playing. Interaction between the trader and the novice was not officially scripted, but several dramatic elements were present. The trader became what the novice had learned to expect, and the novice assumed an air of reckless confidence in an effort to compete with the trader.

The role of the experienced trader, bolstered by numerous accounts of his dealings and delicacies, is fixed within the

community and supported by a superstructure of narrative. The role of the novice can be filled by virtually anyone wishing to do business with the trader, for by comparison, few would have the experience and community support to be considered an equal. There are accounts of traders pitted against traders, but these transactions take place far outside the community and the results of which are rarely common knowledge.

Location of the trading event occurs in places well beyond the ethical and physical limits of the community. For simple reasons of spatial requirements (i.e. pasturage, stables, and sanitation) most barn traders in the region studied are situated on the outskirts of town. This liminal or border element is doubly significant in a region that itself has been a border zone for four hundred years. The mere act of travelling beyond the security of the community and its accepted beliefs indicates that the rules are no longer binding and that all ethical holdings are temporarily suspended. As Welsch's secondary informant, Lew Croughan, noted:

"They's a lot of laws on the books about hoss racin' and hoss stealin', but the whole danged business community has joined forces in seein' to it that there's practically no law 'bout buyin' and sellin' any kind of horse one man is nervy enough to sell and another is foolish enough to buy" (Welsch 1981: 135).

The performance itself is not entirely scripted, though unofficial guidelines do exist. One party wants to either buy or sell an animal. The seller wants the best price possible, while the buyer

wants to spend as little as possible. With this framework in mind, all else is fair game.

There does emerge a certain presence of coded behavior amid the suspension of normal values, and though it could hardly be termed ethical, it does govern the expectations of horse trades. Andrew Dickson, another of Welsch's traders interviewed by the WPA, explained that

"horsetraders depend on their wits and in a flat-footed trade, a good trader never asks to run a horse around or give him a workout. That is sort of a gentleman's agreement, an unwritten code, but thoroughly understood, and if one is outsmarted by the other, no quarter is asked" (Welsch 1981: 89).

This "honorable" behavior is quite common and seems to leave both parties open to all sorts of difficulties, as well as placing a premium upon good judgment.

It can be argued that the trading action approximates gaming or play on the part of the participants, but several important elements of game definition block such an argument. Above all else, both games and play are entirely voluntary in participation, and must be nonproductive in any tangible sense. *Ludus*, or pure play, involves no competition, has no clear rules, and no predetermined endpoint. Games depend upon competition and some understanding of rules governing the scope of participants' activities. Neither play nor game can have material ends or lead to material wealth (Georges 1972: 173). Though the modern trading novice may enter into a trade

for the purpose of acquiring a horse for pleasure, the horsetrader still depends upon his skills for material gain.

The selling party has at his disposal any number of tactics to gain the advantage. The biggest and by far the most useful of these advantages is secret knowledge. The seller has supposedly owned the animal for an unspecified time previously, and theoretically should know the strengths and weaknesses of the stock. Buddy Bishop explained that "a man's gotta know his horses, and that don't come overnight" (Bishop 1987: 3160). If any virtues are present, they will be extolled. If there are flaws, then expect either silence or an attempt to cover them up. Bobby Eubanks commented on the idea of silence in a trade: "Unless they ask me, I don't tell 'em everything about the horse" (Eubanks 1987: 885), while Buddy Bishop recommended that "if a man asks you, tell him the truth. But you don't have to tell him everything you know" (Bishop 1987: 1170). Buddy recalled his former partner, Luke Rushing, saying that "you can't lie about a horse and get away with it for very long" (Bishop 1987: 1545). As a point of thought, deception on the trader's part usually involved visual or performance manipulation, while verbal discrepancies were carefully guarded if not avoided entirely. Such a duality probably stemmed from the chivalrous belief in giving one's word as truth, while the animal's faults were entirely its own.

The concept of secret knowledge goes even farther if the established trader is the owner. A virtual library of tactics for covering flaws is available--many of which the innocent buyer will be wholly ignorant. Any trader that has been in the business long

enough has been exposed or even duped by physical or pharmaceutical manipulations designed to alter the animal's appearance.

A horse's age is by far the most common element disguised in a trade. The most accurate method of determining the age of an animal that has not been tampered with is to "mouth" him, or look at the growth and subsequent erosion of the horse's teeth. Certain pairs of teeth develop consistently with horses. An experienced trader can count the pairs and have a pretty accurate estimate of age up until the sixth year trench develops. From the sixth year, cups in the teeth begin to erode, and a hook will develop in the "scissor" (incisor) teeth. There are a few traders that will claim to be able to tell a horse's age in the mouth after ten years, but all of my informants agreed this is not possible.

Buddy Bishop explained at length a process for determining age after ten years, but it involved feeling the spaces between an animal's ribs.

"Doctor Collins, he used to be a veterinarian back in Houston. He and I figured out how to age a horse after their mouth was gone. At ten years a horse's back rib will start to separate and spread back from the others. You can feel it with your finger. At eleven years it's a bigger spread, and by twelve years it's plumb open. The next year the next rib will start to come back, and so on, until the horse is about eighteen years old. By twenty years there's an inch and a half gap between those ribs, and after twenty years you ain't got no business with the horse no how" (Bishop 1987: 670).

Knowing what to look for when determining the age of an animal is one step removed from altering the evidence to make a

horse's mouth appear to be much younger than it actually is. Filing, "cupping", or "bishoping" (using a drill, file or other tools to give older, worn teeth the sharp edges of youth) the teeth is a common practice, as is the use of silver nitrate to color the cups black and give the appearance of a younger animal. An eight year old can easily be made to mouth like a six year old by cutting the "six year trench" back into the grinding teeth.

Other faults, such as wildness or sluggishness, can be covered up with similar ease. If a horse is broken down, Buddy Bishop prescribed a foot trim "just a little too close so that he'll step lively for a week or so" (Bishop 1987: 3405). Bobby Eubanks told of "gingering" a horse (rubbing raw ginger on the horse's rectum) to make it prance around the yard holding its tail high and appearing to be much livelier and spirited than it really was (Eubanks 1987: 1235). Bobby also told of dissolving a glycerin tablet in water and giving it to the horse to make it "dance a little in the ring" (Eubanks 1987: 1355).

If an animal were wild, the trader would tranquilize him. Buddy Bishop, Bobby Eubanks, and H. C. Long all told of experiences on both sides of "Bute" (butazolydone--a barbiturate commonly used to euthenize household pets, but in small doses has a calming effect on horses). Buddy Bishop took me to a small auction outside of town and pointed out one horse in particular that:

"showed all the signs of being doped. You gotta watch their ears and feet. Most of the time a horse, no matter how gentle, will perk up in a show ring what with all the noises and activity around. If some horse comes

into the ring with his ears down and his feet stumbling or missing, you know for certain he's been shot full of 'Bute' before he showed" (Bishop 1987: 7710).

Bobby Eubanks enjoyed telling about the time he dyed a mule to cover the gray. As mules age, their heads grow whiter and whiter. Bobby had plans to sell the mule to someone that needed it for farm work and light pulling. As he explained, he:

"went to the store and got some women's hair colors. I painted that mule up pretty and black like he was a colt, but the next day while he sat out in the sun waiting for that fellow to come pay and pick him up, his head turned red. I guess that black color just went to red in the sunshine, but he bought that mule anyway--all the time asking how that mule got a red head? I told him I didn't know. Maybe he should ask the mule!" (Eubanks 1987: 1415).

The deceptions are subtle and endless. If the horse were blind, he would be shown only at night or on a foggy day. If the horse were scarred, a saddle would be kept on him. If the horse's face were sunken from fever or just extreme age, a needle was often inserted under the skin just below the eye sockets. Small amounts of air could be pumped into the hollows and give the horse's head a more youthful appearance. The list of tricks continues and comprises the majority of all trading narratives wherein the buyer is duped.

The entire event is clearly a situation of "buyer beware." Lawton Brooks, a long time Foxfire informant, warned that "anytime you would buy something and you look it over and don't see that there's anything wrong with it, well, the trader ain't responsible,

it's you that's trading for it" (Queen 1977: 236). Buddy Bishop advised:

"Only buy what you see. Don't buy in the meantime or over the phone. Don't buy anybody's story. That horse you looked at yesterday could've foundered overnight and if you call a fella up and say you'll take him, well then you're gonna wind up with a no-good horse dumped on you" (Bishop 1987: 3330).

The barter itself comprises the most recognizable part of the trade, for the back and forth offer and counter-offer are often the only spoken elements involved. Timing and bid determination are far more subtle and far more important. Welsch analyzed that "the talent of the horsetrader was not simply knowing animals but, even more, knowing people--how to develop and hold their interest, how to manipulate words and situations subtly, how to relieve tension with humor, how to live by one's wits" (1981: 19).

Haste in a horsetrade gave away the eagerness to sell or buy, and an experienced trader would prey on that eagerness to get his price. Welsch advised that "as strange as it may seem, the successful horsetrader had first and most essentially to appear not to be interested in trading horses" (1981: 25). Bill Ferris found that Manual Allen, a trader in Mississippi agreed: "Never seem too anxious to sell or trade" (1978: 17). Bobby Eubanks once admitted that "there was times I'd fool people for two weeks or so - just let 'em stew on the price. My wife would get so frustrated at me. 'Are you gonna sell that horse or not?' But I never got in no hurry" (Eubanks 1987: 4215).

Bidding is the second art of horsetrading. The trader must know immediately what the animal is worth and just what he can get for it when he sells it to someone else. There is little room for sentiment or favoritism here. A blind, broken-down horse that had been a family pet for twenty years would be of little if any use to anyone but the soap factory. The trader had to be able to assess the relative weight of the animal, then multiply that by the current price per pound that the soapworks might be paying, plus figure in any travel or feed expenses that would be incurred before a trip to the soap factory could be arranged. This total would be what the buyer could expect. His bid would naturally be much lower in order to turn a profit upon resale.

Obviously bidding is a game of compromising extremes. The seller will carefully overprice the animal knowing and expecting to "talk down" to an agreeable amount. After the seller has given an initial figure, the buyer must then counter with an absurdly low offer. This offer is usually accompanied by any number of protests and exclamations designed to bring the "asking price" back down to earth. I offer here a theoretical example:

Buyer: "How much you asking for that old plug?"

Seller: "I'd take five hundred for him."

Buyer: "I wasn't interested in buying your barn, just the horse!
But I could go maybe three hundred."

This verbal dueling continues by diminishing fractions until either an agreement is reached or the asking price and the selling price stop their mutual approach at levels too distant for either participant's comfort. Bobby Eubanks explained that:

"When I'm making a bid on a horse, I'm going to lowball it. Sometimes that'll make a fella mad at me, so I'll take him over to the cafe for a cup of coffee--soothe him a little before we start talking horses again" (Eubanks 1987: 4970).

An extension of the bidding strategy is the performance put on by the trader. Whether feigning disinterest or leading a buyer on, the trader has to be the master of the situation. C. C. Brown revealed:

"I would always agree with a man, even when he was runnin' down my stock--give him a boost of confidence--let him feel top-dog in the trade. But every time he'd open his mouth and I had to play stupid, I'd tack a little onto the price. I was play-actin' and he was payin' for the performance" (Brown 1987: 1210).

Such psychological maneuverings worked both ways for the trader. Once the trader had a solid reputation of being crafty, even outright honesty could fool a customer that was determined he was being tricked. Buddy Bishop recalled just such a trade while he was working with Luke Rushing:

"Once there was this fella that came to buy a dun mare we'd bought somewhere. Now both of the men that worked for me and Luke were good cowboys, and that mare had done thrown them a bunch of times. In my mind that horse was going to the soap factory, but this man he wanted her real bad. Both me and Luke tried to tell him that she'd hurt him--that he couldn't ride that horse--but he believed we were just being horsetraders, trying to save the horse for someone else or something. I doubled the price on that horse--three times what the soap factory would've given--and still he had to buy that

horse. Two weeks later his wife called to say he couldn't ride that horse and would we take it back. The next day he showed up and brought the horse back to trade. He picked out a 'crow-baited' horse [laughter] and we traded even" (Bishop 1987: 4600).

This narrative touches on several interesting bits of horsetrading and community belief about horsetrading. To the poor fellow wishing to buy the horse, the trader's warning was just a trick of some sort. As a practitioner of community expectation he was determined in his mind to beat the trader. To further whet his appetite, the trader asked for three times the value of the horse. This also appeared as trickery to the innocent and actually served to hook him even deeper into the trade. Simple honesty and the testimonies of two bruised cowboys could not dissuade the buyer from believing that Buddy and Luke "were just being horsetraders" as if the possibility of honesty was completely removed from their capabilities. The community dictated that horsetraders were dubiously truthful if not blatantly dishonest, and the man fell victim to the belief. The narrative tradition worked for the traders and against the buyer, leading the poor man by his belief system to his eventual duping.

Such psychological strategies actually fall under the realm of language manipulation. Truth, if believed as falsity, is clearly false for the time being. Veiled truth, however, can be equally deceptive and give the appearance of a weakness in the trader's armor (Ferris 1978: 5). Welsch described several instances in narratives where "the trader . . . warns the prospective customer about the real fault of the animal, but in such language that the meaning is veiled"

(1981: 166). An example of this deception might begin: A blind horse "don't look so good" (playing on the word "look"), or a spirited horse might be "raring to go," meaning that as soon as anyone tried to mount him, the horse was going to stand on two legs and try to throw them off.

If negotiations were at a standstill, any number of avenues might be taken. At times, one participant might offer to "split the difference." If the buyer had a maximum amount that he was willing to pay, and the seller held a minimum price he could accept, then splitting the difference often proved acceptable to both. This technique worked especially well when there was plenty of leeway between the asking and taking prices. Profit margins were trimmed a little faster, but the deal was sooner agreed upon.

Another popular trading strategy involved "boot" (something extra to sweeten the deal for one party or the other). When two animals were being traded for each other only, one participant usually insisted that his animal was worth more than the other's. The trick was to get a horse and some cash for your horse. Though the difference might be ten dollars, a new bridle, or just lunch, "boot" was really just another method of keeping score in a horse trade. Bauman explained that "in most cases cash profit stands as a token of having played the game well; it is a sweetener that enhances the encounter" (1981: 82).

By far the most risky means of settling a gap between the asking price and selling price was flipping a coin and letting the winner get his price. This arrangement became a gamble when the monetary difference was significant, but despite the potential for

loss, flipping a coin was a very common practice. Statistics prove that the results are fifty-fifty, but with the tremendous mystique of an established trader, coin-flipping took on enormous meaning. Bobby Eubanks swore that one should

"never flip a coin with Mr. [Hub] Long. Ninety-nine out of a hundred he'd win, and he'd flip for anything too. They used to say [about anyone dealing with Hub Long] 'If they ever flip that coin, he got 'em'" (Eubanks 1987: 3420).

Any trader that managed to unload a flawed horse in trade and draw boot, stood a good chance of getting the horse back when the buyer discovered the fault. The trader would have to remind the often angry buyer that no guarantees were in effect and that the deal was entirely final. He then might offer to swap back even for whatever the buyer had offered in trade. Of course the trader would keep the boot, and the buyer would have paid for a lesson in horsetrading.

Welsch stated that the concept of back-trading was the most common theme in horsetrading narratives, and that some traders "made a living out of selling . . . and trading back for the boot" (1981: 14). Bobby Eubanks spoke of "one horse sold so many times I was ashamed to see it standing in the lot every other day." After awhile "usually they'll (the duped buyer) take anything to get rid of a horse (that is flawed)" (Eubanks 1987: 1160).

Several trading strategies relied on a degree of trickery or subterfuge without being blatantly dishonest or illegal. Much as riddles and language jokes depend upon expected reactions and subtle trickery or manipulation of the facts, horsetrading put the responsibility of the sale entirely upon the novice. The community understood the risks when entering these trades, and generally approached them in the spirit of "buyer beware." Horsetrading became a situation where all the normal rules are temporarily suspended, and members of the community entered into this arena willingly.

"Auction sales are the best places to get beat." - Buddy Bishop

"I won't take a good horse to the sale barn." - Bobby Eubanks

The Changing Face of Horsetrading: Sale Barns and Trail Rides

The areas of interaction between the trader and the community were usually well-defined and prescribed. The trader's liminal status in the community often relegated his practice and business to locations out of the general community view, and under most circumstances, this arrangement was satisfactory to all parties involved. With the advent of the sale barn in most rural communities in my area of research, both the trader and the community found themselves drawn by common interest to a new arena of interaction, with a new set of rules.

The sale barn grew out of the old "trade days" practice begun in the 1850s when the circuit court was in session in the county seat (Parvin 1979: 24; Bauman 1981: 80). On whatever day of the month the judge would usually ride in, the community would migrate to the town square to watch the court's proceedings, conduct business, and socialize. On this one day a month there might be hundreds or even thousands of people and their animals in a relatively small town, and the opportunity to scrutinize and trade arose.

As small towns became larger towns, electing their own judges and conducting court proceedings whenever necessary, a "first Monday" or "hoss Monday" remained the bargaining and social draw for rural residents (Parvin 1979: 24). Many Texas towns continue to hold "Trade Days" once a month, often on the same day that the circuit judge used to come to town one hundred years ago.

For the growing commercial interests, one trade day a month was far too infrequent. The sale barn evolved as a bimonthly or even weekly meeting place for agribusiness to buy and sell animals and tack in an auction atmosphere. The sale barn served as a meeting place for buyers and sellers, and provided services including auctioneering, animal handlers, stock pens, and animal upkeep if the seller brought the animals in several days before the sale. The public attended these auction sales not only as entertainment, but as a means of rapid economic return.

In an agricultural economy, most of the community operated on credit until the crops came in, with frequent barter as the standard means of exchange. Though prices were often lower at the sale barns than they would have been if the stock were delivered to a railhead or destination market, cash suddenly became available at any time of the year. Though cash took over as the main means of sale, skills honed in barter were still valuable tools.

Where the public bought, sold, and traded stock, the horse trader soon arrived. Not only did the trader get to see many more animals at a time, but the presence of new, transient buyers in the community offered the trader an opportunity to do business without the delicate mantle of wariness and social caution. Animals that

had "made the rounds" of the community were now available for sale to a new and expanded market.

In a community where deception had provided the only market for broken or disabled animals, the advent of the sale barn not only lessened ethical gray areas, but brought in new buyers from soap, glue, and pet food companies. These newcomers were interested in live weights and reasonably healthy stock and had no concern for an animal's performance or potential. Horses were often sold by the pound, and the astute trader quickly developed weight estimation skills to adapt to the new market focus.

Buddy Bishop became a master of judging the live weight of any animal he came across.

"Once we took two horses to the veterinarian's because he had a platform scale, and this fellow that was selling didn't believe I was offering him a fair price. He knew that I was getting seventeen cents a pound up at Palestine [Texas], but wanted ten cents a pound for his horses. I told him the palomino would go 1150, and the bay was just under a 1000, but he had to have proof . . . some people are like that you know. Anyways, the vet weighed them both and the yellow horse weighed 1158 and the bay was 991. That fellow liked to have torn his pants trying to get his billfold out of his pocket to pay me the money he'd bet. See, he was embarrassed" (Bishop 1987: 5650).

A few days of buying around the county before the sale day, and the clever trader could round up poor stock by the pound knowing what the factory buyers will be paying at the sale barn, and quickly make a healthy return on his investment.

One major distinction between the activities of the sale barn and the trading methods usually employed by horsetraders is that the sale barns had rules governing sales. Simply put, the barn owner received a flat rate or a percentage commission of the sale price, and anything passing through the barn's show ring under the auctioneer's stand had been entered into sale. If the auctioneer couldn't raise a suitable sale price, the owner had the option of pulling the animal out of the sale, or "P. O.-ing" the animal. Even though an owner may P. O. a horse, a fee must still be paid for entering the sale. The barn owners created an environment convenient to buyers; therefore, sellers must pay for the privilege of being there.

The only other rule of sale barn trading was really just an extension of the first. Since the barn owners depended upon commissions or P.O. fees, any buying or selling outside of the sale barn--including, and especially, the parking lot--was expressly forbidden. According to Bobby Eubanks,

"A lot of people did it [trading in the parking lot]. It wasn't nice, but it was popular. The barn didn't make no money that way. Once up in St. Augustine I sold a roping horse in the lot before the auction, but I ran him through the ring anyway--even though he was already sold--and just P. O.'d him. That way Bud and Janet could make their nickel too. If I was to get an offer in the lot that was better than what I felt I could get inside, I'd sell the horse, but go up to the window and pay the commission on him anyway" (Eubanks 1987: 1430-1465).

One informant, H. C. Long (son of "Hub" Long), traded in the parking lot before and after the sale so frequently that he was banned from the sale barn in Raywood, Texas, and was watched by barn employees from the moment he stepped onto the grounds of the Kirbyville auction. H. C. figured that "the horse is mine and the money's mine, so there's no need for them fellas to get interested" (Long 1987: 2210). One of the sale barn owners in Dayton, who wished to remain anonymous, commented that H.C.'s practices

"are gonna get the son-of-a-bitch shot real quick. Some of us depend on P.O. fees and commissions for a living. I got half-interest in a sale barn when the cattle industry around here is dying. If we manage to bring up a buyer from somewhere, me and the folks raising stock here in this county don't want him spending his money out in the goddam parking lot" (Anonymous 1987).

As long as the barn owners were filling the role of "ethics police," the community felt generally safe in coming to the auctions with their stock. There were other concerns.

The nature of the sale barn at auction required that a single animal or a small group be brought out into the ring so that all bidders could see. The auctioneer spoke very rapidly and attempted to get the bidding going at an equally rapid rate. The higher the price went, the greater the commission for the sale barn. Such a brief presentation only allowed buyers to see the stock for a very short time, and any decisions had to be made quickly.

There were two problems with such a process, and the traders quickly picked up on both. The first trick was for a potential buyer to get a better, longer look at the animals up for auction. Some sale

barns allowed individuals to go back to the holding pens and view the stock before the sale, but with the ever-present threat of "lot trading," many barn owners feared buyers and sellers mingling over the animals prior to their showing in the ring. Bobby Eubanks believed one should "Always go in the pens before the sale. You can tell a lot about a horse back there" (Eubanks 1987: 1525).

Traders often brought one animal in under the guise of selling, when they actually planned all along to P. O. the animal. This would allow them back in the pens to do any last minute grooming, while checking out any other stock in which they had a genuine interest. Whatever the deception, it was vital for a successful trader to get a good look at any prospective purchases. Bobby Eubanks continued to say that

"once there was a horse I saw in the pens, just standing there holding the fence rail in his mouth. That horse was a stump-sucker [a common but misunderstood condition in some animals that makes them hold wood or other materials between their teeth while breathing heavily] for sure, and I didn't have nothing to do with him. See, I wouldn't have known that if I'd waited until he got in the ring" (Eubanks 1987: 2885).

Another auction found Bobby unable to preview the stock, and he purchased a particular mule that had been drugged just prior to running through the ring.

"Some kid was riding that mule in the ring to show how gentle he was, so I bought him. Took him home and later that day the 'popsicle' [whatever drug that was given to the mule to make him gentle] wore off. I got on that mule and he threw me so high I did a full flip in the

air and on the way back down looked that mule eye to eye. That animal went to the dog [food] factory the next morning" (Eubanks 1987: 2905).

In addition to gaining access to the pens to preview animals, traders developed other means of beating the sale barn's rules. Bobby Eubanks told of a system of "buy-bidding" built around an age-old auction scheme involving a cohort bidding solely to raise the price of the seller's animal. Mr. Eubanks was quite careful to explain that he had never attempted this anywhere near his home town, but laughingly admitted exploits all across the Gulf coast. He did confirm that many traders have done this, even in the sale barns nearby.

I used to work in tandem with my brother-in-law. We would get to the auction and not have anything to do with each other so people wouldn't think we were together. I would run the horses through the ring and nod to him every time the bidding got a little slow. Sometimes the bidders would be so poor that [name withheld at informant's request] would have to open the bidding. I hated to have him start it off, but I didn't haul stock all that way for nothing. Anyhow, I'd nod to him if I wanted him to bid up, and sometimes we'd keep going up and get so greedy that we'd get stuck, so I'd just P.O. the horse (Eubanks 1987: 2800).

Teamwork in an auction did not do much to endear traders to the barn owners, but to many traders, the barn owners themselves were not without suspicion. The system of buy-bidding often worked for the owner as well. H. C. Long related that

"if the sale price kept going up and up, their commission did the same damn thing. They'd holler and scream at us traders for partnering up, but it was OK for them to run the bids through the goddam ceiling!" (Long 1987: 1005).

Evidently some owners went so far as to employ buy-bidders to raise stock prices across the board, but if they ever made the final bid, they had to buy the animal.

Other dubious activities often attributed to sale barn owners involved selective showing and prior-interest buying. Bobby Eubanks talked of one barn owner that also served as the auctioneer in Kirbyville who frequently bought stock for himself. Though subtle, he would bring bidding to a close quickly in order to meet the buyer out back and offer him a little more for the animal. There were even times when he would meet the seller as he unloaded stock and make purchases right off the trailer before the animals ever got to the pens. "That kind of business almost got him shut down. Word got out and people just quit coming to his sales" (Eubanks 1987: 2875).

Other barn owners seemed to prefer certain volume clients and would encourage sales to go their way. Bobby Eubanks and H. C. Long spoke of a sale barn in Quincy of which neither approved. To begin with, the animal handlers used electric cattle prods constantly, and any horsetrader knows that hurting an animal is a last resort, not a standard means of operation. H. C. realized that any animal that's been "shocked until it don't know which way is why, is pretty much useless when you get it home. That stinger [electric prod] they use

up there has ruined more stock than bad breaking and babying" (Long 1987: 1870).

The truly aggravating practice came about when a buyer representing a certain slaughterhouse in Fort Worth came to auction. The owner knew that this particular buyer would spend several thousand dollars that day, and in order to make as many sales go his way, or even to push his limit up a little, the owner would not run horses out individually if he could possibly avoid it.

Sending stock out in lots of two to seven animals at a time was quite common and served two usual purposes. The first was to speed up the pace of a slow sale day. If someone is going to buy horses, they will normally have the capital to buy several animals at a time, and the more animals purchased per ring showing, the faster the day. The other reason for grouping animals in lots was to force a buyer to take several other animals in order to get the one or two exceptional ones and thus spend more money. If a seller brought in several animals, this unscrupulous owner would run them into the ring in lots, thereby forcing the one or two eligible buyers to take the whole lot and eliminating most of the possible buyers that could afford to bid on one horse. By running lots into the ring, the sale barn owner almost guaranteed the animals to the one buyer with a substantial capital backing from an outside interest such as a pet food factory or glue works.

Such favoritism rarely went unnoticed by the regular patrons, and like the crooked auctioneer in Kirbyville, the Quincy owner almost had to shut down due to lack of community support. On the other hand, impeccable honesty was always rewarded with

community support and attendance. Both Bobby Eubanks and H. C. Long admired the way business was currently being conducted at the Kirbyville sale barn, and H. C. went so far as to say that "Robert Muckelroy is as good a handler and boss as any horse trader would want. He'll let you back in the pens an hour before auction, and ain't nobody doing business back there either" (Long 1987: 1770).

Such comments of favor from those very traders considered so ethically suspect by the community serve to guide the student. For traders undergoing a life-long social repugnance, a recommendation based upon honesty and fairness seemed almost an anomaly in form. To the community, any problems the traders might face "serve them right," and sympathy for unfair practices was in short supply.

There was a sense of folk justice in a trader getting cheated, and as previously discussed, anyone that can manage to better a trader rose significantly in social standing. Sale barn owners simply did not belong in the trader's category. In all my fieldwork, no one in the community thought of the sale barn owners as traders, but more as legitimate businessmen. They could hold places on the Chamber of Commerce and were considered integral "cogs" in the agribusiness wheel. The sale barn was more of a clearinghouse for livestock, and not the dark, mysterious lot of the horsetrader. The trader had adapted well to a fundamental change in his business, and would have to continue to adapt as the market moved around him.

With a larger public now having access to the local horse market, the home traders were forced to broaden their efforts in order to stay in business. Horses in the late 1980s were no longer used for farm labor. Pleasure and show horses grew in importance,

and with racetracks just across the Louisiana line and in New Mexico, many home traders began to dabble in registered and race stock.

Back in the early 1950s, the city of Houston sponsored an immense "Go Texan" movement. Among the numerous celebrations of Western heritage were several trail rides planned to recreate and commemorate the original cattle drives. Small groups of riders from all directions would slosh through the wet Texas February in attempts to converge on downtown Houston in a grand parade kicking off the big rodeo and livestock show.

At the onset, only those riders that spent time riding horses on a regular basis would participate, but in the last forty years the trail rides have become a combination social event and endurance test. The Salt Grass Trail Riders, originally numbering a dozen or so, have grown to several thousand and require entire community and county parks for their overnight campouts. With so many people interested in riding horses for two weeks a year, the traders found a way to profit from the situation.

As a general rule among horsetraders, animals are meant to be sold. Any horse that stays too long in the trader's stable becomes more expensive by the day. Feed bills accumulate rapidly, but it is an expense that must be met. Poorly fed stock will not look or perform well should a potential buyer stop in; therefore the trader keeps the animal that much longer. As Luke Rushing said, "you can't starve a profit out of them" (Bishop 1987: 3495).

Buddy Bishop remembered buying horses to fill orders rapidly.

"Me and Luke never kept a horse or mule longer than a week. The expenses just got too high when you were feeding out of your own pocket. The idea was to know where they were going before you bought them. Luke was real good at that. He could be up at Palestine on sale day and see something in the ring and start bidding. 'What you want that old thing for?' I'd ask him. And sure enough, he'd know somebody in the next town that needed that horse" (Bishop 1987: 3515).

With the popularization of trail drives, a market for horses developed every February. Bobby Eubanks understood the folly of keeping horses year-round just to make sales in one month, so he

"bought like crazy at the end of January when everybody else was tired of feeding them. Man, you could get horses cheap at sale barns in January. For the longest time people up at the Kirbyville thought I was plain crazy, but I kept buying. When February rolled in, I might have thirty head in the barn. When those trail riders started looking for something to look pretty on, I had just what they needed" (Eubanks 1987: 5105).

Bobby and Buddy both understood that the trail riders had no intention of keeping the horses after the parade was over, so they changed their pricing structure to fit the market. Buddy explained:

"we might put two hundred dollars into a good saddle-broke horse, and when the trail riders came by we'd charge four hundred--three hundred up front. After the ride was over we'd wake up and find four or five horses a day staked out in the yard or tied to the fence. We got our money back out of them horses and had the horses to sell again. Them folks didn't care to keep a horse, and Luke and I didn't mind taking 'em back" (Bishop 1987: 3590).

Bobby Eubanks stated that he:

"liked to buy them 'pencil-tails' [non-registered horses] cheap in the winter. I'd load up on saddles and bridles and stuff too, 'cause they didn't take up much room or eat anything, then sell them to the trail riding folks for a week or two. Sometimes I'd rent them horses, but most of 'em I sold for what I had in 'em and got 'em back when they were through. Got my money and my horses back" (Eubanks 1987: 4930).

Buddy told of several "would-be" traders that "popped into business just before trail rides. Doug Milford over here in Timpson spends all year boarding and doing some part-time auctioneering, but come February he's right there in the thick of things--like he was a real horsetrader! He'd advertise in the paper too! Can't imagine a horsetrader doing anything like that" (Bishop 1987: 3445).

Buddy's unwillingness to accept Doug Milford as a "real" horsetrader stems from two fundamental assumptions. Milford participates part-time in an occupation Buddy feels must be endured full-time in order to claim the whispered, though dubious, benefits. Buddy also sees Milford's advertising as a breach of established distances between himself and the community. As a product of old-time horsetrading in a new market environment, Buddy may be quietly lashing out at Milford's enterprising adaptations.

A drastic change in the market around the horsetraders caused them to modify trading strategies in order to keep up. Rental horses and unwritten return policies, coupled with a rapid urbanization of the population and eventually the market, may have signalled the

demise of the horsetrading worldview. The importance of special knowledge and bidding strategies in a horsetrade may have faded somewhat, but the value of personal wit and quick thinking in any business deal will never disappear.

Synthesis of Elements Establishing Context

Historically the region in which I conducted my research has been one of economic and social liminality. From the beginnings of recorded history, no political or economic institution was able to assert a lasting dominance until 1865. The denizens of this region have grown independent as a result.

Developing as an agricultural region, trade and barter defined the means of exchange and animal power determined the success or failure of the individual farm, if not the region as a whole. The horsetrader appeared infrequently as a specialist to meet a demand for farming power and grew in importance and permanence as communities developed. As nineteenth century towns and settlements grew, the need for animal power increased and the horsetrader settled comfortably onto the fringes of the community he was to serve.

Remaining suspect ethically, the horsetrader continued his business in close proximity to a community which labelled him both an outsider and an integral part of the culture. The twentieth century trader was forced to maintain a standard of public acceptance while living in the shadow of community narrative claiming him to be the very essence of evil and subterfuge. Such a duality cast a cultural gray area over the trader's life, while fixing him even more substantially into the system of community belief.

Functioning within a conservative value system, many members of the community viewed the horsetrader as an ethically dubious element to be relegated to the fringe of society. Folk narrative tradition concerning dealings with these traders developed into a system of belief that included warnings and cautions and denigrated the trader to a lower social status. Any upstanding member of the community had no business with such an unsavory element, but if such dealings became necessary, then the innocent community member was expected and encouraged to become as ruthless and devious as the trader was believed to be.

Such a change in accepted behavior signalled an ethical suspension on the community member's part and helped to strengthen the role of the trader in community importance. As an integral model of unacceptable behavior, the trader helped to define ethical and social norms and served as a liminal influence to define the physical and ethical boundaries of the community as a whole. Though the boundaries between trader and community were understood by both, many crossed over to the trader's world--an ethical screen door to the community. As both subject and victim of community narrative tradition, the horsetrader came to symbolize one end of the community ethical spectrum and found security in his role.

Prior scholarship has placed the horsetrader on a moving pedestal--a swingset of cultural inspection that will focus on the trader as a trickster or even a criminal and then run to him with silent, communal consent. While some scholars deal only with the masterful linguistic manipulations and logistical comeuppances that

horsetrading narratives imply, I have found that somewhere in the middle of this ethical swing is the essence of what the trader must live with day to day.

Bill Ferris and Roger Welsch, both trained folklorists, have contented themselves with their own research and conclusions. Both researchers found that horsetraders are ethically suspect and definite fringedwellers, while holding positions of remarkable respect in the community narrative tradition. Many townsfolk may have been fooled or tricked by the trader, yet they felt comfortable in their defeat because of an established belief that no average community member can compete with an experienced trader. My research indicated that there was much more going on within the community belief system than passive acceptance of the trader as an immovable obstacle to horsetrading success.

One informant, L. E. Bishop of Timpson, Texas, explained that while he sat every Sunday in the first pew of the local Baptist church, from Monday to Saturday he was viewed with suspicion. Townsfolk chose not to associate too closely with him at the stores and restaurants in town, yet they would come out to his place to talk trades.

Such a duality of ethics tells the observer that the community may publicly shun a particular element of society while secretly supporting it. In order for an upstanding member of the community to do business with the local horsetrader, all community members accept the fact that the challenger must suspend normal ethical beliefs in order to compete with the horsetrader. In fact, the community wishes and supports a margin of success for the

supposed novice when dealing with the "evil" element the horsetrader represents.

Such a suspension of ethics is not only supported, but necessary to social definition. As Alan Dundes described, community definition of self is dependent upon representation of the counter-elements that determine what is not acceptable. My research defines the community perceptions of the horsetrader and therefore allowed an insight into community perceptions of self. By taking an inside look at the horsetraders and the perceptions they are forced to deal with daily, I have discovered the unique ambiguity in which horsetraders must operate. Considered the villains of society, yet supported continually by visits from members of the same society, the horsetraders must quietly continue without admiration, while retaining enormous societal respect.

Prior scholarship on the subject of horsetrading and horsetraders has sought to entertain the reader with narratives independent of cultural context. I feel strongly that without an understanding of the context within which a horsetrader operates, any study of horsetraders and horsetrading is incomplete and insufficient.

Historically, horsetraders have been ethically suspect--from roaders making yearly rounds all the way to barn traders taking advantage of strangers in town. Over a hundred years ago horsetraders made deals and were gone the next day, leaving the duped farmer with whatever he had bargained for. Today traders live on the fringes of town, still suspect in the community, yet somehow relied upon at specific times of the year.

Since horsepower is no longer the measure of farm labor, the horsetrader has moved into the pleasure class with the horses he sells. Young women enamored with horses and men with dreams of racing fall prey to the trader's nuances now, and every February the naive of the trail riders flock to the trader's lot. Trail rides take dozens of animals from the traders for weeks at a time, and mysteriously return these mounts after the need is satiated.

Evolving from a group of travelling men with a need to trade successfully and then depart, horsetraders have acquiesced and taken up handling the needs of a sedentary community. The home-based trader has adapted to the changing requirements for horseflesh in this part of Texas, and has successfully met the elusive demands of an urbanizing public.

My research is unique in that I have attempted to display the special cultural context surrounding the modern horsetrader. I understand and comment upon the accepted techniques and practices of horsetraders throughout the region's history, yet stress the influence of recent community expectation upon the trader's behavior. Horsetraders enact a special role in that they must not only continue as the dubious fellows of commerce that they are expected to be, but must also fulfill every community expectation as to their deviousness as well. The trader is both the measure of practicality and the epitome of deviousness. Both characteristics are somehow valued by each of the communities I studied, and yet the duality itself is considered unacceptable.

Contemporary horsetraders have turned their antiquated, yet specialized knowledge into a system of reference for those who no

longer live by the horse. Turning from experts in the field to consultants to a hobby, my informants have developed a protective ambiance of retirement to conceal their fading reliance. It is important here to recognize change in a folk system, for nothing is truly folklore unless it exists in variation. The drastic manner in which the horsetraders of my study have changed to accept the developing markets of the past forty years is a clear measure of cultural adaptation. Such changes express a definitive awareness of cultural influences, and are hallmarks of cultural context.

Horsetraders in the five-county region of my study exhibited every ability to accommodate such changes in public opinion and awareness to the point of being at the forefront of such changes. When one end of the community ethical spectrum can quickly and comfortably accommodate changes in public opinion, these accommodations themselves will bring about changes back in the community. Cultural reflexiveness must occur when one parameter of community definition is altered.

As tastes shifted from horses as work animals to pleasure creatures, all of my informants were quick to meet the changing public demand. Informants Bishop, Eubanks, Long, and Brown were willing to accept "rental" agreements just as the desire for trail ride horses emerged. It is my argument, based upon my research, that the horsetraders of the five-county area in East Texas responded not only to an ethical duality within their profession, but felt the pressure of liminal cultural definition by their own extravagances. Operating both outside of and within the realm of

community expectation, these traders certainly responded to and excelled in an unique cultural context.

**Appendix:
Times and Locations of Interviews**

<u>Informant</u>	<u>Date of Interview</u>	<u>Location of Interview</u>	<u>Comments</u>	<u>Tape Number</u>
L. E. "Buddy" Bishop	07/11/87	Timpson, Texas	Informant's Home	LEB7/11/87JRR1 LEB7/11/87JRR2
L. E. "Buddy" Bishop	07/14/87	Timpson, Texas	Doug Milford's Show Ring	Not tape recorded
Anonymous	07/27/87	Raywood, Texas	Raywood Sale Barn	AN7/27/87JRR1
C. C. Brown	08/07/87	Kirbyville, Texas	Kirbyville Sale Barn	Not tape recorded
Bobby Eubanks	08/07/87	Kirbyville, Texas	Kirbyville Sale Barn	Not tape recorded
Bobby Eubanks	08/21/87	Deweyville, Texas	Informant's Home	BE8/21/87JRR1
H. C. Long	08/28/87	Kirbyville, Texas	Kirbyville Sale Barn	Not tape recorded
H. C. Long	08/28/87	Silsbee, Texas	Informant's Home	HCL8/28/87JRR1 HCL8/28/87JRR2

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