

CHAMBERS, W. FOX

INTERVIEW

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Virgil Coursey, Field Worker
Indian-Pioneer History
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An interview with W. Fox Chambers,
513 West Pezan, Altus, Oklahoma.

I'm an old cow man. During my ramblings around here and yon, I have lived in a number of frontier places. In 1885, I drifted into this part of the country and settled near the bend of Horse Branch Creek. At that time all this part of Oklahoma was free grazing land for cattle. There were thousands of ~~heads~~ of cattle, cattle of various brands grazing together. Ranch headquarters were located at various points, and there were numerous line camps. Two men were stationed at each camp. Their duties were to ride a certain range and keep the cattle pushed back within a certain territory.

When they left camp, one man would ride in a certain direction, say east, until he met the rider from another camp. These camps were usually some fifteen to twenty miles apart. The other man would ride west in a like manner until he met a rider from the camp west of him. By this arrangement a sort of network was formed, and if each individual did his work thoroughly everything worked fairly smooth, and the cattle were kept within their specified range.

Now there were cattlemen in both Texas and

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Oklahoma who used unscrupulous methods. These unprincipled men did not hesitate to sell cattle of a brand other than their own if they could get away with it. Roundup was made at certain intervals, usually twice a year, in order that cattle might be divided as to brand, and marketed or disposed of as the owners saw fit. For instance, after the cattle were all rounded up if some cattle of X brand were seen they were cut out and pushed aside. Those of another brand were cut out and pushed into another range, etc. After all the cattle were separated all young calves were branded. Of course, calves usually followed their mothers and ownership was thus determined. Occasionally a calf of a foreign brand was found in a bunch of cattle. This was usually due to an error, though sometimes it had been deliberately driven in with the other brand.

In the old days there was a trail leading out of Texas and going into Kansas. The cattlemen used this trail in carrying their cattle to market. Ft. Worth was a good stock market, though I believe there were more cattle shipped from points in Kansas. While driving their cattle over this trail unscrupulous cattlemen picked up other brands of cattle and sold

them. To protect the honest cattlemen an organization known as the "Cowmen's Association" was formed.

Men were stationed at strategic points to prevent cattle from being stolen or from drifting in with cattle on the way to market. Such men would sometimes follow a drove of cattle for a day or two until they were well out of his range to be certain that none of his brand had been carried away. This job was called cutting cattle.

I have had quite a bit of experience in cutting cattle. I tried to do my job well and to be fair to everyone concerned. I have known men having difficulties over cattle, but I never in my life had any misunderstandings.

In order to understand better how this Cowmen's association worked, let us follow a bunch of cattle to the market. Suppose for some reason a few cattle of foreign brand got mixed in the drove. One would naturally think that they would be sold with the entire lot. But this was not the case. Inspectors were present to see the cattle loaded. All cattle with a foreign brand were cut out, and the rightful owners received checks for

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the market value of his cattle. All members of the association registered their cattle brand in order that ownership could be determined.

Supplies for the ranches were usually secured from Vernon or Panhandle. They were bought in sufficient quantities to last for some time. Canned goods such as salmon and tomatoes were bought in lots of ten or twelve cases, several sacks of sugar were purchased at one time, and all other commodities such as flour, lard, beans, etc., were bought in large quantities. Men working for large cattle concerns were given plenty of good food and a good variety.

I have had experience in every phase of the cattle business, and I worked from the western part of the state to the Indian Territory on the east.

I brought a negro boy to Oklahoma, probably one of the first in this part of the country. I bought him in Louisiana and kept him until he was fifteen years of age. He was in the World War.

I worked for the Carruther boys for quite a while. Later I worked for the White brothers.

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They were fine men, men of honesty and integrity. However, I made more money training horses than I ever made working for others. In fact, I cleared \$10.00 to every one dollar working for wages.

One of my buddies announced to me one day that he was getting married, and showed me a letter from home in which his family congratulated him on his decision to take unto himself a wife.

Now I knew there were very few women in the country, and I was quite sure Bill intended marrying an Indian, but I said nothing. Bill took his leave and I heard nothing from him for several months. Then I heard from a cowboy that Bill had really married an Indian, and was finding it tough "s'edding." to make a living.

A few days later I rode into my camp and found a couple of Indian squaws in possession. They were cooking in my pots and were using my water bucket to wash clothes in. I asked the squaws where Bill was and they looked blank and said "No savy," though I knew they understood perfectly well what I had said. About that time I saw a man's coat laying over on a box. I walked over, picked it up and

began going through the pockets. Pretty soon I found a letter. It was the letter that Bill got from his folks back home.

I picked up my hat and told the squaws to tell Bill when he came in that I was going to kill a beef. I knew that Bill was hungry and that he hesitated calling on me.

Well, I met Bill on my way back to camp. After some slight embarrassment, Bill was his old self and we had a nice visit, and he admitted being hungry. He said that the Indians could eat more at one meal than any people he ever saw and could put their meals further apart than anyone. He just couldn't get used to eating that way. He preferred less food at more regular intervals.

I loved the Indians. They were the best people on the face of the earth. They were my best friends. However, they stole one of my prize horses. I was working near North Fork of the river, and had these horses on pasture next to the river. The Indian reservation was just across the river.

I had reason to believe the Indians had taken my horse but I did not want to have any trouble with

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them, so I said nothing. One day I was on the Indians' territory when suddenly I rode up on Lone Wolf, Chief of the Kiowas. We stopped and talked a while. We had always been friendly when we met. When I started to leave I said, "Lone Wolf, come go back with me and take supper with me." Lone Wolf looked at me a moment and said, "Maybe so I go." And without further ado turned and rode home with me.

I had a big pot of beans cooked, plenty of fresh beef killed and managed to prepare Lone Wolf a real good substantial supper which he ate with evident relish. We had a nice visit and it was quite late when he departed. I asked him to return the next day and bring his family for dinner. He smiled broadly and replied, "Maybe so I come."

The next day Lone Wolf returned with his family, and spent the day. They seemed to enjoy every minute of the time. When they started to leave Lone Wolf's wife asked me for some soda. I gave it to her. Then she asked for some flour and she got that.

Well, I felt sure that I had their entire confidence and friendship. I commanded their respect by kindness. Next day, sometime, I looked

out and saw my stolen horse grazing in the pasture with the rest of the horses.

After Mangum developed into a town I ran the first wagon yard there. I was partner with Colonel Risinger.

I am proud of my ancestors. My father, Ed Chambers, was a noble gentleman of Tennessee. He fought in the Civil War and was in the legislature some sixteen years. And I am proud of my own record, in that I have carried out the tradition of our family--that of fair and honest dealings with everyone.