

J. FRANK DOBIE

MR. TEXAS

*On Exhibit at the*  
SOUTHWESTERN WRITERS COLLECTION

*February 1 – July 31, 2006*





*J. Frank Dobie &  
The Southwestern Writers Collection*



The Southwestern Writers Collection was founded twenty years ago with a gift of J. Frank Dobie materials to the university by Bill and Sally Wittliff. Bill Wittliff had purchased Dobie's remaining literary papers at an estate sale in 1985, and he understood that the Dobie archive represented an enormous treasure, offering deeply personal insights into this seminal Texas figure. Wittliff envisioned the Dobie archive forming the backbone of something even larger—an entire collection devoted to the writers of Texas and the Southwest. With that in mind, Bill and Sally Wittliff established the Southwestern Writers Collection at Texas State University-San Marcos in 1986. The collection has since grown and flourished, and now—in its twentieth anniversary year—it is becoming recognized as one of the nation's major repositories for regional culture.

J. FRANK DOBIE: MR. TEXAS is taken from the major Dobie archives donated by Bill and Sally Wittliff, along with selections from a comprehensive collection of Dobie's published materials donated by Texana collector Al Lowman and his wife Darlyne.

The exhibit was co-curated by Steve Davis, Assistant Curator of the Southwestern Writers Collection, and Joel Minor, Processing Archivist, with assistance from Curator Connie Todd and Archives Assistants Mary Garcia and Tina Ybarra.





*“If nothing in written form* pertaining to the Southwest existed at all, it would be more profitable for an inhabitant to go out and listen to coyotes singing at night in the prickly pear.... It is very profitable to listen to coyotes anyhow....

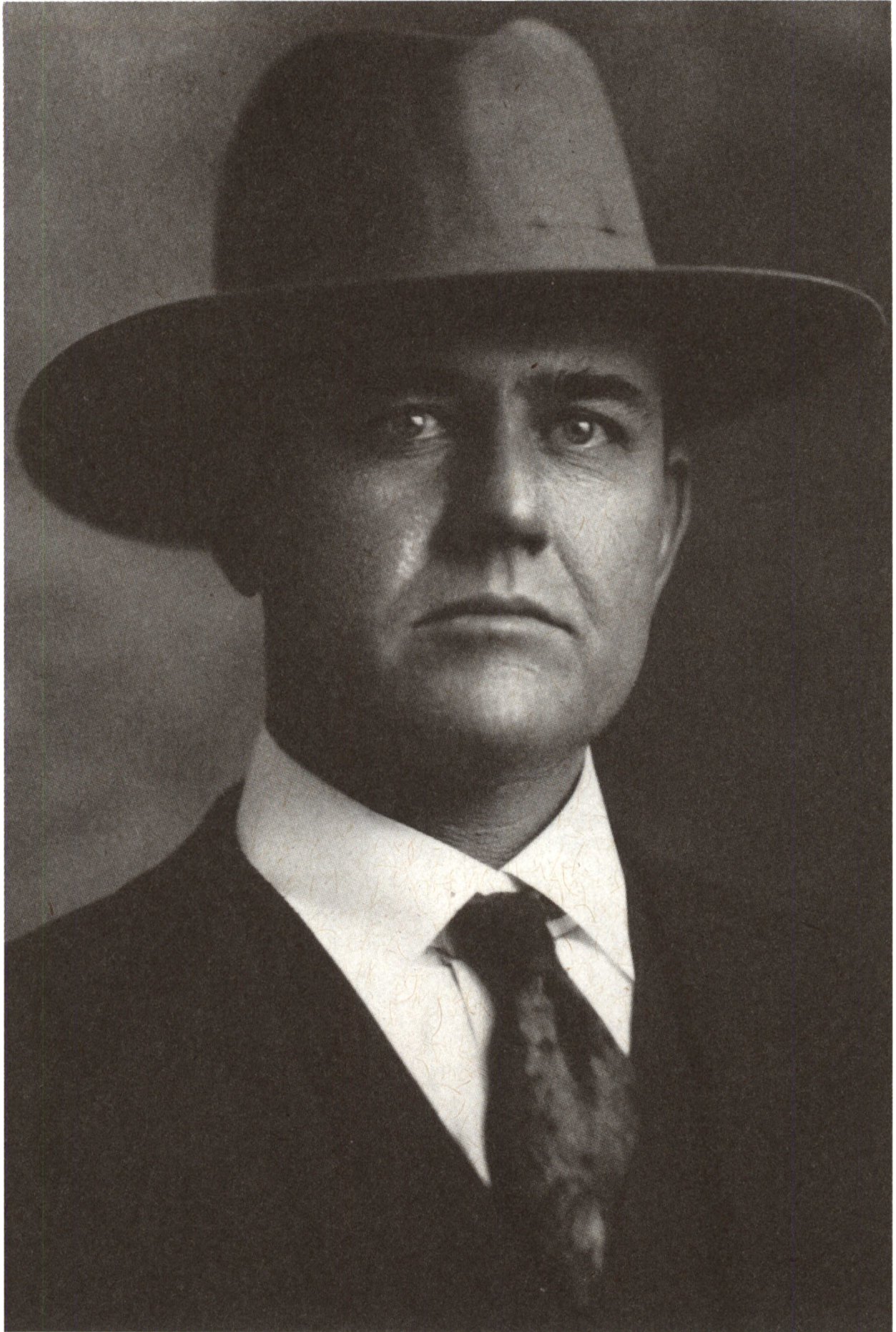
“I should probably have been a wiser and better informed man had I spent more time out with the grasshoppers, horned toads, and coyotes.”


—*J. Frank Dobie*



*Right: Snapshot of J. Frank Dobie in his trademark linen suit; both the photograph and the suit are on display in the exhibit*







*Folklorist and author* J. Frank Dobie (1888-1964) was Texas's dominant literary and cultural voice in the first half of the twentieth century. Known as "Mr. Texas," Dobie helped define the state in the popular imagination.

He grew up on a working ranch in South Texas and he published tales of cowboys, lost gold mines, and figures from "old-time" Texas. He also chronicled the state's natural history, writing books about longhorns, mustangs, coyotes, and rattlesnakes.

Dobie was a long-time professor at the University of Texas, where he brought regionalism into the realm of academia by championing "Southwestern Studies." He penned a syndicated newspaper column and he often appeared on radio programs. Dobie used his popularity to speak out on the social issues of the day. During the 1940s, he called for integrating African Americans into the University of Texas. His outspoken views caused controversy, and the university terminated his teaching contract in 1946.

Dobie continued to write and publish until his death, and his influence over Texas literature remains strong today. His ranch southwest of Austin is home to the Dobie-Paisano fellowship, where writers and artists receive a six-month stay to work on their projects. Dobie is also commemorated in a larger-than-life statue at Barton Springs in Austin, along with his literary compadres, Walter Prescott Webb and Roy Bedichek. Titled "Philosophers' Rock," the sculpture pays homage to this "Texas Triumvirate," and their leader, the man who proclaimed, "I have come to value liberated minds as the supreme good of life on earth."



*Left: 1924 studio portrait of J. Frank Dobie*



*J. Frank Dobie* and Bertha McKee Dobie met at Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas and were married in 1916.

After Dobie's death in 1964, Bertha Dobie edited and published three additional books of his work, including *Some Part of Myself*, which serves as Dobie's autobiography.

*Bertha McKee Dobie* was an integral part of her husband's success as a writer. Dobie said it best himself in his dedication of

*The Voice of the Coyote:*

"Throughout the years I have derived as much from [Bertha's] habit of clear thinking as from her particular criticisms. She is the most incisive and the most concretely constructive critic I have ever known. Her sense of form and fitness and her precision in details have gone into every book I have written."





Left: College portraits of J. Frank Dobie  
and Bertha McKee, ca. 1910

Below: Detail of a Valentine's Day letter  
from Dobie to his wife Bertha, n.d.



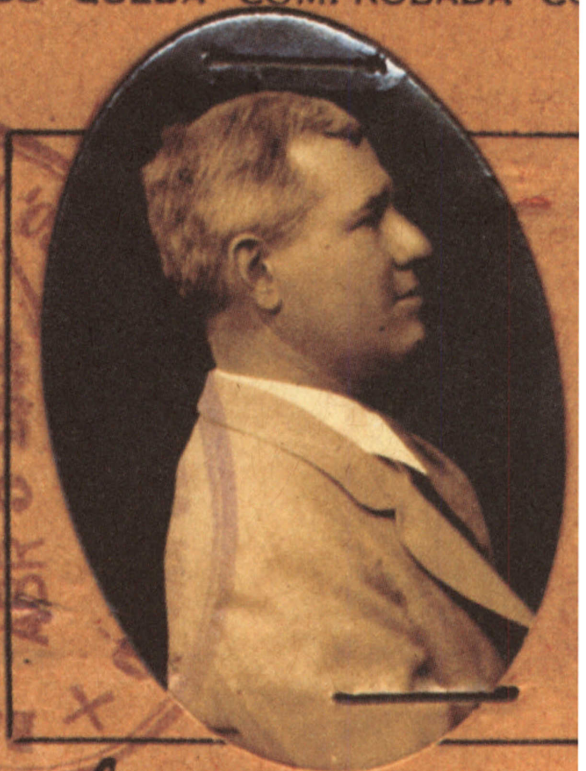
2  
Depended on so tremendously, that with a little  
more organization she can - and will - wrest  
from relenting - and not altogether grateful  
man - her rights. I guess that you know  
my ideas coincide with yours, entirely, without  
reservation, on these matters.

Above: Detail of a letter from J. Frank Dobie to his wife  
Bertha, sent in February 1917. This is one of over a hundred  
letters Dobie wrote to his wife while serving in the Army during  
World War I. Here Dobie consoles Bertha over the subordinate  
place of women in society and he promises that things will get  
better. He adds that, "You know my ideas coincide with yours,  
entirely, without reservation, on these matters."

SERVICIO  
REGISTRO

SE EXPIDE EL 4 DE abril DE 1932  
A DOBLE JAMES FRANK

CUYA LEGAL ESTANCIA EN MEXICO QUEDA COMPROBADA CON  
ESTA TARJETA



*J. Frank Dobie*  
(FIRMA DEL PORTADOR)

QUIEN ENTRÓ EN MEXICO POR Ojinaga, Chih.  
EL 30 DE noviembre de 1932.

mav.

MIGRACION

EXTRANJEROS

MEDIA FILIACION DEL INTERESADO

CONSTITUCION FISICA ..... **Fuerte**

ESTATURA ..... **1.74**

PELO ..... **entrecano**

OJOS ..... **azules**

MENTON ..... **borlado**

BARBA ..... **no**

COLOR ..... **extra blanco**

CEJAS ..... **pobladas c.a.**

NARIZ ..... **convexa-baja**

BIGOTE ..... **no**

SEÑAS PARTICULARES ..... **ningunas**

DATOS COMPLEMENTARIOS

EDAD ..... **44** AÑOS. FECHA EN QUE NACIO. **1898**

ESTADO CIVIL ..... **casado** PROFESION, OFICIO U

Ocupacion ..... **profesor universitario**

IDIOMA NATIVO ..... **ingles** OTROS IDIOMAS

QUE HABLA. .... **poco español**

LUGAR Y PAIS EN QUE NACIO. **Liveoak, Conty. E.U.A.**

NACIONALIDAD ACTUAL. .... **norteamericana**

RELIGION ..... **ninguna** RAZA. .... **bianca**

LUGAR DE RESIDENCIA. .... **Madereros 247 Mexico.**

NOMBRE Y DOMICILIO EN MEXICO DE PERSONAS QUE PUEDAN DAR RE-

FERENCIAS DEL INTERESADO. .... **Eyer Simpson, Monte**

..... **de Piedad 15. Mexico, D.F.**

EL JEFE DE LA SECCION.

( FIRMA DEL FUNCIONARIO DE MIGRACION )

*[Handwritten signature: Jose Trinidad Ramos]*

JOSE TRINIDAD RAMOS

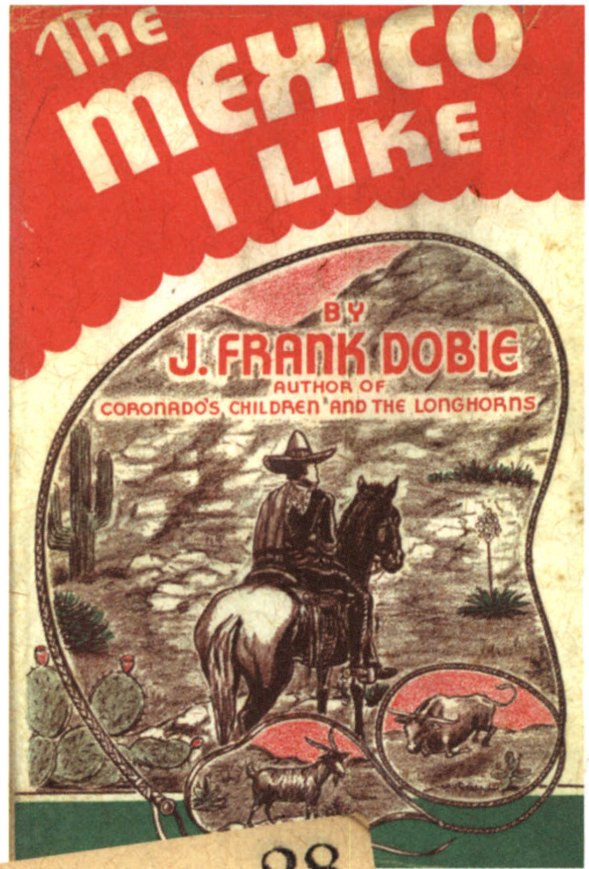
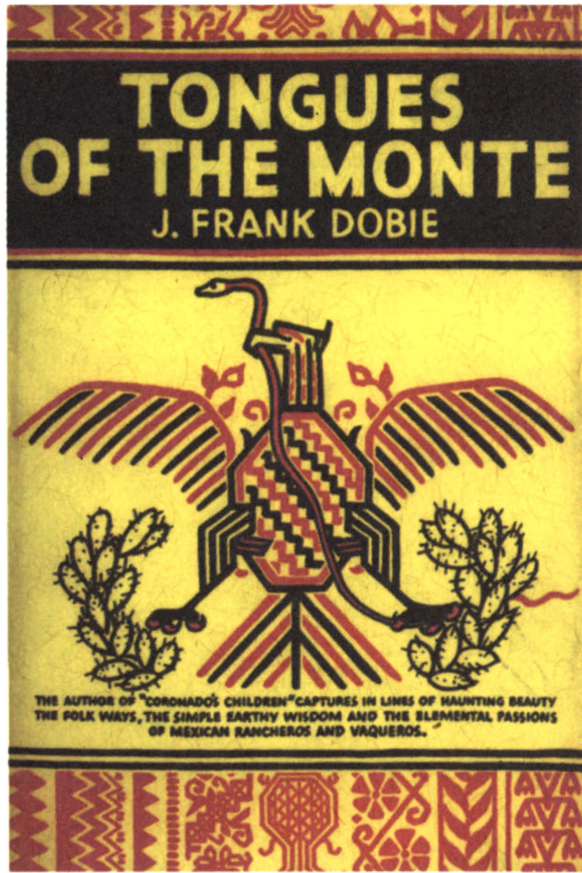
SELLO

*[Faint circular stamp: MIGRACION EXTRANJEROS]*



*J. Frank Dobie* maintained a lifelong interest in Mexico. He grew up alongside *vaqueros* who shared stories of their home country with him. As Dobie began collecting folktales of Texas and the Southwest, he also included northern Mexico. He spent much time traveling throughout the country, particularly during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Dobie preferred to explore Mexico from the back of a mule, rather than by car or train. One of his most personal books is *Tongues of the Monte* (later reprinted as *The Mexico I Like*), which recounts his adventures there and the stories he absorbed.





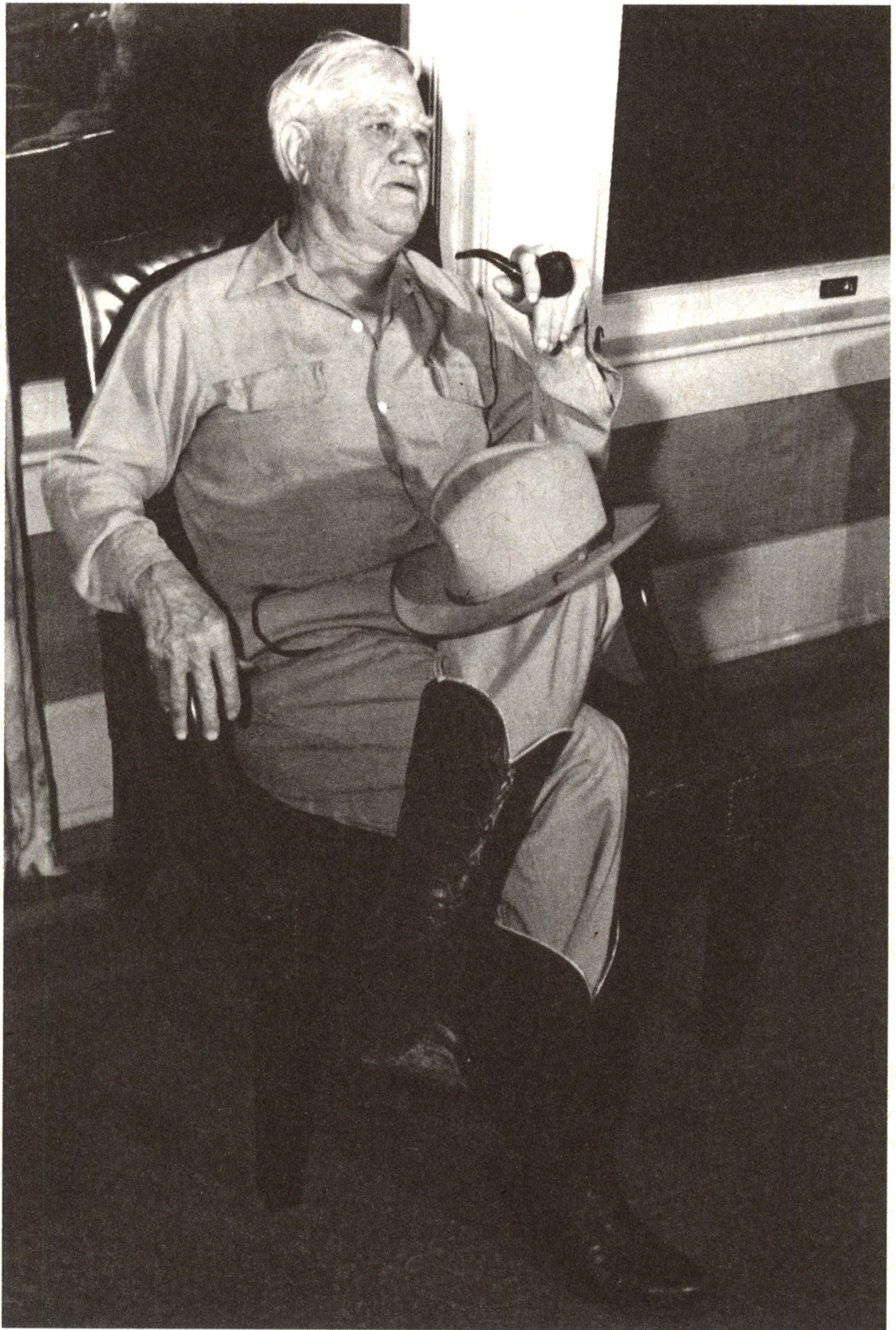
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Name of line, Teahualilo  
Thursday, Aug. 31, 1933, Levelman.

Tell Torreon by train for  
 Teahualilo. Four musicians  
 got on + I enjoyed them to  
 play to the end of the journey -  
 "Zacatecos Masach," "the  
 "Maquerena," "Paloma,"  
 Next "Noche Serena," etc.  
 It seemed to me that the  
 mountains beyond the valley  
 and ~~to~~ also the trees  
 along the irrigation ditches  
 were following the music

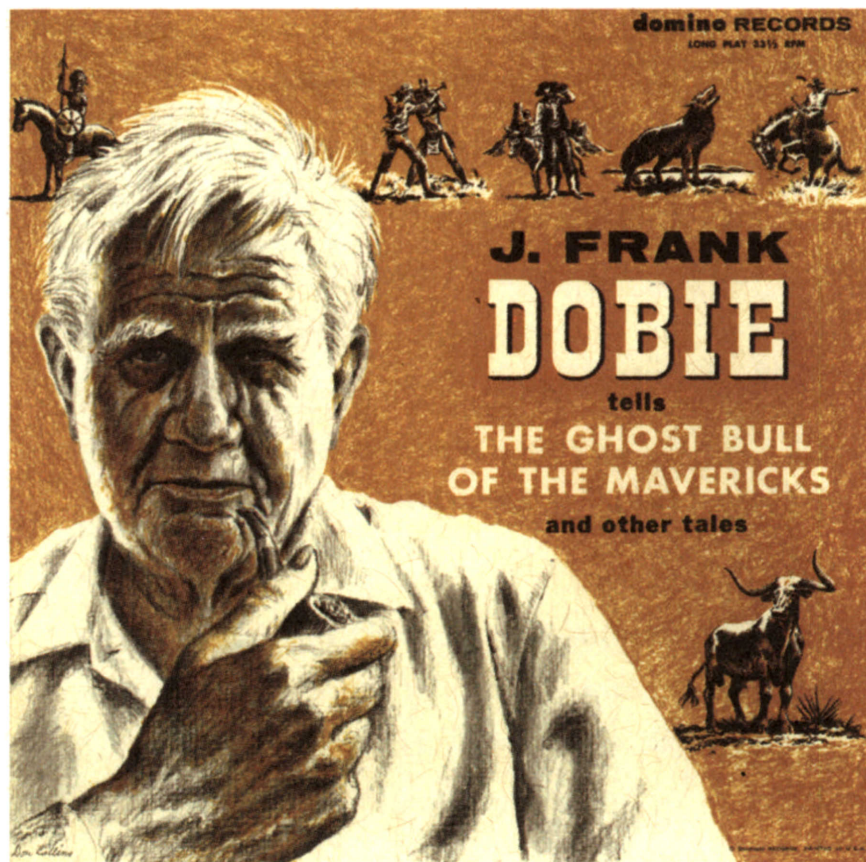
Left: Dobie in Mexico, 1929

Above: Detail from the 1932-3 "Saltillo" diary he kept in Mexico

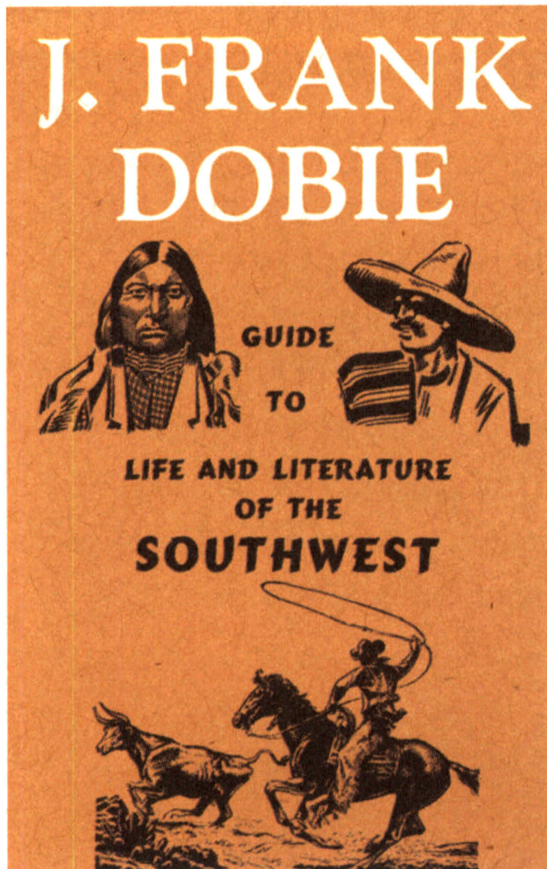


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*Storytelling was an art*, according to Dobie, and he clearly delighted in capturing the rhythms and cadences of the spoken word. He collected and told countless tales, believing that truth lies in narration and allusion, more than in facts and proof. Anthologies like *I'll Tell You a Tale*, *Out of the Old Rock*, and *Tales of Old Time Texas* showcase the great characters and storytellers of J. Frank Dobie's time, including Dobie himself. He also made use of radio, television and sound recordings to enhance the storytelling experience.



*Right: Dobie in his study, ca. 1950s, by Bill Malone/copy print by Bill Wittliff*  
*Above: Spoken-word LP record from 1961 of Dobie reading from his books can be heard playing in the exhibit room*



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*“To study* a provincial setting from a provincial point of view is restricting. Nobody should specialize on provincial writings before he has the perspective that only a good deal of good literature and wide history can give . . . .

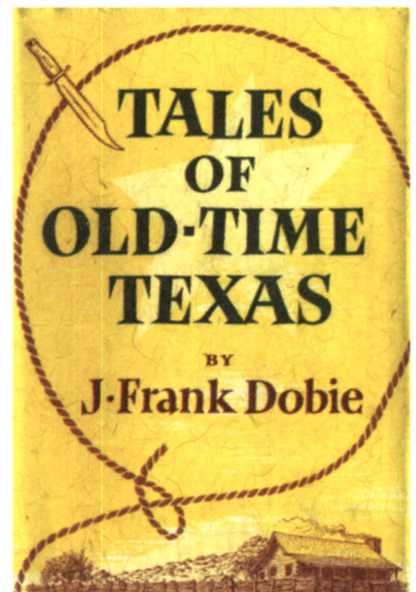
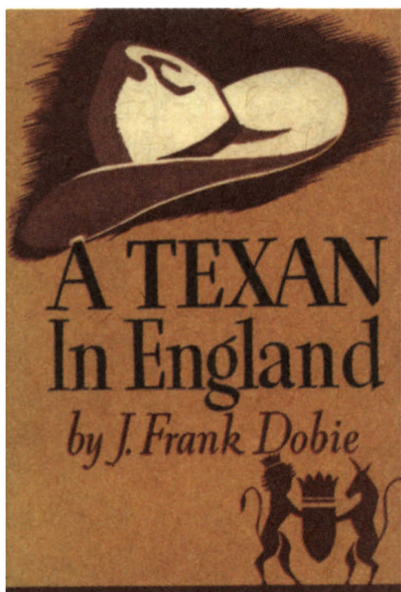
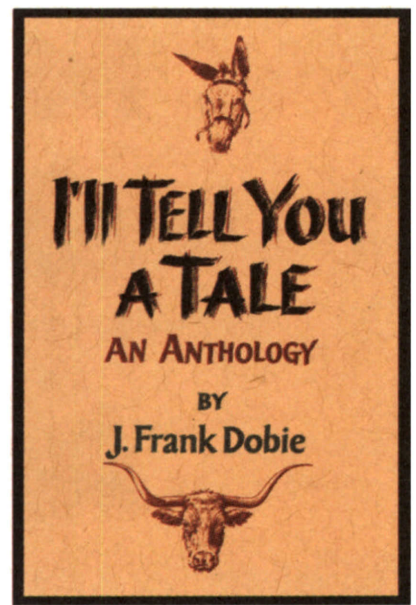
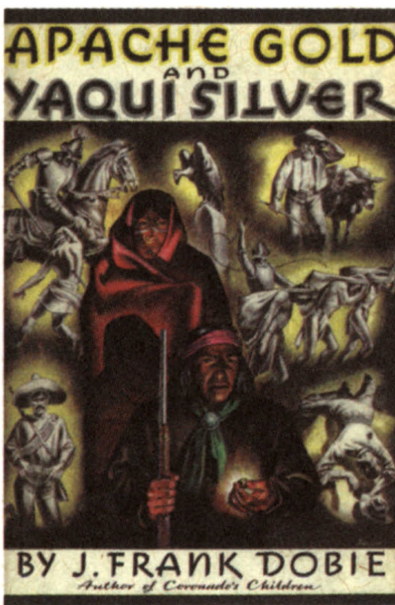
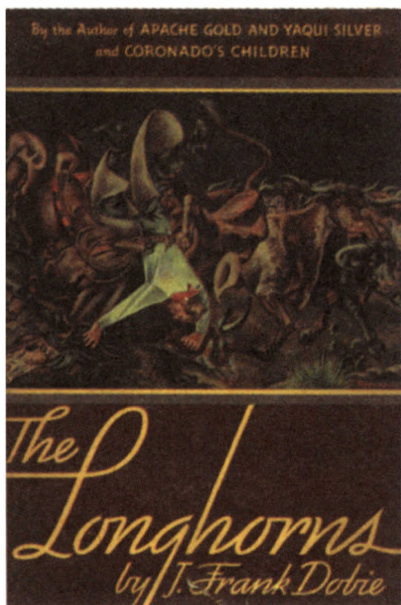
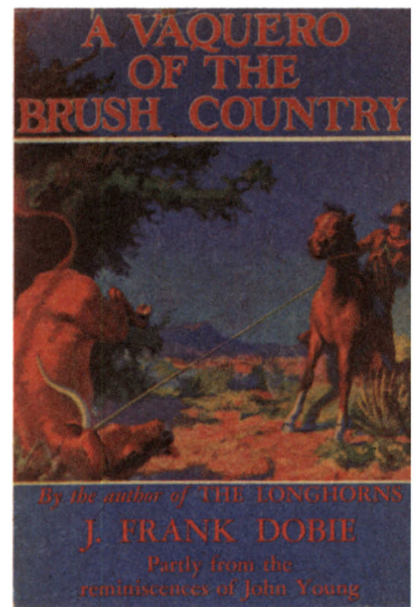
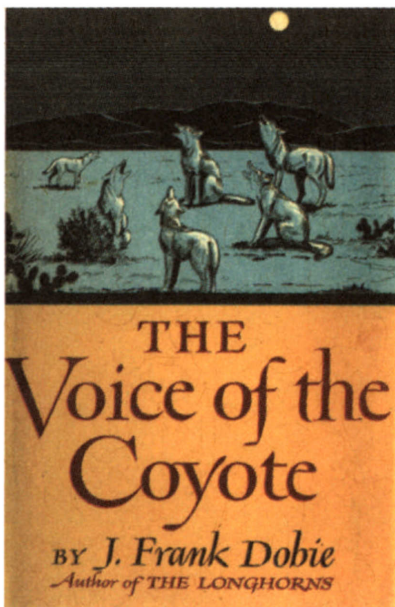
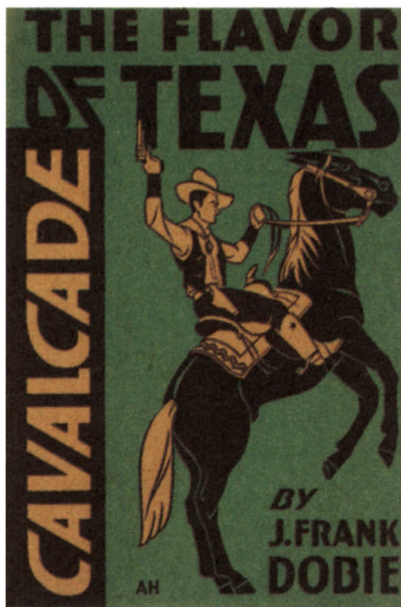
“I have never had any idea of writing or teaching about my own section of the country merely as a patriotic duty. Without apologies, I would interpret it because I love it, because it interests me, talks to me, appeals to my imagination, warms my emotions; also because it seems to me that other people living in the Southwest will lead fuller and richer lives if they become aware of what it holds . . . .

“By ‘literature of the Southwest’ I mean writings that interpret the region, whether they have been produced by the Southwest or not. Many of them have not. What we are interested in is life in the Southwest, and any interpreter of that life, foreign or domestic, ancient or modern, is of value.”

—from *Life and Literature of the Southwest*

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*“You can’t always judge* the value of a public library by the number of slips showing how many books are drawn out during a month or a year. One book can unlock in one person something that may lead to thought and action that will influence many lives—even a nation’s destiny.”

—*J. Frank Dobie*





*Instructing • Illuminating • Inspiring*

Part of the Alkek Library Special Collections Department at Texas State University-San Marcos, the SOUTHWESTERN WRITERS COLLECTION was founded in 1986 and has since become a distinguished and steadily growing archive charged with preserving, exhibiting, and providing access to the papers and artifacts of principal writers, filmmakers, and musicians of the Southwest. Its resources attest to the tremendous diversity of creative expression among southwestern artists and contribute to an inspiring research environment within which students and others may discover how the unique conditions and character of the region have shaped its people and their cultural arts. Connie Todd, Curator. Steve Davis, Assistant Curator. • 512-245-2313 • [www.swwc.txstate.edu](http://www.swwc.txstate.edu)



*Front:* Illustration from *The Voice of the Coyote*  
book jacket by Olaus J. Murie & Samuel Bryant

