

# HE BLUFFED BEN THOMPSON

*Georgetown Editor Began in the Days When Six-Shooter Bolstered the Pen*



For all that he is "nearer 83 than 82," as he likes to give his age, Editor J. E. Cooper of the Williamson County Sun bridges with facile pen the gap between the "six-shooter days" of Texas newspapering and the present. There is, however, one habit of his younger days to which he clings—he still writes his copy in longhand just as he did when the Sun was founded back in '77. The well loved Georgetown resident, banker and civic leader as well as newspaper man, is noted for his column, gleaned from old files, dealing with Williamson county events of 54 years ago, but he also writes editorial comment on current affairs. Genially though reluctantly told, Mr. Cooper's stories of early county days, when a six-shooter was as much a part of copy desk equipment as a stubby pencil, make a fascinating chapter.

thumb-eared dictionary and galley proofs. Editor Cooper kept the gun convenient to one hand while he penciled his news items with the other.

"It was one night in '82 that somebody threw a rock through the window of the Sun office. I can show you the spot." At this, Editor Cooper steps next door to point out quarters long occupied by his paper. After the rock shattered window glass and landed uncomfortably close to his person, the editor gave up editing long enough to snatch his gun and get to the front door. Scampering around the corner and out of sight was a figure never identified, although the editor might have done some shrewd guessing.

"Now don't get the impression Georgetown was a lawless place. It just had some malcontents hanging around in those days.

"I'm reminded of what an 87-year-old negro told me not long ago—he's probably the best posted man in the county. He said, 'Mr. Cooper, all those men tried to stir up trouble and git after you and swear to kill you, and it's a funny thing now. Everyone of 'em's dead now and you're still living.'"

A long pause, and then Mr. Cooper's eye crinkle in a good Presbyterian joker: "It's my religion not to worry because when a man's time comes it's come. But that hasn't kept me from being half scared to death many a time!"

There was the incident of Ben Thompson, who masterfully took revenge on The Austin Statesman editor, because of certain printed remarks about Ben and the quick adjournment of a stockmen's convention, by striding into the composing room and making one quick move: Thompson pied the type.

In the days of hand-set type that was no small revenge, and—Cooper mused. "That made him pretty mad at me, and he sent word he was coming over to Georgetown and pie the Sun type. I said he could come ahead.

"Then the veterans—they were still young men then, right fresh from the war—organized a vigilante committee and sent word to Ben to come on over but not to expect to leave alive . . . Things got pretty exciting."

"But," you interrupt in a fever, "what happened?"

"Why, the vigilante committee organized."

"But what happened?"

"Oh, Ben didn't show up."  
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As he likes to put it, Mr. Cooper is "closer to 83 than to 82," which means he will be 83 in February, an occasion which friends will make memorable. He attributes an alert mind and sure step to eating heartily, sleeping soundly, working moderately and drinking no stimulant stronger than coffee.

Although he has a variety of interests to keep him busy, he usually is to be found at his desk behind a window on which a date is proudly emblazoned—1877, the year the Williamson County Sun was established.

By LORRAINE BARNES

**F**ORTUNATELY for his reading public, Editor J. E. Cooper consistently violates the rule that news, to be news, must be NEW!

Thus, when he writes in the Williamson County Sun that "Miss Ada Talbot, our postmistress, made a visit of two or three days in Austin this week," or, "Rev. Charles H. Dobbs, of Waco, preached in the Presbyterian (frame) church on last Sunday morning and evening," or, "Capt. J. W. Posey has his law card in this issue," he is chronicling the events of 54 years ago.

To appreciate the man behind the column, you must know that Mr. Cooper founded the Sun a good many more years ago than he became a banker and civic leader, and gave his paper into the competent hands of his son, Robert, on whom

principal editorial duties now fall. But Mr. Cooper's abiding interest in "news items of interest about people you might have known" keeps him culling the old files.

Current topics bring editorial comment in another Sun feature, "Snatches of Here and There."

It takes no circulation expert to discover why many of the old families continue to take the Sun long after they have moved to distant parts.

Mr. Cooper touches a nostalgic and sentimental chord in readers from east of the Mississippi to California, and pretty soon the editor gets a grateful little note telling him the readers did know So-and-So, or is a grandson of Somebody, and by the way are any of the old family still living in Georgetown and whatever happened to Such-and-Such anyhow?

That calls for an answer, with the result that this columnist's correspondence, for a matter of geography if nothing else, is at once the envy and admiration of colleagues.

Fresh from Tennessee, Editor Cooper founded his paper in 1877 and today fails to remember why he named it the Sun. That is the only point in its history he can't recall.

Get him, if you can, to tell about his early partnership with a gentleman of Indian blood and exciting, if not altogether reliable, habits. Without revealing too much of the story, Mr. Cooper acquired sole ownership by lightning calculation and native ability to stand his ground in the face of a six-shooter.

THOSE were the days when a six-shooter was as much a part of copy desk equipment as a stubby pencil,