

MASON, RICHARD COLBERT

INTERVIEW

#12568

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

Mary D. Dorward

Field Worker's name _____
December 13, 1937
This report made on (date) _____

Richard Colbert Mason

1. Name _____
Tulsa, Oklahoma
2. Post Office Address _____
2001 E. 17th Place
3. Residence address (or location) _____
October 28 1876
4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month _____ Day _____ Year _____
Blossom Prairie, Texas
5. Place of birth _____

Richard Chatham Mason

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 _____.

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Mary D. Dorward,
Investigator,
December 13, 1937

Interview with Richard Colbert Mason
2001 E. 17th Place, Tulsa, Oklahoma

Richard Colbert Mason was born in Blossom Prairie, Texas, October 28, 1876. He was born on the estate granted to his grandfather, John Nugent, first by the Mexican Government, then again by the state of Texas. His grandfather was a brother of Will Nugent, who later established the Nugent dry goods store in St. Louis. The two Nugent boys had left their home in Mississippi together as youths, starting out to seek their fortunes in the west. They got as far as St. Louis together but there they separated. Will, attracted by the possibilities of the fur trade which centered in St. Louis, decided to stay there. John continued on to Texas, where he took up farming and cattle raising, settling at Clarksville on the grant of forty-eight thousand acres given him by the Mexican Government.

Richard Colbert Mason is the son of Richard Chatham Mason who fought in the Confederate Army, serving four years and four days, first as lieutenant,

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then as captain. Captain Mason took part in the Battle of Pea Ridge, Arkansas, where his horse was shot from under him and he himself was severely wounded in the leg. The Confederate forces were in retreat hotly pursued by Federal forces when Captain Mason was wounded and it looked very much as if he would be captured. However, a Choctaw Indian helped him to escape the Federal soldiers by hiding him along a log and covering him with leaves. At nightfall after the pursuers had gone the Indian returned and helped him to safety. The Choctaw's name was Grayson Colbert and Mason promised him that he would name his first son for him, the first son being Richard Colbert Mason, the subject of this sketch, whose middle name is Colbert. It was this same Grayson Colbert, who lived in southern Indian Territory along the Red River, for whom the town of Colbert, first station on the M. K. & T. north of the Texas line, is named.

About 1884 the Mason family moved from Texas to a ranch near Caney, Kansas, but in the Indian Territory.

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They had another ranch down near Stonewall, and used to drive cattle from Stonewall to the ranch near Caney, fording the Canadian River at the old Wealaka Mission. They used to swim as many as three thousand head of cattle at one time. They crossed the Arkansas River at the store kept by Jules Cypterien, west of Bartlesville. The eastern trail crossed the South Canadian River at Eagletown. Cattlemen in those days were called "drovers".

In the early days there were few fences and cattle were turned out to graze wherever grazing was good. Great pastures were leased from the Indians but no particular attention was paid as to whether the cattle stayed within the confines of the leased range or not. Frequently a gang of United States deputy marshals would come and round up all the stock we had grazing in Indian Territory and we would have to pay fifty cents a head to get our cattle back. Then as soon as the marshals were gone we would let the stock out again. Sometimes if we got wind of the coming of the marshals we would round up the cattle ourselves and keep them

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shut up until after the marshals had gone.

In driving cattle we used to travel about eight or ten miles a day. The thing we dreaded most was a thunder storm. The cattle were afraid of them and that was one of the surest ways to get a stampede started. The stampede was usually started when one of the leaders would give a kind of danger signal. It was more like a whistle than a bellow.

Sometimes in crossing a large stream, the cattle would get confused and start milling, that is swimming round and round in a circle. When they started to milling they would be almost sure to drown.

The bad winters of '85 and '86 "broke" Richard Chatham Mason in the cattle business. There was so much cold, rain, snow and bad weather generally that cattle froze to death by the thousands, and what did not freeze to death starved to death.

After that Richard Colbert Mason took up printing, first in Caney then in Bartlesville and set the first stick of type ever set in Bartlesville, for the old Magnet, back in '93.

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Bartlesville wasn't where it is now but was about six miles south of its present site, at what is known as Silvertown.

Osages used to camp east of Turkey Creek near Bartlesville. The squaws would go down by the creek and dig chinquapins. These they would dry and then would cook them in winter. They were similar to the sweet potato.

Richard Colbert Mason knew Bill Tilghman personally when he was a boy. Mr. Tilghman used to tell many a tale of his experiences with outlaws and desperadoes. Jim Vaughn, desperado, wore two guns always. He was killed at Caney in a fight with the Amos boys. One of the Amos boys was shot but he came on out home shooting all the way out. On Sunday they came out to arrest him, took him to a little guard house and shot him to pieces. Dick Broadwell (Texas Jack) worked for Richard Colbert Mason's father for two years before the Coffeyville raid. In that raid the man who really shot the Daltons was Henry Isham, although he has never been given the credit for it. Henry was

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in his hardware store behind a row of stoves where he could not be seen and he shot up the alley at them.

Henry Starr killed Floyd Wilson at the Halsell ranch near Collinsville. Richard Colbert Mason does not know what their trouble was but after Henry had shot Wilson he seemed to go crazy, gobbled like a turkey, and tramped all over Wilson. Starr was an outlaw from then on.

At one time Bill Tilghman, Chris Madsdon, Heck Thomas and several other United States officers had heard of a gang of outlaws who had been stealing horses and were at that time hiding out near Engles. The officers decided to get the gang who were hiding in a kind of hotel kept by Rose of the Cimarron, sweetheart of one of the gang. The officers slipped up on the men who were hidden in hay in the barn. One of the outlaws, Cherokee Tom, Rose's sweetheart, had become suspicious and ridden off. The others fought it out with the officers, three of the gang being killed. One of them, Charley Dunsmore, had been sent to Kansas City to try to sell the stolen horses.

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They got him later and sent him up for five years. Ed Newcomb, or Bitter Creek, was shot all to pieces. He was a tough character who worked western Oklahoma, holding up trains or robbing banks but he never bothered the cattlemen. There was a sort of understanding between the outlaws and the cattlemen, so that neither one bothered the other. The Daltons used to ride up to a ranch during the night, crawl into the hay and the next morning come in and line up for breakfast and there would never be any questions asked of them.

Game was plentiful in those days. The river bottoms were often black with wild turkeys. There was never any need for anyone being without fresh meat.

Richard Colbert Mason came to Tulsa with some cattle in '86 when there was nothing here but a few shacks and a boxcar for a depot. Hall's store had a deer and some saddles hanging on the front porch. Sam Booker ran the post office.

Richard Colbert Mason has seen Texas Longhorns with horns so wide that they had to turn sideways

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to get through an eight foot door onto the train.

When the Santa Fe was building down through Kansas and Indian Territory the cattlemen wanted it to come through Elgin, but they would not put up any bonds or do anything to induce the railroad company to come through there, so the road was built around the town without coming through it. They built a bridge over the river at Big Caney and Jess Lawson, a cattleman of Elgin, burned it down. They built another bridge and Jess burned that down, so after that the road came through Elgin.

Richard Colbert Mason has an old shot pouch found over in the Osage Nation; a dutch oven used in buffalo days, probably seventy-five years old and a painting brought overland from the Cumberland Mountains in Maryland in buffalo days.