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Journalist,
March 23, 1938.

EARLY DAYS IN INDIAN TERRITORY

An Interview With Phil Horton,
Bluejacket, Oklahoma.

My name is Phil Horton. I now live on my fruit farm, Bluejacket, R.F.F. I, three miles west of the town of Bluejacket, in what is known as the Timber Hill District, of Craig County. I was born December. 20, 1867, in Tipton County, Indiana, near the town of Kempton. I first came to the Indian Territory in 1885, and settled on Cabin Creek, fifteen miles northwest of Vinita. A white man of the name of Comak had opened up a little coal bank there and I worked for him digging coal. He did most of the coal digging those days with a pick and shovel, sometimes using a team and plow to strip off the dirt. He would find where the coal was showing on the surface, and would find coal at a shallow depth, and it was easy to get out. The coal mining business in North Craig County was all done in this manner for many years. Strip pits were opened up all through the northern part of what is now Craig County, and the coal was hauled to Chetopa, Edna and Coffeyville for sale. I remember one

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time a man of the name of D. B. Comak took a load of coal to Coffeyville for sale and was gone three days. He got drunk and started home, and laid out all night on the road. He froze all the toes on one of his feet and had to go back to Coffeyville where the doctors amputated all the toes on this foot. He said he had one consolation in losing his five toes, "every one of them had a corn on it." Most of these coal banks were operated by white men. In most cases the Indian had given a five or ten year lease on the land, at the end of which time the improvements put on the place belonged to the Indian, however, the Cherokee Nation held the Indian responsible for all coal produced on the land and he in turn collected 1 cent per bushel royalty from the white man and turned it in to the Cherokee treasury.

Coal was very cheap those days selling at 3 cents a bushel delivered to town. The operators of the mines did not make much, but everything else was so cheap a man did not need much. There was no such thing as a crop failure those days and a man only had to put out a small field of

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corn to make his bread and feed for a team. The fields were all fenced with rails and the stock was permitted to roam the prairies. The rails were made on Cabin Creek, which was streaked with timber, heading near the Kansas line and flowed in a southwest direction through the prairie country. The early day settlement was all made along the creeks and prairie branches, so that the settler could have wood and rails. When the country was first settled it was not known that there was any coal in the prairie country, but now it is a solid mass of coal fields from a few miles north of Vinita to the Kansas line.

A few years ago a large stock company was formed by Eastern capitalists and thousands of acres of land were leased up in North Craig County. Core drills were moved in and the land tested out and much valuable coal was found, some several hundred feet under the ground. A few deep mines were opened up, but nothing like as many as was expected. It is thought this company tied up the coal land to keep down production, until it was needed in the east. About all the coal mines that are in operation at this time, in Craig County, are being mined by private

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companies. Several of these companies are located in a radius of fifteen miles from Vinita and supply enough coal for the Northeastern Oklahoma Hospital, at Vinita, as well as the towns in the county, and the mines west of Bluejacket and Welch haul by truck a great deal of coal to the lead and zinc field in Ottawa County.

SOME EARLY DAY SETTLERS

Some of the early day settlers who were living in what is now North Craig County when I came here in 1885, where Dr. A. J. Nolan, who was the neighborhood's country doctor, Charles Journeysake, Henry Wolf, Charles Goddard, Wm. Lackey, who had a big sheep ranch six miles south of Edna. He also had a big spring on his place, where tourists would stay all night. It finally became a regular camping ground; Granville Craig, after whom Craig County was named, William Trittheart, Thomas Daugherty, William Howell, Art and Jack Barker, George Walker, Ves Hurst, Lark McGhee, Louis Rogers, P. B. Kinnison, and some few others. Most of these people did their trading at Chetopa and Edna, Kansas. J. E. Wolf, William Lee and James Curnutt were three early day preachers in the neighborhood.

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ANTELOPE AND DEER

To the northwest, about half way between Vinita and Coffeyville were two more creeks, flowing to the southwest. They were Clear Creek and Big Creek. There were a few antelope on Clear Creek and plenty of deer on all the other creeks, and all timbered land, and in the spring and summer deer and antelope roamed the prairies in great droves.

There were also plenty of fur bearing animals, such as coon, opossums, skunks, coyotes, beaver, etc. The settlers derived quite a lot of money from the sale of fur from these animals. There were also plenty of quail and prairie chicken. It was against the law to ship a prairie chicken out of the Cherokee Nation, but thousands of them were smuggled across the Kansas line and sold. We took our hides to Chetopa and usually took along a sack of corn with which our bread was made. There had been no wheat grown up to the time I first arrived. Jack Isibol was the first man to raise any wheat in the community. He lived over east, around Bluejacket.

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FIRST SCHOOL TO BE ESTABLISHED

The first school to be established in the coal field, where I first settled, was a little subscription school. The settlers built a log cabin, made seats of slabs, and hired a little Irishman of the name of Charles Galligher as the first teacher. He had fifteen scholars. Galligher's main line was raising bird dogs which he sold to the men in the prairie country for hunting purposes. He had seven bird dogs and fifteen scholars and between the two he made a pretty fair living. The first Indian school to be established, in what is now the northern part of Craig County, was the Timpson Chapel School, near the present town of Estella. It was located in the heart of a full blood Cherokee settlement, some of whom located there before the late Civil War, and was established by Bear Timpson, a full blood Cherokee, who at one time represented his people in the Cherokee National Council at Tahlequah. It was while there that he conceived the idea of getting a national school for the Indians of his community. The next Indian school to be established in the northern part of the Territory was located

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on Cabin Creek, about twelve miles southwest of Chetopa, Kansas. It was established by George Walker, Lark McGhee, and Louis Rogers, three Cherokees who moved down out of Kansas when the new territorial line was made.

JIM BARKER KILLED

Jim Barker was a white man who came into the Territory with three of his brothers. Two of them married Indian girls and were well to-do and respected farmers of North Craig County. Jim got into some trouble over on Cow Skin Prairie, near Southwest City, Missouri, and killed a man, and as I understood it, Jim had been working for Bill Howell near Oseuma, on the Frisco and Bill had not paid Jim what was coming to him and Jim took a bunch of Howell's cattle and started to Coffeyville, Kansas, with them. Howell got Jess Cochran, sheriff of Coe-wee-scoo-wee District, who was living near Chelsea to head him off and bring back the cattle, if possible. Cochran and a deputy marshal, an Indian of the name of Galcatcher, overtook Jim Barker on the Verdigris River near Coffeyville and a fight ensued in which Barker was killed.

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BLUEJACKET ESTABLISHED 1871

The town of Bluejacket, on the M.K.&T., was established in 1871, when the Katy first passed through the Territory, by Charles Bluejacket, Chief of the Shawnee Tribe of Indians, who had settled within a mile of where the railroad passed through.

The first railroad agent for the Katy was a man of the name of Merket. He also opened the first grocery store in Bluejacket, and was also the first postmaster of Bluejacket, which position he held for a number of years. The country surrounding Bluejacket was a wild prairie hay country, and in the latter part of the 80's hay began to be shipped out, and in a few years it was one of the greatest hay shipping points along the M.K. & T. Railroad. Thousands of tons were shipped out annually, and the Cherokee Government derived much revenue from this source as hay was being shipped from all points, on both Katy and Frisco in large quantities.

WELCH ESTABLISHED IN 1889

Bluejacket was located eighteen miles south of the

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Kansas line, and hay dealers decided to establish another town between there and the Kansas line, and in 1880 the Katy put in a switch there and a town called Welch was opened up, with Brooks Campbell, the leading hay dealer. Campbell remained in the hay business until his death after statehood, and grew immensely rich, eventually going into the grain business for which he built a fine elevator. Other early day merchants of Welch were Uncle Jim Dobkins, and sons, J.A. Stroud & Son, Lake & Dugger, Frank Keener and others.

ANTI-HORSE THIEF ASSN' ORGANIZED

The first Anti-Horse Thief Association was organized about 1885, and was a great help to the few officers in this part of Indian Territory in stamping out crime and outlaws. They were also very efficient in trapping and arresting petty thieves. They always cooperated with the marshals and Indian Police, and in many instances assisted the officers in desperate battles with outlaws.

Among the many foul crimes committed in this section were the murder of the two Mahoney brothers. They were

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murdered by a man of the name of Pat McCarty and another man who was never caught. The bodies of the two brothers were thrown in an old coal pit and buried, where they were later discovered by Albert Hurst. It was first thought that the murderers would never be apprehended, but through the efforts of L. P. Isibol, city marshal of Vinita, McCarty was trailed into Kansas and caught. He was tried before Judge Isaac C. Parker at Fort Smith, and there hanged. The other man was never heard of.

The A.H.T.A. had a novel way of trapping criminals. If there was a suspected criminal in the neighborhood, the president of the association would appoint an annual committee of two men to waylay and watch the house and the actions of the suspect. A new committee would watch each night, for possibly a month, and if the criminal started on a night raid he was apprehended and caught and if he was a desperate character additional guards would be summoned. In this way and with the assistance of the following United States Marshals crime was reduced to a minimum in the Territory, which had had the name of being the dumping ground for criminals from other states. Some of the early day marshals

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were: Jess Cochran, Heck Bruner, Heck Thomas, Willis Bluejacket, Capt. G. S. White, L. N. McDonald, L. W. Marks and L. P. Isibol. There were numerous others who came into the Territory, after 1898, when the Curtis Law took over the law enforcement, but the above were the older bunch who worked when there were not enough officers to cover the Territory.

THE FRUIT GROWING BUSINESS

Now here is some advice for the small farmer-the man who has lost his farm, but who was once a prosperous farmer or an Indian who had been given an allotment for himself and family, which is now all gone but possibly a few acres. Here is what I did. I was a poor white man, with no means except a few dollars I had saved up working for wages. When allotment time came I bought the first ten acres I could buy in what is known as Timber Hill, three miles west of Bluejacket. I set out in a small way of planting an orchard, strawberries, grapes, peaches, apples--anything I could raise a dollar to buy. I had a few improvements, just a log cabin for myself and

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a similar one for my team. My land was in timber and had to be cleared. It was on a sandy rocky hillside, but I soon found it would grow any kind of fruit I put on it. So I put every dollar I made back into trees, until now I have about ten acres of grapes, have bought another ten acres for fruit trees and I now have my entire place covered with fruit trees. My little twenty acres, which many a man would not have, is making more money for me than many of the large farms in the county. People have heard of me from far and wide and come to my place every summer in trucks, cars, wagons and any way they can get there to get grapes and fruit. I do not have to peddle my fruit and do not even have a truck on the place, but I sell truck load after truck load every year. I think it is a mistake for the small man to try and farm on a big scale when five or ten acres in fruit would make him a better living than a large farm that would cost him \$5000.00 or \$10,000.00. I earnestly urge all small farmers to go into the fruit growing business and much of the poorer land in Oklahoma will produce an excellent crop of fruit. I have examined much of the land in Craig County and the