Both Sides of the Border

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John Robert Craddock (1901–1933)—Frank Dobie’s friend and collaborator: “Of all the young men who have come under my eye . . . you by the genius of your imagination made a profounder impression upon me than any other.” (Courtesy Matagorda County Museum, Bay City, Texas)

J. Frank Dobie in Beeville in the summer of 1923. He sent the picture to John Craddock with the message: “Down in my country we all wear ducking jackets; so the coat you see in the picture is not a dinner jacket.” (Courtesy Matagorda County Museum, Bay City, Texas)
LETTERS FROM J. FRANK DOBIE TO JOHN ROBERT CRADDOCK

Edited by Mary Belle Ingram, Historical Marker
Chairman, Matagorda County Museum Bay City, Texas,
with F. E. Abernethy

The Texas Folklore Society is forever indebted for its very existence to J. Frank Dobie, the Society’s Executive Secretary and the editor of its publications from 1922 to 1943. The Society, which had been founded in 1909 and was stabled at The University of Texas, was a casualty of World War I. Fortunately, J. Frank Dobie, a young English instructor at UT, resurrected the dormant society in 1921 and made it the bearer of his wealth of Texas legends as well as a treasury of Texas folklore in general. Dobie led the Society for the next twenty-one years, established it academically, and made it almost as well known as he was. For which reasons the Society was pleased recently to receive the following collection of J. Frank Dobie letters from Mary Belle Ingram, Historical Marker Chairman and Archivist with the Matagorda County Museum, Bay City, Texas.

Mrs. Ingram, who is in charge of the archives at the Matagorda County Museum, discovered the Dobie letters among the collection of papers given to the museum by the Richard and Florence Craddock Gusman family, prominent citizens in Bay City and Matagorda County. Richard Gusman was longtime mayor of Bay City, and his wife was the sister of John Robert Craddock, to whom Dobie wrote the letters.

The letters from Dobie to John Craddock were written between November 6, 1923, and April 16, 1932. The final letter
of August 30, 1933, is from Bertha Dobie to John’s father, W. A. Craddock, expressing her sorrow and Frank’s at the death of John at age thirty-two.

Most of the correspondence occurred between November 23, 1923, and November 9, 1924, during Dobie’s two years of “exile” as head of the English department at Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College at Stillwater. Aggravated with the condescending attitudes of some of his peers and superiors at UT, Dobie precipitously accepted an offer to head the English department at Oklahoma A&M. He was sorry he made that leap almost as soon as he landed, and a year later was working earnestly with his friend and TFS founder Leonidas Payne to get back to UT. Dobie returned to The University of Texas at Austin as an adjunct professor in the fall of 1925.

Unfortunately, we do not have much biographical information about John Robert Craddock during the time of the correspondence. We know that John was born in Rogers, Bell County, Texas, on November 20, 1901, to William Attress Craddock and Florence Punchard Craddock. Both parents were from old-time Texas families. So, John was twenty-two years old and a student at UT when the correspondence began. He was not a student of Dobie’s, but Dobie considered John a collaborator. Dobie had already published John’s “The Cowboy Dance” in PTFS II (1923), now called Coffee in the Gourd. John had also given Dobie three stories—“The Waiting Woman,” “The Headless Squatter,” and “The Legend of Stampede Mesa”—for PTFS III (1924), Legends of Texas. Dobie loved the Stampede Mesa story and used it many times in his storytelling speeches and in his writing.

Dobie, in the list of contributors in Legends, describes John as “a true product of the rangy West, and he is gathering all manner of folk material from the old-time Plains people. Only one to the manner born can seize a legend as he has seized ‘The Legend of Stampede Mesa.’ At present Mr. Craddock is ranching in Dickens County. He has written good ballads and has been a student at the University of Texas.” The phrase, “has been a student” was written
during the summer of 1924, when John was spending the summer at his father’s ranch near Spur.

John was obviously a favorite young man for Dobie, who was thirty-six in 1924, and the planned camping trip for the summer of 1924 was the height of excitement for both of these young men. The adventure fell through for some undiscussed reason. John returned to UT in the fall of 1924 with a plan to study law but quit school at the end of the semester, in January of 1925, probably because of health problems. He returned to his father’s ranch near Spur, where he finished his life as a victim of Parkinson’s Disease. Dobie published John’s “Songs the Cowboys Sing” in PTFS VI, *Texas and Southwestern Lore* in 1927, and “The Corn Thief—A Folk Anecdote” in PTFS VII, *Follow the Drinkin’ Gou’ld* in 1928. Dobie wrote his last letter (as far as we know) to John in 1932, at which time it appears that John’s illness had reached such a state that his father had to write for him.

John’s disease caused him to have trouble walking, and he drowned when he accidentally fell into the family well on August 23, 1933. Dobie was in Mexico at the time, so Bertha Dobie wrote the letter of condolence to John’s father in which she said, “Frank has loved very few men as he loved your son.” Frank Dobie did love John, as can be seen from the correspondence, and admired his family and the family’s history and ranching culture, and his sorrow must have been great with John’s passing. One of Dobie’s last tributes to John was in his letter of 1932: “Of all the young men who have come under my eye since I have been in Austin you by the genius of your imagination made a profounder impression upon me than any other. This aside from the fact that I came to know you better as a friend.”

John Robert Craddock was buried in Red Mud Cemetery, Dickens County, Texas. On his death certificate his profession was listed as “student.”

The following letters, now residing in the archives of the Matagorda County Museum, reveal a lot about the young, cowboy-romantic J. Frank Dobie. He wrote these letters to John at a time
when he was exploding with excitement and enthusiasm for collecting and writing about the legends of Texas. Dobie’s career began with the popularity of the Society’s *Legends of Texas* in 1924, it accelerated with his publication of *The Vaquero of the Brush Country* in 1929, and it reached national prominence with the publication of *Coronado’s Children* in 1930. Frank Dobie went on to national fame and popularity as a writer and folklorist and character, but the years he spent in correspondence with John Robert Craddock of Spur, Texas, were the years of his making. It is interesting to discover in this most personal correspondence the mind and personality of Frank Dobie during the years of his maturation.

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**OKLAHOMA**

**AGRICULTURAL AND MECHANICAL COLLEGE**

**BRADFORD KNAPP, President**

**STILLWATER**

Nov. 6, 1923

Department of English

[handwritten]

Dear John:

Your explanation, with sketches, of the Haunted Spring and Stampede Mesa legends is fine. However, you did not say what is the place of the new legend, “The Waiting Woman.” You say that “the wood cutter who hauls wood for the store” gave it __. What wood-cutter, what store, where? What bills? This is a good little legend. Something over three weeks ago I was at T. C. H. and then before the Texas Poetry Society at Dallas telling and reading Texas legends. Among others I read yours—“Stampede Mesa”—and, believe me, it took.

It froze last night; there is no wind this morning and what heaven it would be to ride across the frosty grass now! How a horse
would feel his oats! I am all lonesome for the outdoors. It is a farming country all around here, though the 101 Ranch and the Osage pastures are not so far away. What’s the Texas news? Are you taking all Law this year?

Your good friend,

J. Frank Dobie

[OKLAHOMA A&M LETTERHEAD]

December 1, 1923

[typed, with handwritten postscript]

Dear John:

“I have started me a sour-dough keg, and settled down for the winter.” When I read that the hot blood of sympathy flamed up in the back of my head as it does into your eyes sometimes when you hear something that appeals to you. Oh the mocking curse of civilization and of the necessity to “be getting on” that keeps us pulling over poets and pupils when we might be listening to the more than poetic rhythm of spurs on frosty gravel these fine mornings. There is one humane thing that I learned in the army that I wish to pass on to you. Always these cold mornings rub your horse’s bit to warm it up before you put it in his mouth. I never saw a cow-puncher think to do that. I never thought to do it before I learned it in the army.

The map is a good deal better. In your legend you say that Doakum Flats are to the south of the Mesa. In your map you show the Doakum trail running east and west and the squatter’s house is north of the trail. Now where exactly are those flats? I imagine that the squatter must have had his squat near the Flats where his little bunch of cows was grazing, don’t you? You see, I am as particular about particulars as old [Morgan] Callaway
would be. If you happen to learn of the New Mexico Fort that the 
trail leads to, be sure to let me know. That would make an item of 
color.

I’ll joy to get your ballad when it comes. Do not generally 
employ internal rhyme in your ballads as you did in The Wagon. 
You will never regret the winter you are spending out in the open. 
If I stay in a year, I grow more in three weeks out than I do all 
the year in. Nowhere but out of it can a man masticate and digest 
civilization.

Mrs. Dobie sends her regards. We had turkey Thursday, and I 
would have given a good deal to have had you with us. I hope that 
your father is out and mending. I should very much like to know 
him.

Always your good friend,

J. Frank Dobie

P.S. I am sending you a magazine in which you will find some 
things to your liking—especially the jump off of a 70 or 75 foot 
cliff! Please return magazine when you are done with it.

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Dear John:

Have I treated you like a stranger? Well, up to a few days ago I 
have been going for weeks on five hours of sleep—working on 
the legends. They are with the printer now and soon I shall be 
receiving proof to read. There will be over two hundred and fifty 
pages of them, and they will be read long after old Morgan Callaway 
is rotted and the worms have eaten his Anglo-Saxon infinitives.
[Dr. Morgan Callaway was the head of the English Department at The University of Texas at the time. He was condescending about Dobie’s work in folklore, and Dobie returned the sentiment about Callaway’s work in Anglo-Saxon grammar.] You can have as many copies as you want, but I am sorry to say that you will have to pay for them at about the rate of five dollars for half a dozen, or, if you want them bound, at the rate of two dollars a piece. I am running the Society three or four hundred dollars in debt getting out such a big publication. The volumes will be ready for delivery by the first of May I hope. Anyway, I am going to Austin May 2–3 for the meeting of the Texas Folk-Lore Society.

I have been too busy to consider my environments, but if I pause to consider it, I realize that I had as soon be in hell with my back broke as chained permanently to this layout. The majority of young people here seem to be descendants of Kansas sooners who squatted on 160 acres of land and lived on turnips and cornbread while they brought up a family. The country is so thickly populated that rabbits can’t exist. I see by the papers that your part of the state is settling up a lot. Well, we came on a generation too late.

Now, I always soak beans over night before trying to cook them. Then I put them in an iron pot the first thing when I get up, let them cook until I leave camp, leaving plenty of water on them and plenty of bacon in them, and plenty of fire around them. They will be done when you get back, but keep on cooking them for two or three days, and about the time you eat the last one it will be as black as ebony, as soft as a girl’s kiss, and as palatable and digestible as ambrosia. It snowed here last night, and I have enjoyed myself today wearing my moderately high-heeled boots (which I bought last summer); but no amount of boots could fool my imagination into the idea that I was dragging a pair of spurs around, squatting gingerly so as to keep those spurs from hooking my stern, or catching an extra breath of the free, free air at the sound of twig’s whirr of the rowel on my heel as I rode through the brush.
I have just read a great book: *Fifty Years on the old Frontier*, by James H. Cook. I think sometimes of our project. I think that we want to make it cover present cow people as well as those of the dying generation. Are any cowmen coming back, financially? Not many, I presume. For atmosphere, you ought to go to Houston to “the Convention.” I am sending you a sheath of cowboy songs. Keep it, but send back to me that copy of the Pioneer Magazine I sent you, please. I want it for my file.

What is called civilization is a damned lie and delusion. Are you going back to it! I hope that you are not thinking of marrying soon. Write to me when you can—soon.

Your friend,

*J. Frank Dobie*

Are you getting any more songs? Keep your collection going. What about the ballad? I want to see it. Have you sent anything off? Any luck?

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[OKLAHOMA A&M LETTERHEAD]

April 28, 1924.

[typewritten]

My dear, dear Friend Craddock:
At last I can write you a line. For the last six weeks now I have not slept six hours a night, and I have made every waking hour count. I have been finishing the legends as they came from the printer, correcting proof, verifying notes—there are scores of them—and working on various material connected with the volume. I honestly think that this will be one of the three or four most significant books ever printed in the state of Texas. It will be nearly three hundred pages long. Your legend of the Stampede Mesa is the
best legend in it. By the way, I have picked up two or three additional versions to that legend up here from some old “rusties.”

It is costing us a cool thousand to print the book. We have about half that much money. I have so much confidence in the volume that I ordered 1250 copies run off and five hundred bound. I’ll send you a bound copy. If you want others bound you will have to pay for then [sic] at the rate of $2.00 each. The binding costs money.

I am about to finish the index now. Wednesday night I leave for Austin, and never did a thirsty saddle horse trot towards the water hole with more eagerness than I am heading for Texas. May God curse and damn such a layout as I am in here. I hear that I am charged with 1, using profane language in class, 2, smoking in my office and on the campus (against which crime the president has issued special orders) 3, never attending chapel, 4, flunking too many students. I do not give a damn whether they like my ways or not; I do not intend to reform. Nor am I afraid of my job.

I am more or less counting on seeing you this summer, but as yet my plans are not certain, and yours are not either, perhaps. I can picture no greater happiness than owning your own land and living on it.

You ask for a kodak picture. I am sending one that my sister snapped of me at Beeville last summer. It would be better if the horse’s head were showing. Down in my country we all wear ducking jackets; so the coat you see in the picture is not a dinner jacket.

I have laughed a dozen times at your horse’s “interpreting his belly full of oats.” How the cattle are lifting up their heads on the grass these days! I am glad to see that the price is up a little. Write me now when you can and let me see those ballads. I have several new songs also. I am thinking of making up an article of several versions of the stampede legend and trying to market it. Have I your permission to go ahead? We could write the article jointly, for you have already contributed the best version. Keep on the watch for other legends. Good night,

Your friend,

J. Frank Dobie
Dear John:

I spent a glorious week in Austin, where I was treated like a king. [The Texas Folklore Society met on the UT campus on May 3. Even though Dobie was in Stillwater, he was still the secretary of the TFS.] Since returning I have been covered with mountains of dead timber—except Sunday when we went to the 101 Ranch rodeo, Indian dance and parade, and pioneer historical pageant. The 101 Ranch is only about 45 miles from here. We got out of these peanut settlements on the way over and saw some good pasture land and hundreds of Texas coast steers that had just been shipped in. Well the rodeo was fine, especially the bull-dogging, the bronco riding being rather a cut and dried affair, the mounting all being done in a chute and some of the horses doing little more than see-saw, though a couple of them were right hellish. As I admitted to you before, I myself am not jinete [sic. jinete] (bronco buster). Hundreds of real-Indians—they live all about the 101 Ranch—in old time garb and gait made a rare sight to me.

Now, did you get the package of legends that I had sent to you? What do you think of the book? The Society is in debt $500.00 on it but we have plenty of copies for sale at $2.50 and $1.50 respectively. You can convey this information to any one you see who wants a copy. You might give the paper at Spur a little write-up on the volume. We need to get some publicity! [The last sentence had a left side bar with the handwritten words “Do this.”]

“Sweetened hot” was new to me. Thanks for the word! Yes, I have sniffed cigarettes along with burning grass. For my part, I like the smell of horses too. But of all sensations the sound of a lone Mexican whistling or singing as he comes in the darkness to a camp fire around which talk low other Mexicans is the most soul stirring.

I am too busy now to do anything with Stampede legends. I have learned a lot of things. I wish that I could go over your
material with you and see what you have. Can’t you get music to those songs? We must have the music.

How is your father now? Adios. Write ere long.

Your friend

J. Frank Dobie

[OKLAHOMA A&M LETTERHEAD]

May 31, 1924

[typewritten]

Dear John:
I do not often answer a letter on the day that I get it, but I am in a great hurry to tell you that I think I shall arrive in Spur about the 22 of July if that date suits you. My school does not close here until about that time. I’ll go with you and work for the S M S outfit if they will pay me forty dollars a month and board and not make me ride any pitching horses. Or, I’ll ride with you towards New Mexico. I will not pitch hay or ride in an automobile. I have a Stetson hat, a pair of boots, a pair of spurs. Can you rustle me a saddle and a blanket in addition to the saddle blanket? I can not be around there more than three or four weeks, as I have to go home for a few days. I am due out in Santa Fe to talk on the Folk-Lore of the Southwest about the last of August, but may not go [He went,]. We have a warm invitation from a Boston friend of mine who is excavating Indian remains to camp with him and his outfit at Pecos, New Mexico. He is a bully good fellow—not of Boston origin, I think. Well, I want to see something of the plains life and something of you. I had as soon be one place as another when I get out there, and the business of riding and trying to rope will be my entertainment. Don’t plan anything except to have me with you doing whatever you have to do.
No, you owe the Texas Folk-Lore Society only $5.00. I threw the bound volume in for a pelon, as the Mexicans say. By Gosh, but it pleases me to hear how much you like the book. I doubt if I shall ever do another piece of work in which I shall put so much of my heart. I do not know though. Be figuring out some way how you can get the music of cowboy songs transferred to paper. We can make a little book of them that will sell. My wife is pleased, too, with your liking her legends. She helped me on a thousand details.

God, but I will be glad to get away from here into an open country. Your friend always,

J. Frank Dobie

[OKLAHOMA A&M LETTERHEAD]

June 28, 1924

[typewritten]

Dear John:
I am not out of the sage country, but a whiff of any kind of water will make a steer dying of thirst throw up his head. I am scheming now to get away from here if possible four or five days earlier than I expected. If anything develops you will hear from me soon. I suppose that there is no necessity for an exact date just yet.

I like the looks of my horse. If we make Mexico [Dobie meant “New” Mexico, not Old Mexico.] in three days we shall have to string out sure enough. I wish that we would strike a good sized herd of cattle trailing that way and that we might loaf along with them a day or two. [Dobie would have given his front seat in hell to have made a real trail drive.] I feel a sort of hunger for association with cattle. I have a few memories that will stand out in my life as long as I have memory; I know that this experience will make

Remembering Our Ancestors

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another such. I wish that we were going to be gone a month. I have to be down in Beeville about the middle of August to a homecoming. Then the last of August I have to be in Santa Fe, New Mexico, to read a paper on “Folk-Lore of the Southwest.” Then back here about the fifth or tenth of September [sic]. I won’t think of this place when I get away from it.

Meet me in your car as I shall have a suit case or two. I’ll bring my substitute for a slicker, a raincoat. I am glad that we won’t have a pack-horse, and you won’t have any trouble making me leave behind all vestiges of college garb. Shall I bring a wool shirt? If we get up into the hills we may strike some right cool weather. I have a good morral that I shall bring also, and when I step off the train I shall have on a Stetson hat.

Say, John, do you know a fellow in Spur named J. A. Putnam? He is reputed to know all about the famous “Lost Adams Mine” of Colorado, and may have a flood of legends on the subject to pour out. By the way, LEGENDS OF TEXAS has for a month been the best seller of non-fiction in Dallas. Eight weeks ago we were six hundred dollars in debt; the financial officer writes me that we shall soon be out. I think that we will have to go into a second edition. Last night I wrote to the Dallas News, or rather to one of the men I know on it, suggesting that you and I could furnish some interesting feature stories to the News. We’ll take along a good notebook apiece, more or less write up our trip, and then after we come back see what we can sell. I’ll be going through two or three of the cities this summer and can see the editors personally.

We have had rooming with us for two months now a couple, the man of which was a cowboy in Wyoming twenty years ago. He is the most interesting talker that I have met in Oklahoma and has given me some real pictures. Well, I pant like a lizard to see you.

Your friend,

J. Frank Dobie
Dear Craddock:
You can expect me to arrive on the noon train in Spur July 18. I intend to steal time and get away early. Am going through a new country (Lawton, Okla. and Wichita Falls) and it will take me only 2 1/2 days to make the trip! I am going to bring my six-shooter. I have some army blankets light and no better than cotton. Shall I bring one? I intend to let my beard grow on this trip.

I had thought of bringing a few books and a fish line or two, in case we should come to the Pecos or some other river. Shall I bring such or not?

There is a bare chance that my long absent brother from California may get home this month instead of in August as was planned. If so, I’ll have to go to Beeville first. At any rate, I should get to Spur by the last of the month. I mention this contingency. I do not expect Elrich to come yet.

My blood dances hourly at our prospects.

Yours,
Dobie

P. S. Do I need a coat of any kind; I do not know what kind of climate to expect, especially at night.
WESTERN UNION
TELEGRAM

RECEIVED AT
3 D S 16.NL
Stillwater Okla Jul 11 1924

John R Craddock
Craddock Ranch Mail Spur Tex

Cant reach you until Monday July Twenty One Look for me then
Will explain delay later.

J Frank Dobue [sic]

STILLWATER, OKLAHOMA,

July 12, 1924
[typed, with handwritten postscript]

Dear John:
Absolutely I feel cheated out of three or four days of my life. I
wired you kast [sic] night that I could not reach Spur until Mon-
day, July 21. I figured that you might be in town today and would
get the telegram if the agent mailed it to you. I had been all primed
to come as per arrangement when an order came from the presi-
dent requiring that nobody put up his examinations and leave
unless given awritten permission. I could not get the written per-
mission. I am head a [sic] department and responsible for the con-
duct of six or eight other more or less human beings. Damn such
responsibility. Just now I am looking for an instructor to resign
and if he does I should fill his place before I leave. But I am going
to leave here next Saturday night or noon. And when I leave I am
gone. No mail for a month is my hope. However, I have to be in
Austin the night of August 11. I could weep at the time I am los-
ing from your society and range.
I am bringing a good camera. Have not heard anything from the Dallas News people. Yours always,

Dobie

Three minutes after I received this came your letter. I am tickled at the prospect of seeing Stampede Mesa. We will get pictures of it. Andy Adams from Colorado wrote me of his admiration for that legend. Your letter vibrates with freshness.

WESTERN UNION
TELEGRAM

RECEIVED AT
4 D S 49 NL

Stillwater OKLA Jul 14 1924
John R Craddock
Mail Craddock Ranch Spur Tex

Foiled again The villain had just received telegram My brother absent five years California is home He will remain only few days My mother expects me to come now I will go Am very much ashamed to putting you out so can reach Spur about August third Will write

J Frank Dobie
Dear John:
The unexpected happened. A month ago I wrote you that I had a brother who might come home. As I wired you last night, he has come. I want to see him very much, but I do wish that he had accommodated his visit to the plans that the family had set. Well, Elrich “has seen the owl and the elephant.” You would like him. He is about as regular in his methods as a [second part of the simile is scratched out and unreadable.]

Here for days I have been imagining: this time next week or two weeks hence, John Craddock and I will be riding up the bank of the Double Mountain Fork; we will be smelling the broiled bacon; I will feel the delicious feel of leaning back against my saddle as we smoke by the fire. I had not built so on an experience in years. What I am concerned with now is how all this affects you. I must say, that it seems to me I am treating you very shabbily for a host—though I have not played the hand myself.

I can get out there about August 3 if you are still able to go then on the trip. I would have most of the month left then to be with you. If you can’t get off then, be frank & say so and if you have work, I’ll come and help you do it. Write me at Beeville, Texas. I’ll be there by the middle of next week. I guess.

I hope that you have not had the horses shod. I hope that you have got both my telegrams in time to prevent extra trips and preparations. I hope as I live that we go yet. Our appetites will be whetted—not dulled—by the delay. I am going to ship you a blanket and a few things so that I will not have to lug them around. Have read up a lot on New Mexico; have a good map of it also. What is the quickest railroad time between Austin & Spur? What best route? Write me quick at Beeville.
Got a letter a day or two ago from old Andy Adams—great frontier writer—who spoke fine things of your Stampede Legend. He knows the Dockums in Colorado, sons of old man Dockum, and says that he is going to check up the story with them. By heaven, we’ll have to make some kind of camp at Stampede Mesa. We’ll have to yell and shoot my six-shooter and stampede the jack rabbits. We’ll have to celebrate. You have immortalized Stampede Mesa. Meet it is that we pay tribute to both Mesa and immortality.

Yours,

J. Frank Dobie

Regards to your father, please. If we take this trip still, and if the plan still holds to camp at Squatter’s, I hope he will come with us. I have bought a good Eastman Kodak—3A

[One wonders what happened between July 15 and October 20. I cannot believe that Dobie and John made that trip because Dobie would have made some mention of it in the following correspondence. Dobie had a hectic professional and family schedule, as referred to above, and he could have kept canceling and rescheduling the trip until they ran out of time. But I do believe that he dearly wanted that trip as a great adventure and as grist for his writing mill. I have a feeling that the reason for cancellation lay with John, and perhaps with John’s physical condition. I base this on the idea that Dobie would have been too sensitive to mention the aborted trip had it been John’s fault through his illness that the trip did not make.]
October 20, 1924

Dear Friend John:
I have time just to write a bit. I am still lookong [sic] for those ballads. Revise them all you can before you send them. Then I will rake them over and perhaps one of them will hit the fancy of Hubbell. Have you seen the new SOUTHWEST REVIEW? It is a thousand per cent improvement over the old Texas Review. [Jay Hubbell was the new editor of the Southwest Review, and he was interested in western themes. He and Dobie became good friends, and Dobie was a regular contributor.]

Do you have any cowboy pictures? Very much to my surprise I received a commission, so to speak, from a big outfit the other day to write a couple of articles on cowboys. They want pictures. I have a lot of pictures, but they are all of Mexican vaqueros. If you can possibly rustle me up some cowboy pictures, I would be eternally obliged to you. I like the picture you sent me. Would you mind if I ran it? If not, send me one without any writing on it. This picture is a little too self conscious though for my purpose. I wish that I had a picture of cowboys in camp along about sunset. I wish that I had one of them on herd. I wish that I had two or three of cowboy “characters”—long, lank, slouchy looking. If you know where these can be secured and will write for them, I’ll be more than glad to pay good money for them. The thing is that I do not want posed pictures.

Watch and see if I do not get somebody to take your “Legend of Stampede Mesa” and pay for it.

I am busy as a cat. Give [historian Walter Prescott] Webb my regards if you see him. How is his book [The Great Plains] coming along? Are you taking any English? How do you like studying law? Craddock, take my advice and study like the devil. I have reached the point that I can be as methodical as a machine, drudge like a
dead head, and yet never lose my zest for adventure. A man has to come to the place that he can control his lust for the open and for adventure if he is to do anything with a professional life; at the same time he need not kill those refreshing qualities in himself. Stevenson said, you know, that romance was not so much seeking adventures, as being ready to seek them. Stevenson knew a good deal about romance.

Your friend,

Frank Dobie

[Dobie never signs his letters to John with “Frank.” Here for the first time, however, he leaves off the “J.” Also, Dobie’s salutation is almost sentimental, “Dear Friend John,” which might be an indication of a new plane for their relationship.]

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ON TRAIN, NORTH OF RED RIVER,
November 9, 1924

Dear John:
I have been intending for days to write you. I am going to do over two of your ballads and submit them to Hubbell of Southwest Review. By “doing over” I mean merely ironing down a few wrinkled places. The “Sunday Cowboy” is good stuff. You surely know your oats, but you must pay more attention to technique of English. That does not mean that you are to gut all flavor out of it. Gut nothing out that is flavor or savor.

I have been down to San Antonio to write an article on “The Old Trail Drivers” for Country Gentlemen. Was certainly glad to see Webb there reporting the meeting for the Dallas News. I wrote
an article for *Country Gentlemen* on “Cowboy Songs.” All the time I was writing it, I had in mind that you could be writing a better one. I’ll send you a copy of the article when it appears.

I’m feeling my oats these days. Thank you for pictures. I do not believe that I can use them, however; they are too *posed!* I want them, though.

Craddock, no other people on earth can equal the old cowmen and cowboys. But their time is past. Be sure to go to San Antonio sometime when they are meeting. I’ll write again soon.

Your friend,

*J. Frank Dobie*

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We have no correspondence between Dobie and John Craddock for the next eight years. This does not mean that they did not write nor communicate. On November 11, 1929, Dobie remembered John with a newly minted copy of his *A Vaquero of the Brush Country,* inscribed “To my friend John Craddock.” *Vaquero* is also from the Gusman collection and is in the Matagorda County Museum archives. The following letter from Dobie to John, written in 1932, is sent with all the warmth and friendship of a long-held and loving relationship. But, the two were no longer collaborating, probably because of John’s poor health. It appears that John could no longer write and that his father wrote his letters for him. This is the approach to a sad conclusion.]
Dear John:
I hope that you won’t think I do not think of you as seldom as I
write. It is literally true that hardly a day goes by without my think-
ing of you. Of all the young men who have come under my eye
since I have been in Austin you by the genius of your imagination
made a profounder impression upon me than any other. This aside
from the fact that I came to know you better as a friend.

Tonight I seem to be in a mood to review the life I have lived
during the last several months. I can’t remember what I did in Janu-
ary but be miserable with hay fever. February 1 I began teaching
again, and I have done little but attend to teaching and meet the
increasing routine of demands on my time since. I have written less
during the last four months than during any other period of the same
length for many years. I have gone about some “lecturing” as it is
called—and honestly I have become very tired of listening to myself.

Your father writes me that you hear me every other Monday night
over the radio. That information pleases me very much, though those
radio talks never satisfy me. In the first place I don’t seem to have
enough imagination to visualize the audience; in the second place I
am never for a momonet [sic], while talking, unconscious of the
passing of time. One has to hew to the split second. In order to
save time I have been writing out what I had to say and reading it.
Then to get through I read too fast. I aim to sound as if I were
talking instead of reading, but when a man is thinking about the
time and not about his subject he can’t do his best. I shall not go
to San Antonio this coming Monday but am going to Lufkin to
spout—“lecture.” Mrs. Dobie is going with me as she wants to see
East Texas flowers, and we are going in the car.

Well, ON THE OPEN RANGE did not get adopted as a text
book and it has had not much of a run as a trade book. It has never
been advertised as it should have been. The Southwest Press has about gone to the wall; in fact it has so far gone that it has never paid me royalty on Coronado’s Children or paid the printer a big bill. Attempts are now being made to reorganize and refinance it; I hope they pan out. I have planned all along that you should receive a check for your Stampede story in ON THE OPEN RANGE whenever the Southwest Press starts to paying anybody anything again. My prediction is that that story will live a long, long time. [On the Open Range was adopted by the State of Texas as a supplementary reader in 1932, but Southwest Press had to sell it so cheaply that Dobie received little if any royalties from it.]

The Country Gentleman seems to have forgotten my existence. I don’t expect that magazine to ever buy anything else from me. All its non-fiction is utilitarian now—the kind of thing I am not interested in and could not write.

I am getting a great deal of pleasure out of my course in “Life and Literature of the Southwest.” The course was supposed to be limited to 50 students, but about 70 got in. A hundred and seventy would be in it if they had not been cut off. We read Bigfoot Wallace, Andy Adams, etc. and have a bully time. As usual the majority of the students are girls, though there is a good sprinkling of boys. Those girls had rather read about Billy the Kid than Alice in Wonderland. The way girls take to bloody deeds and men always puzzles me.

If you can use some more books I wish Mr. Craddock would write me. I have received some very good ones dealing with the West since you were here and should be most happy to make up a bundle to send out and loan you. Tell your father to write me right away if you want some. I sent you a copy of the last folk-lore publication the other day. It has been out only a week or so. I hope it has arrived all right.

Some time ago I had a long letter from a friend of yours, John H. Davis, who is as full of romantic ideas as an egg is of meat. Soon afterwards he came to see me. I am sending you his letter, thinking it might interest you. Send it back some time, as I may sometime
follow its lead for a story. Almost daily I receive letters from people who think they have a buried treasure located but cannot “make out the signs” and want my help. And never, never can I give them the least help.

Perhaps you saw in the newspapers that I had been granted a Guggenheime fellowship for writing a book of tales out of Northern Mexico [Tongues of the Monte, 1935]. The grant affords $2000 a year and I shall consequently be on leave of absence next year. I am going to put the story of the Lost Tayopa Mine in the book, the story of the Onza, and some other yarns that I have. I have enough already for probably a third or a fourth of the book. In September I am going with a man down into the state of Tamaulipas, on the east coast of Mexico. He wants to hunt jaguars; I am going along to hunt stories also. We are going in a car and will be gone about two weeks. Soon after returning I plan to go into Mexico about Del Rio, outfit with horse, pack, and a Mexican and travel across the country towards Chihuahua City. This trip will be 400 miles or more. That is the way I will learn the country and its traditions. Later on Mrs. Dobie and I are going to Mexico City, where we have long wanted to go, and also to Torreon, Saltillo, and Durango. We may take a mule-back trip into the mountains out from Durango. I think I’ll learn something. I hope I can write it.

If I had a book now I would not let it be published. The market on books, like that on everything else, is all shot to pieces [The Depression was at its worst in 1932.]. You never met my brother Elrich. He is the most interesting member of our family. After having been in Java for five years working for the Dutch Shell oil people, he came home last December—work having closed down in Java. He had saved some money. The first thing he did was to buy in with a fellow on a bunch of good cattle. I am mighty glad that the family is again [sic] represented in the cow business. I wish I had some money to go into it myself.

It is dry in this country as it is everywhere, but I wish you could see our yard. It is very beautiful and restful and we take a great deal of pleasure in it. One drawback to our situation is that
our street has become almost a main thoroughfare between Speed-
way and Red River, which is now paved from town out almost to
the Country Club. The new boulevard along Waller Creek is being
paved. Perhaps when it is opened up we shall not have so much
dust and noise from traffic.

The annual Roundup for exstudents of the University was
today. Sight of the horses made me homesick.

Well, John, I have enjoyed writing to you. Good [sic] bless
you. I am, with affection,

Your friend,
Frank Dobie

Mrs. Dobie asks me to remember her to you. I send my regards
to your father and mother. They are the salt-of-the-earth kind of
people. The older I get the more I think of their kind.

402 PARK PLACE
AUSTIN, TEXAS

August 30, 1933

[typewritten]
Mr. W. A. Craddock
Spur, Texas

My dear Mr. Craddock:
In my husband’s absence I am writing in reply to your letter
announcing John’s death. He will, of course, write you himself as
soon as he comes home. Frank could not keep away from Mexico,
and about two weeks ago went back to be gone until about the
time the University opens.

I knew John too, and admired his noble ambitions and later
sorrowed over the cruel disease that made any fulfillment of them
forever impossible. Frank has loved very few men as he loved your son. Never did he write John or send him books out of any feeling of being kind but simply out of an affection and regard that the passing of years could not lessen. He has always regarded John’s high appreciation of him as one of the gracious, good things in his life.

With sympathy for you and Mrs. Craddock, I am

Sincerely yours,

Bertha Dobie [signed]

Mrs. J. Frank Dobie
J. Frank Dobie in the Texas Folklore Society office at The University of Texas, ca. 1936 (Courtesy Barker Texas History Center, University of Texas)