

NICHOLSON, W. J.

FOURTH INTERVIEW #12896

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BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

NICHOLSON, W. J. FOURTH INTERVIEW

#12886

Field Worker's name Effie S Jackson

This report made on (date) January 26 1938

1. Name W. J. Nicholson

2. Post Office Address Tulsa, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 301 North Santa Fe.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month _____ Day _____ Year _____

5. Place of birth _____

6. Name of Father _____ Place of birth _____

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother _____ Place of birth _____

Other information about mother _____

Notes or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and story of the person interviewed. Refer to Manual for suggested subjects and questions. Continue on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 5 sheets.

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Effie S. Jackson
Journalist
January 26, 1938.

Interview with W. J. Nicholson,
501 N. Santa Fe, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

"Old Oklahoma and Cherokee Strip Days."

(As a cow-puncher lived it).

In the Summer of 1885 all cattlemen were ordered out of Old Oklahoma by a proclamation issued by President Grover Cleveland. Indian scouts and soldiers were sent out to see that the order was carried out. We were connected with the Government by contract and had the right to hold cattle on the range. There were only two of these Government contracts—one to furnish beef to the Indians (that was ours—under Colonel D. R. Fant) and the other to furnish beef to the soldiers. There were a thousand or more soldiers stationed at Fort Reno on the south side of the Canadian River. They were there to look after the Cheyennes and Arapahoes who received their rations from the Agency at Darlington.

The only people in the country in the early 80's were the cowmen, soldiers, Indians and a few of Captain Payne's Boomers. The law was for the soldiers to destroy any permanent improvements made on any ranch and thus run the Boomers out. I have

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seen the Ninth Cavalry, on their line of bay horses with their negro soldiers dressed in blue suits and brass buttons, line up in front of a Boomer's ranch-house, take his supplies out, pour on coal-oil and leave the green logs to smoulder. The order was that cattlemen would only be allowed to use tents.

Major Miles of Fort Reno issued an order that all ranchmen and cowboys in Oklahoma should carry passes stating where they worked, and their kind of work. This was done to find out the Boomers. Anyone found without a pass was taken to Fort Reno, put in the guard house, then taken, by the wagon load, to Arkansas, Texas, or Kansas and turned loose. The cow-punchers did not like the Boomer. They plowed up good grass. So with the Indians scouts, soldiers and cattlemen on the lookout the poor Boomer did not have much chance.

Old Oklahoma and the Cherokee Strip were not under the same control. Old Oklahoma was under the United States Government and had been reserved for Indian reservations but none had ever been located on it. The Cherokee Strip was owned by the Cherokee Indians. Cattlemen had been ranching in the Cherokee Strip since the 70's, so it was well stocked in the 80's. They paid the Cherokee grazing fees. In 1883 the cattlemen organized what they called the Cherokee Strip Live Stock Association,

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headquarters at Caldwell Kansas. They leased 6,000,000 acres in the Strip from the Cherokee Indians for \$100,000 a year for five years, payable semi-annually in advance. The range was fenced in big pastures, ranch-houses built. About 1883 cattlemen began grazing their cattle in Old Oklahoma, they did not lease it. They got permission to do this from the commander at Fort Reno. The proclamation by Cleveland in 1885 to move out in six months was a blow to these cattlemen who had enjoyed, gratis, these great free ranges - no fences, plenty of blue-stem and buffalo grass and good creeks of water. This proclamation was made to get ready for the Opening of Old Oklahoma - 1889.

I did not make the Run in 1889 - I was still with Colonel D. R. Fant but later under Bill Blair, head of the Comanche Pool of the Cherokee Strip - I came to know of the life of the 89'er. Many of my old cowboy associates got good claims - some of them were accused of being "Sooners", but none of them were proved so. I do not think it was in their blood - they liked a game race. One of my pals told me of his experience with "Sooners". He said he actually found a man with a team of oxen on a claim 40 miles from the line when the fastest horses reached him - not only that but a garden up, and young

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chickens hatched. Even the story went that men lathered their horses with soap to make them look as if they had been ridden hard.

From my own experience in the Cherokee Strip - while rounding up Major Drum's herds and getting them to their new owner, Colonel D. R. Fant, I came to know how Oklahoma settlers helped themselves to "free wire." Wire to them was a necessity, they had to fence in their claims. So wire fences and even ranch houses disappeared from the Cherokee Strip. They knew that the leases of the Cherokee Live Stock Association were about to run out. They just took wire by the wagon load. Miles of fencing disappeared during the last few months of the Cherokee lease - this was usually done at night. Under the contract, between the Live Stock Association and the Indians, all improvements were to go to the Indians when the lease expired. The cattlemen used line riders to guard the fences - but when they had passed and night came, many a queer contraption on wheels wound up miles of fencing. Wire was a thing that could not be identified.

In closing I want to pay a tribute to the greatest cattleman of our period - old Colonel George W. Miller. Back in 1879, when I was only 14, a green kid on the Chisholm Trail -

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George Miller had the fore-sight to bring his herd from Texas along the Chisholm Trail and pasture them in the old Cherokee Strip. It was then Government land leased by the cowmen for about three cents per acre a year. This 101 Ranch, nine miles southwest of what is today Ponca City, once a cattle range larger than some of our states, was hanged under the guidance of Colonel Miller and his three sons, Joseph, Zack and George, to the largest diversified farm and ranch in the world.

When the Strip opened in 1893, Colonel Miller had to re-organize his vast domain. He did this by leasing tracts of land from the Ponca Indians adjacent to the Salt Fork river. - all told 110,000 acres. Then miles of fencing - blooded breeds of cattle, horses, sheep and hogs - scientific agriculture. Churches, schools, bridges and roads added to the general welfare of the community. Nature seemed to repay their efforts in its bounty of oil to them. I have seen all of that glory for them - and then a few months ago at the Indian Exposition I saw my old friend - Zack - the only one left. He is like me - "the last leaf on the tree" - we have lived all of it - only he is younger and must "take it" longer than I will have to. But like me and the other old cowpunchers left - we can live with our memories.

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