CHITWOOD, JAMES A. (MRS.) INTERVIEW. 12787

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Interview with Mrs. James A. Chitwood,
1612 South Atlanta, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

I was born in Iowa in 1865. My father was Andres Berglan, born in Norway, and my mother was Wilhelmina Busse born in Germany. My father was twenty-one and my mother was thirteen when they came to this country.

My father was a cattleman and in 1875 he moved the family by covered wagon to Harrison County, Missouri, looking for "free range". My father had standard bred cattle and was very successful. I remember as a child thinking that money was only to play with for Father had cans of gold and we children used to play with the piles of coins.

About 1883, looking for another "free range", my father again moved his family---this time to Kansas, five miles east of Hunnewell which place was near the end of the Chisholm Trail and there was a railroad connection for shipping cattle East and North. I had never seen the western cowboy before and imagine my fear in seeing thousands of those longhorn cattle under control of what looked to me like fierce "wild men." The cowboys

life was wild- he met his match in steering and corraling those longhorns.

Then we moved to Caldwell, Kansas, the end of the Chisholm Trail and from that point my brothers freighted to Darlington and Fort Reno and the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agencies.

I remember in 1883 going by stage-coach from Caldwell to Pond Creek "plumming'. We had driven down before and knew there were wild plums in abundance, so I went down by stage-coach and stayed at the stage-coach headquarters--sort of an inn and commissary combined. They kept relays of horses there also. I was to gather the plums and my brothers were to pick me up on their way back from Darlington. The greatest difficulty in getting back was the risk of crossing Salt Fork if the stream should be swollen by sudden rains and that's what happened in this case, so we followed the advice of old timers and waited until the stream went down. The cowmen and freighters took chances--just made their horses swim across after which they would take ropes which had been fastened to their wagons and tie them firmly to trees across the stream, then they would float the wagons across and the ropes would keep them from going down stream.

After we moved to Hunnewell, Kansas, about 1884, my father fell under the influence of Captain Payne and became a Boomer. He joined the Boomer camps across in the Territory, then when Payne was chased back into Kansas he followed him to Arkansas City. The Boomer camps often consisted of as many as fifteen hundred people whose devotion to Payne was such that they were ready to lay down their lives for him. My father was a faithful follower until the sudden death of Payne in Wellington and then he fell under the leadership of Captain Couch, Captain Payne's successor.

Our family did not follow my father from camp to camp with Payne. We moved to Caldwell but my father was across in the Territory at that time at Payne's "Boomer" camp called White City.

Sometime after the death of Payne my father moved us down in the Pottawatomie Reservation on the river northwest of old Shawneetown. I was now in my early twenties and wished to be on my own so I went to live in the home of Miss Mary Bourbonaise. The Anthony Bourbonaise family, French and Indian, was prominent in church and community leadership. They lived at the old Shawnee trading post called old Shawneetown in which place was an Indian

boarding school and a Friend's Church. Dr. Kirk and his wife were missionaries to the Indians and had established this church. There was also a store, post office and blacksmith shop. I always went to church and Sunday School at this church. The school was a large building of brick, two stories high- nice surroundings.

I recall something of interest when there was a change in superintendents. The one in charge had not allowed the boys and girls to sing or talk in Indian but I attended their church service after the new superintendent had taken charge and found that he was more liberal. I watched the pupils march into chapel-boys two by two- girls two by two. They sang the hymns, those who wished to in Indian and others in English. It still seems to me a beautiful melody- the songs in English then picked up and carried on in Indian like an echo.

Miss Mary Bourbonaise with whom I was living was asked to become the leader of Sunday School and church activities but refused, saying that she was not even a member of the church, that she loved to dance and be free from restraint and asked why they should want her. The church leaders told her it was

because what she did, she did well and on that ground asked her to become the superintendent. Strange to say she became so interested in her church work that she gave up all of her worldly pleasures and became a "true" leader. She lived to be old and even yet the name of 'Miss Mary" is revered by all who knew her.

Something else in that community interested me. My father had rented a farm on the river about ten miles northwest of old Shawneetown. Between my father's farm and the town was a place called Pleasant Hill, which, according to the story told, had originally been a log cabin used as a residence and later became the first Sunday School in that part of the Territory. There was only a foundation there at the time I lived th re.

I have a Bible that "Miss Mary" said came originally from this first Sunday School.

It was while I lived in old Shawneetown that I came to know of and even witness Shawnee Indian burials. These graves were usually dug in the ground near the home of the Indian and were dug deep enough that the person to be buried could sit up, about shoulder high. He was dressed in his usual costume, then wrapped

in his blanket after which he was placed in the grave in a sitting position. His belongings-blankets, cooking utensils, everything for personal use, even food, were placed around him and stakes were placed around the top of the grave about three feet high, then railings were placed around the sides and compactly across the top. Of course, this shelter was made as a protection against animals. We often came across these graves along the roadside, sometimes in secluded timbered regions.

About 1886 I went to Purcell to live, that is what was to be Purcell. My two brothers, brother-in-law and wife and I joined a camp of men who were building the railroad south from Arkansas City to Purcell which was called the north end. The south end of the Santa Fe was coming up from Gainesville, Texas, and the meeting place was to be Purcell. There were railroad camps and commissaries along both lines. As a spur to their activity the Santa Fe officials had offered the honor of driving a gold spike to the contractor whose crews got his line through first to Purcell. Price and Bell had the contract for the north end. My brothers worked for them and I was their cook. That was a fine life in those

days, freedom, exercise, good fellowship among men and women bringing civilization to the cowman's country. No longer would there be need to go the length of the Chisholm Trail, one could cut across east from the Trail and send their cattle by train from Purcell to Arkansas City.

The meeting point at Purcell was to mean more to me than the completion of the Santa Fe lines for coming up with the south Santa Fe camps was a carpenter, James A. Chitwood, working under his foreman, Henry Quinn. That was the man I was to meet and later marry. Great was the jollification when the line was completed. The south end won and nailed the golden spike but I got the golden wedding ring.

A tent city rose over night and courtships were brief in those fast moving days. James Chitwood and I were married December 25, 1887, but it took longer to be married than it took to become engaged for there wasn't a preacher or a priest in that part of the country and we finally had to go by buggy to Johnsville, below old Shawneetown, to find a preacher. The preacher didn't have any license so we were married without one and received a very fancy certificate of marriage. I have

always kept this very carefully framed and impressed on my children that that stood for their parents' marriage, though we never had the detail of a license.

My husband, James A. Chitwood, was born in 1855 in Dyer County, Tennessee. His father was Judge Green Chitwood. When James was seventeen the call of the west lured him and he ran away from home to be a cowboy. An uncle who was in sympathy with him gave him a pony which he sold at New Orleans for enough to get two guns and made his way by boat to Texas. He rode the pony express from Bonham to Quitman, Texas. He fulfilled his ambition to be a cowboy on the R 2 Ranch with Onstott and Stansell owning the first bunch of cattle on the Pease River. He soon had cattle of his own and used a "Cross-Jay" brand taken from his nickname of "Cross Jay" Chitwood. After ten years of cowboy life he joined the train crews putting through the Santa Fe Railroad, where he was working when I met him.

After we were married we returned to Purcell, a busy town in those days, at which place my husband became a contractor and things went nicely for us. There was much social activity.

We had banquets, even engraved invitations to social affairs, some of which I have kept as souvenirs.

The exciting time of our life came when the hour of Opening "Old Oklahoma" arrived, April 22, 1889. From Purcell it was just a matter of crossing the South Canadian River and my husband took his position for the "Run" at Byer's Crossing. I watched the train load, all the cars the engine could pull with humanity packed inside and humanity holding on outside. We stood on a high hill and waved as, at the given signal, the train departed.

We were among the fortunate ones in getting claims. My husband staked 160 acres three miles southwest of Oklahoma City which is within the city limits today. My parents and two brothers all staked claims northeast of what is today Norman, on the Little River, some of which land they still own.

The way of the '89er was one of hardship. My parents furnished us a horse, a cow and some chickens, which gave us a start. My husband was very industrious and I stayed alone in the tent for months while he was away working as a contractor on railroads. Of course, this brought us real money,

but even the cow got as lonesome as I did, I had to build a fence in front of the door to our tent to keep her from coming in. I had never been alone and that fear stays with me even to this day. I had never learned to shoot a gun, but I can remember the first time I did. A coyote was prowling around after my precious hens. The kick-back almost finished me but the coyote disappeared.

After three successful years on our claim we sold it for what was in those days good money, $2100, and we moved to Union City, west of Oklahoma City, where we went into the mercantile business. We stayed two years there, then went to Geary, where at first we were in the mercantile business but later were in the broomcorn business.

My husband drew a lucky number in the Caddo country and got a claim one and one-half miles east of Colony. He was always successful in business. He bought a failing mercantile business, built it up and sold it at good profit.

We came to Tulsa in 1925 and Mr. Chitwood passed away in 1926. I watch my two daughters living in what the world calls ease and comfort, with all modern conveniences. I

would rather have one day in my little tent home, with its floor made of grain-sacks stretched over prairie hay and its strawbeds on wooden slats than all their years of ease and comfort.