

JONES, EDSLEY D.

SEVENTH INTERVIEW

13404

96

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Journalist, Effie S. Jackson,
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Interview with Eadsley D. Jones,
2240 E 10th,
Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Life and Death on the Chisholm Trail

There were many lone graves near the old Red Fork Ranch. They were places of curiosity to me and my brother. In all the years I lived at the ranch or in its vicinity I never witnessed a murder, though death on the "lone prairie" in earlier days had happened from various causes. A sudden stampede accounted for some; gamblers evening up their scores accounted for a few; early raiding Indian parties (not in my day) and then, of course, victims of illness and disease.

Great care was taken to give the last resting place every possible protection. Graves were dug deep as a safety against wild animals. Stakes were set deep and close together, stock~~ing~~ fashion around

JONES, EMDSLEY D. SEVENTH INTERVIEW.

13404

-2-

the grave, then a covering of stakes was stretched across the top. That is the reason that in my boyhood many graves of men buried in the '70's were still to be seen.

About a mile south on the Reno road was the grave of a horse thief - no one knew his name - that was always the rule for a horse thief - "hang him, and no questions." South of the Cimarron River on the west side of the Reno road, this was the stage road that paralleled the Chisholm Trail, sometimes running along beside it and varying to a distance from it of five miles, according to the lay of the land about a quarter of a mile up the hill was the grave of another horse thief. The unidentified bones are probably there today, about a quarter mile west of the Rock Island Railroad bridge where it crosses the Cimarron.

The Sanamaker Murder

North a mile and a half from Red Fork ranch in the "black-jack" woods near Turkey Creek was a lone

JONES, EMSLEY D. SEVENTH INTERVIEW.

13404

-3-

grave by a towering ash tree. On the tree, which served as a tombstone, were carved the letters "Wa"- that was all.

My father told me the story of that grave. One day in 1875, father was the owner of Red Fork Ranch at that time, a strange herd of ponies in charge of a young fellow in cowboy "rig-out" appeared. The herd was turned loose in the vicinity of Turkey Creek, one and one-half miles north of the ranch. As reported later this fellow was not very pleasing in appearance, furtive in his actions and given to the display of a violent temper. He was followed by a man about forty years old, well set up and prosperous looking, the trader type. The man rode a good horse well saddled and a man and woman driving a covered wagon containing a mess box and camping utensils completed the outfit. This couple, a man and wife, served as handy man and cook for Mr. Wanamaker, that proved to be the man's name.

George Wanamaker was from Washington County, Kansas, the brother of the famous Pennsylvania merchant,

JONES, EMDSLEY D. SEVENTH INTERVIEW. 13404

-4-

John Wanamaker. George had married Col J. B. Queen's mother, who was widowed during the Civil War, and in 1867 brought her and her young son to eastern Kansas. There Mr. Wanamaker engaged in various enterprises, among them a trip to the newly found gold fields of Colorado. Very successful there he had taken his gold, gone to Texas in 1875 and invested some of his money in a herd of ponies which he was taking north to sell; he was thought to have had about \$5,000 in gold with him. Where he formed the partnership with the young man who became his murderer is not known. Col. J. B. Queen, only thirteen at that time, vividly recalls the agony of waiting experienced by his mother and himself.

After the camp was made for the night, supper was over and darkness was falling, the young man proposed to Mr. Wanamaker that they go into the woods to hunt for wild turkeys, that it was roosting time and they could make a good "kill." The young man took along a shot gun as well as his "six-gun." The cook and her husband noticed this for they had been suspicious of the

JONES, EMDSLEY D. SEVENTH INTERVIEW. 13404

-5-

young man during the whole trip. They were uneasy from the moment Mr. Wanamaker departed on the hunting trip with his questionable companion. They heard a lone shot; of course, that could be from killing turkeys but their feelings were otherwise. Suddenly the young man appeared, such a sinister look on his face that they believed the worst had happened. Without saying a word he quickly saddled Mr. Wanamaker's horse, filled the saddle bags with provisions and rode away into the darkness. At daybreak the frightened campers hitched the horses to the wagon and drove to the trail where they met a "bull-whacker" who was on his way to my father's ranch. They told him what they thought had happened and asked to be directed to the nearest authorities so he sent them to the Darlington Agency, thirty miles away. The frightened man came on to the ranch and told my father the story and Father and his foreman set out to investigate. They found the camp-site and the scattered ponies but after looking all day they did not find the body

JONES, RMDSEY D. SEVENTH INTERVIEW. 13404

-6-

so finally rounded up the ponies and started back to the ranch. On the way they were overtaken by the head man of a band of Sac and Fox Indians. The Indians reported they had been deer hunting and had camped near the whites the night before, they had heard the shot and noted the hasty departure of the wagon in the early morning. They sensed something was wrong so followed the trail of the two hunters the night before and had found the body of the murdered man. The shot had been so close it tore away part of his face, the pockets had been rifled. The Indians were glad to find my father near the spot, it would remove them from suspicion. It was late, too dark to remove the body, so my father returned to the ranch to await daylight. That night a troop of cavalry from Fort Reno came to Red Fork to camp, Agent Miles had sent them as a follow-up to the story told by the man and woman who had arrived in the afternoon. My father accompanied the cavalrymen to the spot the next day and helped them bury the victim; they wrapped it in a blanket and buried it deep

JONES, EADSLEY D. SEVENTH INTERVIEW.

13404

-7-

at the foot of a large ash tree. A stockade mound was built around it and my father carved the letters "Wa" deep on the trunk of the tree. Years later I was to know the step-son and widow who waited in vain in far off Kansas for the return of their loved one. The troop of cavalry took up the trail of the murderer, tracked him into the Texas Panhandle and brought him back to Fort Reno and court-martialed him. He was convicted by evidence given by the married couple and was sentenced to hang. He was placed in the custody of a United States Marshal to be removed to Fort Smith, escaped on the way and was never heard of again.