

THE CHISHOLM TRAIL AND DRIVES

An interview of Ceasar Holmes, Negro,
age 80, Clearview, Oklahoma.

Billie Byrd, Field Worker
Indian Pioneer History
7-30-37

Chisholm was said to have been a quiet sort of a man. It has been told that he had a pipe in his mouth all the time even if it wasn't lighted. This particular pipe had a cover which could easily be fixed to cover the tobacco when necessary during the rainy weather.

The course of the Chisholm trail was laid across what is now Oklahoma with the source of beginning in Texas and the trail hit points in Kansas.

This trail was not only traveled by the cattlemen but it was frequently traveled by the Indians of the Osage, Cheyennes, Sac and Fox and others of the Western and plains tribes. These Indians had hostile feelings to anyone who came into their part of the country and made attacks on anyone who happened to travel on the trail when they were near.

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Numerous herds of cattle and many traders traveled this trail, but the cattlemen would herd their cattle off of the main trail at sunset or before it was too dark into some well-hidden valley. The cattle thus hidden were carefully watched and guarded by some of the cowboys at all hours of the night. This precaution was taken because the Indians were known to make their attacks during the late of day. Then in the early morning hours, the cowboys would proceed on their way.

The big cattle drives were made during the early part of the Springtime when the grass was green and tender. The cattle had become undernourished during the winter because of the lack of feed and when they were turned loose in the green grass which was very abundant they cattle would easily go in the direction to be driven by grazing along on the grass and not much driving was needed. When the cattle became fattened as they were herded in the grass and when they became fattened they became slower in their progress.

The cattle were driven along in a V-form. The lead being in the small part of the V and the

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rest of the cattle were distributed out to form the larger part of the V. The chuck wagon was always some distance in the lead of this drive.

There were two men, whose last names were Curtis and Knight and who owned large ranches in the southwestern part of Oklahoma. These were only two of the cattlemen who often drove their herds over the Chisholm Trail as there were numerous other men who did their cattle driving on the trail.

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Field Worker; Amelia Harris
April 12, 1937

BIOGRAPHY OF Mrs. John Holmes
Maiden name Mary E. Forgay
1106 West Park Place

Born Douglas, Kansas.
March 1879

PARENTS Father, J. H. Forgay, Kansas
Drew a homestead
Mother, Sarah, Kansas
Taught school in Oklahoma

Mary E. Holmes' Drawing in Addo County.

I was with a party of five who came to Oklahoma in 1901, from Douglas, Kansas to El Reno.

The party of five was my father, J.H. Forgay, Reed Davis, a neighbor, and close friend of Father's as the two pioneered in Kansas, Miss Estelle Webster, Mable Hieson and myself. We came overland in a covered wagon, with our camping outfit, and food enough to maintain us for two weeks. It took about a week to make the trip. We girls did the cooking, we slept in the wagon at night, Father and Mr. Reed Davis bunked on the ground. We were all so thrilled and excited over a chance to obtain a free homestead that we did not notice any hardships on the way here.

We arrived in El Reno about 4 P.M. and such a wild excited mob that crowded the streets, and tents everywhere! All the vacant lots and alleys were filled with thousand and thousands of people of all classes representing most every state in the Union, there ready

for the drawing. We succeeded in finding a good camping place, on a hillside out near the water tower. We camped two days here, and the first night there a thief jerked Father's pants from under his head which had \$50.00 in the pockets. The thief took pants, money and all. There were so many people camped near we did not know who to accuse and we did not say any thing about it.

We let the horses rest and then we started out to look over as much of the land as we could before the drawing. We went from El Reno to Rush Spring, over to Lawton and then back to El Reno. At El Reno each of us registered where previously ten thousand or more had registered. The number of people far exceeded the amount of land to be drawn.

We wrote our names on a slip of paper which was dropped into a barrel along with 10,000 other names. We were all nervous and excited. This barrel was shaken and rolled around, then a young man reached in and brought out a handful of names. These names were entitled to a homestead.

There was a large map and each name was given a number and each homestead was numbered accordingly. My father was the only one in our party who was lucky enough to draw a homestead. The drawing continued in a like manner each day until all of the land was taken, then the unlucky ones went home.

We went back too, because it would require thirty days or more to put each individual on his respective homestead.

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Father returned in about six weeks and hired a "locator" as they were called. The "locators" were men that knew the country very well and for \$25.00 or more, perhaps \$50.00, would locate and take you to your claim. Father paid 50.00 as his claim proved to be sixteen miles from El Reno, (in Caddo County). Father camped in a nice wooded place, and after looking over the homestead decided that was the nicest place to build a home. The first improvements were a dugout, then a well. One would only have to dig 20 feet to find plenty of good soft water. After these improvements were made Father returned to Kansas for his family.

Imagine his surprise on his return to find a "Claim Jumper" had camped on the back part of our claim. He contended he was there first, and Father had to bring Court procedure at Hydro, Oklahoma, to get him off of our claim. He caused a great deal of worry and trouble but we succeeded in removing him.

We were all so happy, especially Father, With grim determination to succeed he started to work, grubbing and burning; he broke out and planted 20 acres the first year. Mother and we children had a wonderful garden. We planted, grew, dried and canned enough to last us until next gardenin- time. My people never allowed anything to go to waste. We were very resourceful and

In the fall we would bank in straw and dirt; apples, Irish potatoes and turnips beside plenty of pumpkins (under the bed) for winter use. At that time our land would grow any thing (except wheat) abundantly and we had plenty of good wholesome food.

The next year Father bought some native lumber, post oak from a saw mill close to us, and built a four room house and cut down some trees and built a log corn crib and sheds for our stock. We lived in this house ten years; then Father hauled lumber from Minco and built a nice two story home, which we lived in until we sold in November 1919. We moved to Oklahoma City in 1919.

We raised our own ~~hog meat, chickens~~ and had two fine Jersey cows with plenty of milk and butter. Mother sold sweet milk for fifteen cents a gallon, butter at fifteen cents per pound, eggs at three cents per dozen but we got along fine and were so happy.

Mother was a school teacher back in Kansas, and she applied for and got a school at Cogar, Oklahoma. She rode horse back sideways to school every day and the Government paid her \$25.00 per month, which seemed a good salary those days.

Every one was very friendly and the neighbors were kind and tried to help each other. Our social life was quite literary, debates, spelling bees, box suppers, community singing which was taught by Mr. Dan Holcomb. Square and some round dancing. There was not nearly so much drinking or getting drunk

as there is today. We enjoyed each event and never missed a one.

We also had one music teacher, Miss Ethel Garden. All of our social events were held in the log school house where Mother taught school. Our mail came by a stage coach, which carried passengers too. This was called the "Starr Route", it took all of a day to travel sixteen miles (the distance of the Starr-Route) over hills, rough roads and deep sand but we always welcomed the mail coach when it did arrive.

There were quite a few Caddo Indians about three miles north of us on Hoggy Creek bottom; they were good people and did not bother any one. I visited in their homes several times.

The Indians winter home, made of grass, was indeed very strange in appearance. They were round and the grass was closely woven; snow or rain did not penetrate; they were warm too. There was a hole in the center for smoke to escape. There was, also, a hole dug in the floor in the center of the room about three feet in diameter and one foot deep. This answered for two purposes- they heated the room and cooked here too. There were two good size limbs with forked top about two feet high above the ground, on either side of this pit, with a pole across of iron. From this they suspended their pots in which they boiled their meat, corn and so forth. All that I ever saw were very neat and clean. I remarked to one of these Caddo Indian women, "You do not have very much furniture", She replied in broken English, "We have all we need".

In the summer they lived out under brush arbors; their children always went to some Indian school; most of them, near us, would send their children to the Catholic Mission School, on the

Washita river near Anadarko.

We bought our clothing and what few groceries we had to have at Minco. We had to cross the Canadian at Caddo Jok's Crossing; some times we would have to wait a day or two for the river to go down. So we could cross, as this is a treacherous stream, quick sand bottom.

I have seen numbers of "Moyers" try to cross when the river was up and the swift water would wash their chickens out of the coups down the river and drown their dogs and they had to move fast to save their own lives. Later Caddo Jok (Indian) built a ferry across the Canadian. That is he threw straw and hay across the deep sand until they came to the deep water. Then he had a flat boat to cross over on, and charged 50 cents fees for crossing.

HOLT, A. JACK (JR.)

INTERVIEW

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