

DICKEY, DAVID.

INTERVIEW

13168

309

DICKEY, DAVID.

INTERVIEW.

13168.

Ella Robinson,
Investigator,
March 9, 1938.

An Interview With David Dickey,
East 20th St., Tulsa, Oklahoma.

I was born on a farm in Southern Illinois near the town of Cutler, the son of Daniel and Mary Dickey and attended the district school of that state and the Sparta High School in Sparta, Illinois. Later I took a business course in St. Louis and was employed in that city for about a year thereafter. I answered an advertisement of A. J. Blackwell of Chelsea, Indian Territory, in a St. Louis paper and a few days later, in response to a letter from him, I made my first trip to the Indian Territory, about October 1, 1892. I knew nothing about Blackwell prior to my arrival in Chelsea, nor what business he represented, except than that he wanted some one who could write shorthand and operate typewriter. At that time the regular Frisco passenger train only ran as far as Vinita. The railroad extended to Sapulpa but ran only a mixed train between Vinita and Sapulpa, using an entire day for the round trip. Mr. Blackwell met me at the train and informed me that I

DICKEY, DAVID.

INTERVIEW.

13168.

-2-

was to live at his house. He was a powerful man, more than six feet in height, weighing over two hundred pounds, and with a full beard which came almost to his belt line. When I suggested that we get a dray to haul my trunk, he merely hoisted the trunk to his shoulder and carried it to his house, about a quarter of a mile away. I was introduced to his wife, a very handsome Cherokee woman, and to his two small sons, who were named King David and King Solomon. He then told me that he had been a very bad man during his life time, but that he had recently been converted and felt that he had been called to preach the gospel, and he wanted me to report his sermons and prepare them for publication. He confidently expected to make a great name as an evangelist. I reported one sermon and wrote it out, but the Methodist minister at Chelsea prevailed upon him to wait until he could be regularly ordained as a minister of that denomination before he began to preach. As that would require about six months, and my salary would be burdensome in the meantime, I only remained with him one month, but before leaving he insisted that I return when he began his evangelistic work. A short

DICKY, DAVID.

INTERVIEW.

13168.

-3-

time later he wrote me that he was developing a townsite which he had named after me, being the town of David, in the Cherokee Nation. What transpired there is hearsay to me, but I understand that he came near death in that venture. The Cherokee Nation had passed a law making the sale of land to any person not an Indian a crime punishable by death. Blackwell attempted to sell town lots to white persons, and was arrested, and I understand was at one time condemned to die, but was saved through the intervention of the United States Court. He afterward promoted the townsite of Blackwell, out of which ^{he} made a comfortable fortune.

After my arrival there whenever I walked down the street some one would ask if I had a gun. On being told that I did not have, some one would advise me to get one at once and not let Mr. Blackwell "bluff" me. One man went so far as to say "If anything happens to you we can assure you that it won't be two hours until his body will be hanging to a telegraph pole". Strange to say that was not very comforting to me. One evening as we sat by the fire, Mr. Blackwell had been relating many of his daring deeds

DICKEY, DAVID.

INTERVIEW.

13168.

-4-

and telling of the men he had killed. I said, "I have never carried a gun or thought of ever having any need of one. But in this country I think everyone should be prepared for the worst and if I ever have to shoot it will be to kill". Mr. Blackwell never talked of killing men again.

After severing my connection with Blackwell, I found myself back in St. Louis during the worst part of the panic of 1893. About the latter part of August of that year I had an interview with Colonel J. D. Bradford at the old Southern Hotel of St. Louis, as a result of which I went to South McAlester to work for the Choctaw Coal and Railway Company, of which Colonel Bradford was General Manager. I took the Frisco out of St. Louis, going by way of Fort Smith, Arkansas, and Wister Junction. There had been some sort of a gathering at Fort Smith and quite a large number of people were returning to Indian Territory. It seemed to me that about half of them were drunk and the scene on that train was a wild one. I reached South McAlester about 7 o'clock in the evening and before I retired for the night a shooting affair occurred in the town

DIOKEY, DAVID.

INTERVIEW.

13168.

-5-

in which one man was killed. I thought I had come to a wild country sure enough, but I soon learned that a large majority of the people were well educated, high class citizens, and that it was a most desirable place in which to live and I have lived in Indian Territory and Oklahoma ever since that time.

The Choctaw Coal and Railway Company operated coal mines at Hartshorne, Alderson and other points, and the miners were paid each month in cash. There were no adequate banking facilities at South McAlester and the money had to be shipped from Denison, Texas, by way of McAlester or Wister. On several occasions it fell to my lot to transfer this money to Hartshorne. It was the custom to obtain a guard of about four deputy marshals to guard the cash. Almost every month we received word of an intended hold-up, but during the four years I was with the company no hold-up attempt was ever made. I always tried to get Jackson-W. Ellis as one of the guards if possible. Jack Ellis had much the same reputation around McAlester as Bud Ledbetter had in the Northern District of Indian Territory, and outlaws and desperadoes always gave these men a wide berth.

DICKY, DAVID.

INTERVIEW.

13168.

-6-

One unusual affair occurred during my stay at McAlester. There was a gang of outlaws hiding in the Central part of Indian Territory and one or two members of the band had been captured and were in jail and the leader had sent word to the court officials that unless they were turned loose he would come in and burn the court house and open the jail to all the prisoners. The United States Marshal immediately called in practically all of his deputies and told them to go out and capture that gang. A few days later word was received that the outlaws were camped within two and one-half miles from town. This word was received late in the evening and Judge Stuart and the marshal swore in about twenty-five special deputies (including myself) to guard the town. I was stationed at one road and about two o'clock a party of five men came riding in. Our party of about seven or eight men, of course, thought they were the outlaws but fortunately one man in our party recognized them as a posse of deputy marshals who had been out looking for the gang. It turned out that the campers were not the outlaws but a party out trying to effect their capture. That is the only time I was ever a Peace Officer.

7

DIOKEY, DAVID.

INTERVIEW.

13168.

-7-

During the summer of 1897 the Honorable John R. Thomas was appointed United States Judge for the Indian Territory and I made application for appointment as his Secretary and Court Reporter. I was given that appointment during September of that year, a position which I held during his term of office. He was one of the most considerate of men, and I look back upon that four year period as a most pleasant experience. One of the first cases which I reported was that of the United States VS. Cyrus R. Brown, who was tried for murder. Under the law at that time the jury had a right, in the event a defendant was found guilty of a capital offense, to add to its verdict the words "without capital punishment". Unless this recommendation was added the death sentence was mandatory. Brown was found guilty, and I believe was the first man sentenced to death in the United States Court for the Indian Territory, who paid the penalty. During Judge Thomas' term of office I reported the cases of four men who paid the supreme penalty. Most of Judge Thomas' work was in the Northern District-but occasionally he held court in the Southern District. I remember on one occasion

DICKEY, DAVID.

INTERVIEW.

13168.

-8-

eleven capital cases were disposed of at a term of court at Paula Valley and immediately thereafter seventeen capital cases were disposed of at one term at Muskogee, all within a period of about ninety days. At this time Dr. Leo E. Bennett was United States Marshal, P. L. Soper was United States Attorney, J. H. Huckleberry, Orlando Wilcox and O. L. Rider Assistants to the United States Attorney, all men of ability who helped to make history.

One summer during this period, Dr. Bennett, Orlando Wilcox and H. A. Leekly, then United States Commissioner, with several other officers, including Bud Ledbetter, organized a camping trip through what are now Okfuskee, Okmulgee and Muskogee Counties. Leekly held court in one of the tents and they rounded up a great many parties charged with offenses, and held the preliminary hearing in the tent. This became known as the "Woods Court", and was often referred to by prisoners thereafter. I do not recall how many persons were arrested on that trip, but it was a very large number.

One of the early day residents and a personal friend of mine was David W. Yancey. He had come to the Indian

DICKEY, DAVID.

INTERVIEW.

13168.

-9-

Territory from Missouri, and had been appointed by Judge Springer as United States Commissioner at Claremore.

Being quite a young man, Yancey, with some friends, went to a dance one night which was held some distance in the country. At that time there was a band of outlaws that were operating in the vicinity and during the evening they appeared at the dance, and recognized Yancey, as one of the outlaws had been before him on some charge. Yancey and his friends were unarmed and the outlaws forced Yancey to go out in the yard and drink whiskey from a jug while lying flat on his back. If you think this was not real revenge, try it sometime.

At this period the four Judges of the Indian Territory were William M. Springer, W. H. H. Clayton, Hosed Townsend and Judge Thomas, and together they constituted the Court of Appeals. They were all men of large stature and when they sat together they were an able body and presented a distinguished and dignified appearance.

In 1901 Judge Charles W. Raymond was appointed to succeed Judge Thomas and I was appointed as his secretary and reporter of his court. I had read law under the direction

DICKEY, DAVID.

INTERVIEW.

13168.

-10-

of Judge Thomas and during the term of Judge Raymond I took the examination and was admitted to the Bar.

At the end of Judge Raymond's term he was succeeded by Honorable William R. Lawrence and I was then appointed Chief Deputy Clerk of the United States Court for the Western District of the Indian Territory, of which R. P. Harrison was Clerk. When the Indian Territory became a part of the State of Oklahoma I was appointed Chief Deputy Clerk of the Federal Court for the Eastern District of Oklahoma, a position which I held until September 1, 1918, when I resigned to accept a position with the Texas Oil Company. I was married to Alma Kline on April 17, 1912. We have one son, David F. Dickey, Jr.

On October 16th, 1899, the past District Deputy Grand Exalted Ruler, C. M. Saumces of Texas, came to Muskogee and organized an Elks Lodge known as Muskogee Lodge No. 517 with thirty-eight charter members. I was one of the group. It was an active organization and the social features added much to Muskogee society. Grand receptions and balls were held in the opera house and Adams Hotel. Following is the roll of charter members:

DICKY, DAVID.

INTERVIEW.

13168.

-11-

Leo E. Bennett, Charles Moore, J. H. Moran, Walter
E. Howard, James M. Givens, George H. Williams, H. J.
Evans, Joseph Friesman, W. E. Bosoman, P. J. Byrne,
Lee G. Wilson, David L. Yancey, George E. Garland, E. W.
McClure, Frank B. Mitton, Guy L. Emmerson, Albert F.
English, Albert E. Genung, W. T. Wisdom, W. C. Jackson,
M. L. Bragdon, Ben F. LaFayette, William Noble, W. N.
Patterson, William T. Hutchings, David F. Dickey, W. W.
Garland, George E. Bushwell, Phillip M. Ford, C. E. Foley,
Dr. J. L. Blakemore, F. H. Ahrens, Thomas A. Sanson, C.G.
Moore, Harry O. Sheppard, Dr. F. B. Fite, Louie A. Winston.