

CHAMBERS, EDWARD L.

INTERVIEW

8224 .

68

59

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

69
60

CHAMBERS, EDWARD L

INTERVIEW

8224

Field Worker's name Ethel Mae YatesThis report made on (date) August 16 193 71. Name Edward L. Chambers2. Post Office Address Elk City, Oklahoma3. Residence address (or location) 917 W 1st Street4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month December Day 12 Year 18665. Place of birth Anderson County, Texas6. Name of Father David B. Chambers Place of birth AlabamaOther information about father lived the whole four years under General Hood.7. Name of Mother Place of birth LouisianaOther 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 .

CHAMBERS, EDWARD L. INTERVIEW

8224

Ethel Mae Yates, Interviewer,
August 16, 1937.

An Interview with Mr. Edward L. Chambers,
917 W. 1st . Street, Elk City, Oklahoma.

I was born in Anderson County, Texas, December 12, 1866 and came to Stephens County, Texas in 1874. I was raised on the frontier as Stephens County was then a cattle country and a place where the men carried the law on their saddles. The law was a rope and a gun but after law and order began to come in we began to have schools.

Father was herding cattle at this time and Brother Will and I carried his dinner to him. There were Indians in the country and the cowboys had been after them so the Indians had divided into four groups eighteen in a group; they spied us and cut us off from the house. We were just small boys but we had heard older ^{people} talk about hiding in a thicket and putting boys at the front for a decoy. So we ran into a thicket and the Indians thought we were there as a decoy and got afraid and left us and we were able to go home. These were Comanche and Kiowa Indians.

We moved from here to central Texas. We were working four yoke of oxen but had an extra team in case they got

CHAMBERS, EDWARD L.

INTERVIEW

8224

- 2 -

footworn and sore. So we put on the extras and one yoke were old stags. We had gone right into the business part of Fort Worth when the stags got hot and took a notion to quit. They both broke away at the same time and went the same way. I tried to stop them on my horse but could not; they ran into a large dry goods store and there were a number of clerks in there. If they had never climbed before, they climbed that time and of all the yelling and screaming they were doing it and the stags were upsetting counters and everything as they went. I finally got the stags out and went around town and never had to pay a fine. The office came out and talked with me and let me go.

In the year of 1887, my brother, Will, a half breed Choctaw boy and I came to Indian Territory. This boy had gotten into trouble and had come to Texas for safety and they never caught him. The Choctaw law was when they caught a man and tried him and found him guilty and he was given a death sentence the word of a Chetaw was good and when the time came for any of them to pay the penalty a man would go and sit down and lean back against a tree and be shot. When we came

CHAMBERS, EDWARD L.

INTERVIEW

8224

- 3 -

to the Territory we came horseback up the old Denison Trail and crossed Red River at the Horseshoe Bend. We picked cotton on the old bayou and in Love County. Pike McCoy and a man called Mexean John owned most all of the valley. Marietta was our post office and was in the Chickasaw Nation. Bill and Jerry had control of most all the country at that time. We came prospecting. We liked the country pretty well so we leased a little place near Ardmore. Ardmore was a very small place at that time; it had three stores and small hotel and a blacksmith shop. We went back to Texas and got Father and Mother. We were on the road seven days and it rained on us everyday. We camped out every night but one and that night we stayed in an old log schoolhouse but would have been as well off outside as the schoolhouse leaked and the rain blew in all the cracks. We crossed Red River at Love's Ferry. We brought some cattle with us and all the household goods we had. We brought Father and Mother to the new country. I don't know why we came unless it was the call for something different. We

CHAMBERS, EDWARD L.

INTERVIEW

8224

-4-

farmed here for three years, then moved to a place near Thackerville, then from there went to a place near Velma, an Indian town, and took an Indian lease.

The Territory was at that time under Federal laws. Heck Thomas was then United States Marshal for the Chickasaw and Choctaw Nations. Fort Smith, Arkansas, was the place where they would try all cases. Heck Thomas went about with eighteen men, a cook and a chuck wagon, and a buck board; the buck board was to haul the dead outlaws in.

My brother-in-law and I made the Run into the Cheyenne and Arapaho Strip. The United States soldiers were lined up all along the line and when twelve o'clock came on the 22nd day of April, 1889, they held their guns in the air and fired, every shot was timed to the second and you could not have told but that there was but one gun fired if you had not known differently. There were about twenty-five thousand on the line when the guns were fired.

There was a cowboy there telling the people just how to cross the creek. This was Oak Creek near Sacred Heart.

CHAMBERS, EDWARD L. INTERVIEW 8224

- 5 -

While this cowboy was talking to the people, a real old grandmother came up to him and caught hold of a button on his chaps to draw his attention. She asked him what to do to get a claim; he asked her where her horse was and she told him that she didn't have any and said that she had come from Kansas in a buggy and an old man who was the only friend she had had come in a wagon. This cowboy told her not to try to make the run but he told her and this man to stand still and said that just a few yards from the creek there was a rock with a mark on it and there was good land on each side and that the people would be so excited that they would not stop there and when the other people passed over this old woman and man could put down their stakes.

A few moments after this hushed talking, the people stampeded worse than any herd of cattle I ever saw. They ran their horses off of the bluffs. They were on foot, on horseback, in buggies, wagons and every way they could get there and in a few moments the prairie was covered with people. I made the run with them and from the Kiowa line

CHAMBERS, EDWARD L. INTERVIEW

8224

- 6 -

to Cloud Chief I saw three claims staked. People were wild and ran over fine land hunting something better. Two of them were these two old people from Kansas and one was an old man by himself in a prairie schooner. I was one with them but I did not put down my stake. It was estimated that there were fifteen thousand people at Wells Camp. A little later people came in and filed on the land.

In 1894 I married and settled on a little place near Velma on a little farm. Our home was one log room with a dirt floor. For windows there were holes sawed out in the logs. We also had a shed room and our yard was fenced in with rails and was about fifty feet square.

As we didn't have any chicken house, my wife had set seven hens in the fence corners and something had caught all the hens but one. One night, my wife woke me and said something was after the last hen. I got up and got my gun and went to the door. The old hen was running for the house and something was after her. I shot at the "varment" but it got away. The next morning I tracked it by the blood and

CHAMBERS, EDWARD L.

INTERVIEW

8224

- 7 -

found it dead and it was a bob cat and as large as any dog I had ever seen.

I settled here as ^afarmer, raised cotton, corn, and hogs I have sold cotton as low as 2 cents a pound, cotton-seed cost \$5.00 a ton and I have seen the time when we couldn't sell the seed and if we got 20 cents per bushel for corn we were doing well. We would get as high as 5 cents a pound for dressed hogs. There was lots of game such as deer, turkey and fish and anywhere you would go was hunting ground and there was fish in every little hole of water and all kinds of wild fruit. For recreation there were dances and horse races. When there was to be a horse race the people would come for days ahead and camp to be ready for the race.

We would also have the old time camp meetings; the men would build large brush arbors and the people would come for miles around. They would come in wagons, buggies or on foot or just anyway to get there; they would bring their food and the women would cook on campfires and they would take

CHAMBER, EDWARD L.

INTERVIEW

8224

- 8 -

turns about going home on horseback to do their chores.

I know when I would be at camp meeting which was not very often I wouldn't be there thirty minutes until at least twenty-five people would have offered me something to eat. Everybody was your friend in those days.

Another thing people had to fight against in those days that people know nothing about today was prairie fire. The grass was as high as a man's head when he was in a wagon in the spring seat with the side boards on. When a prairie fire would break out the first thing people would do was to back fire and one way of back firing was for two men to take a rope and oil the ends of the rope and set fire to it. Then, they would kill a yearling and tie its four feet together and another man would drag it down the trail that the two men had gone over and others would follow with wet sacks and anything they could fight fire with. If you have never fought fire you have missed something but of all the fires I have helped fight and people and animals that burned to death I never did find where a young calf or a

78
69

CHAMBER, EDWARD L.

INTERVIEW

8224

- 9 -

young deer had been burned to death; I have found them where the long hair on their ears had burned and the hair had been scorched a little. But the fire had jumped them leaving them almost unharmed.

When I look back on those days of low prices and many hardships, I look back and think of them as good old days when people loved one another.