



DILLON, JOHN H.

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INTERVIEW WITH JOHN H. DILLON  
Route 2, Geary, Oklahoma  
Born, Lawrence County, Ohio

I was born in Lawrence County, Ohio. I was a born adventurer and wanted to be on the frontier. It seemed that there were more opportunities in a new country than in one which was thickly settled, and I was sure that there would be more excitement in a new country.

I took my wife and children and went to Colorado, and located in the southeastern part of the state, near Troy. We were there three years. There were few neighbors; just Mexican sheep herders and cowboys. The Perenne Ranch was the largest place near us. We went from Trinidad, Colorado, to Kansas.

I left my family at Kiowa, Kansas, and came down into Oklahoma with two other men. We drove four ponies to a spring wagon. We arrived in Kingfisher just five minutes before the signal was given to make the rush for claims. The gun was fired and the rush was on; I drove that four horse team down the place which is the town site to day. Located

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a claim on the east side of Uncle John's Creek. The Kingfisher College is standing there now. My claim did not look good to me; I suppose that I was looking for a claim with a house, barn and fences. I gave my claim to the first one who came and asked for it.

I then went down on Campbell Creek, located a place and unhitched the horses and fed them. I was just sitting there near the wagon when a man came up to me. He was cursing and angry. He said, "The damned Sooners have got all the good land." "I said, "How do you like this claim?" He looked it over as best he could from where he stood. He said that it was all right and he wished that he had been as lucky as I had been. I told him if he wanted it he could have it. He could not believe his ears, and I said that we would get some of the men adjoining the place to be witnesses to the transfer of the claim. This we did, and he was happy.

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The Government had spent several months surveying the land, placing markers at the section corners and allotting the Indians their land. It was not any trouble to locate land. This man was so elated at getting a place that he climbed into his wagon and got out a barrel of white whiskey and insisted that we help <sup>our</sup>selves. I told him that a drink was all I cared for. He had come up from No Mans Land, and every one there who wanted to make whiskey could do so.

I drove back to Trail Creek and camped for the night. I took my gun and killed a wild turkey and cooked him over the camp fire for my supper. I had an interesting day; had had two claims and had given them both away.

The next morning I hitched up my ponies and drove back into Kingfisher. It had been prairie when I crossed as the gun was fired and now it was a city of tents. Places of business had sprung up. There were no streets laid out. I unhitched

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my horses and fed them and walked down among the tents. I did not notice what I was doing or where I was going until I saw a man to my right with his hand just above his gun. He was looking past me at some one else and my eyes followed his; there was another man with his hand just above his gun. They were going to fight a duel. There was another man squatting down frying bacon over a camp fire. He looked up and saw what was going on and he seemed to know one of the men, and he said, "Now, John, don't shoot. That is no way to settle this. The lot is not worth fifteen dollars and surely not worth a man's life." "Do you think so?" he said addressing me. I said that I did not know what it was all about.

The men with the guns did not take their eyes off each other and did not let their hands move from above their guns. "Let's arbitrate this---wont you act as an arbitrator?" he asked me. I said that I would act as one and then from the crowd that had collected, the man frying the meat selected another

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and we two selected the third. I asked the men concerned if they were going to be satisfied with our decision as we were not hunting trouble. They both promised that they would be satisfied and that if we decided as fairly as we could that they would accept our decision.

We asked them all the questions we could about the land; how far they had both traveled and how they had come to the "run." We had them both produce their horses. One man had come from No Mans Land and the other from some place else closer, but he had ridden his horse up to the creek bank and could not ride down and had to walk the rest of the way, so we decided that due to this delay that the other man must have arrived at the lot first.

There were no courts or law in those days and questions had to be settled with a gun or by an arbitrator. The two men in this case shook hands and said they were satisfied.

I looked around town and selected some lots, in fact twelve of them. I plowed around them and

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put up a stake with my name on the stake. Then I went back to Kiowa for my family.

When we arrived in Kingfisher and I went to my lots, I found a man digging post holes and putting up a fence around my lots. I asked him what right he had to do this, and he said that he was just working for another fellow. I asked him who the other fellow was and he told me it was Lamb from the Government land office. I pulled up some of the posts and acted as if I was going to pull them all up, and he said that he would go and get Lamb. I said, that was just what I wanted and I would be right there when he came back.

I waited over an hour and they did not come. I went to hunt Lamb. I saw them talking between two buildings. They saw me and walked on away. I talked about it and the whole town got so stirred up that it caused a meeting of the settlers and squatters who formed an Organized Board of Arbitration and those who had disputes over land took their trouble

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to this Board. Priority claim had the rights, or was recognized by the Board.

#### CHISHOLM TRAIL

The Chisholm Trail ran on the east side of Uncle John's Creek, from Concho, near El Reno to the junction of King Creek with <sup>the</sup> Cimarron River.

There were not many cattle moved over the trail after the country was opened for settlement.

They were taken farther west, across the country.

#### RAILROADS

The first railroad that came through Kingfisher claimed they had a right of way before the country was opened, and there should have been no settling on the right of way. The railroad did not want to fight the settlers and they knew that the city of Kingfisher wanted the road so they just put it up to the city of Kingfisher to clear the right of way.

The first marshal resigned, also the second and third, when they learned what was expected of

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them. There was a meeting of the City Council and plans were being discussed as to how the right of way was to be cleared. Some thought that there was no man in town who wanted the job. I said that I knew one who was not afraid to do the work; if he could be induced to take the position of marshal he would do the thing up right. They said he would be elected or appointed. I said; "No, don't appoint him until I talk with him as that will not be fair to him, and if he does ~~not~~ take the job it will just cause him to resign as the others have done."

They overruled me and appointed Ollie Davis, a driver of a dray, as City Marshal, and told me that I could go and tell him of his appointment. The next morning when I told him what the council had done he said, "Who's got it in for me?" I said; "No one, but you are the only one we know who has the nerve to clear the right of way." He said, "Well, get that council together." I got them all there but

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one man. The first thing Davis said was; "I think you have a lot of gall, appointing a man to a place like that without his consent; to make him accept or admit that he is a damned coward. Now get that other member here!"

I got out and hunted him up (Mr. Solomon). When he had them all together Ollie Davis said, "Now you appointed me as Marshal and I'm going to clear the right of way, but you have got to take a vow to stand by me no matter what happens. I don't know what will come up but you fellows have got to back me up. You may appoint all the deputies you care to but be sure they are the right kind and not too many."

When he started down that right of way the whole town was trailing along behind. They began at the north side where there were not as many settlers as on the south side. When Ollie Davis would come to a tent or fence he would say, "Boys, move this out of the way," and it was done.

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One man had a small house and he promised to move that himself, so it was passed up.

Near where the depot is to-day was an old man who had done a lot of talking and had said that he would shoot the first man that laid hand on his property. He had a little shack and a fence of one barbed wire around his lot. I can see him yet, standing there with a coon skin cap on his head and a rifle resting on the wire of the fence. I did not expect anything else than for the old man to shoot into the crowd. But Davis was giving orders that were being carried out, and he did not even look directly at the old man but went up to him and took the gun out of his hand and threw it as far as he could. The deputies cleared away the fence and house.

After the old man's place had been cleared away most of the crowd went home, as there was no real excitement at the old man's place. All knew the job would be done. So, the right-of-way for the railroad was opened.

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I came to Blaine County in 1892 and made the run. The marshal turned us loose about fifteen minutes later than the marshal who had the men on the south side of Cooper Creek. I did not get any place. I later bought a place near Watonga and I was the first postmaster appointed in Watonga. That was before the country was opened. There was a stage driven by Grant Highbarger, for the Concord Stage. I do not know if this was a company or not but it was called the Concord Stage. It came down from Wichita, Kansas, to Cantonment, to Kingfisher and to El Reno. It came down from McNette Springs to Watonga.

The Government had surveyed the country, getting ready for the opening. The Indians had received their allotments and posts six feet high had been placed at the corners of the Indian land. The Government furnished thousands of maps of the country, showing creeks and rivers. Any one could have as many maps as he wished and the prairies were

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strewn with them after the run.

When the marshal turned us loose we rode over brush thickets across creeks and across the river. It was a pell-mell rush with every man for himself.

I was coming from Old Oklahoma one time with three men friends and we were driving four small ponies to a spring wagon. When we arrived at the Cimarron River we saw a large group of people holding a meeting. A man was making a speech under a large elm tree. Our curiosity was aroused and we stopped to see what it was all about. The speaker was telling the crowd about the dangers they were about to encounter and the protection they would be to each other if they all stayed together. He said that no one man or family could go alone into a strange place like the new country about to be opened for settlement. He suggested that they form an alliance or agreement to stand by each other and protect each family that was in the group. It

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was put to a vote and carried and the speaker was elected Captain or Colonel of this caravan of home seekers. Each one signed the pledge and paid ten cents for the membership, and protection of the group. I suppose they had the idea that there was safety in numbers. The group of listeners saw that we stopped and had listened to a part of the speech and asked us if we did not want to pay our ten cents and join in with them. I said that I did not believe that I cared to and the others said the same.

About the time they were through with the meeting three cowboys came riding recklessly into the group and breathlessly told them that the Indians were on the war-path and were headed that way.

Such a skirmishing as there was!

Teams were hurriedly hitched to the wagons and they began to move out across the prairie. All kinds of old firearms were dug up from the wagon beds and ammunition was gotten in readiness for instant use.

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The caravan was at least two miles long. We did not want to fall into the line so we hung back and let them go on. The cowboys disappeared.

The captain reached the head of the procession. He wore a long flowing red sash. You could spot him a mile in that rig. The Captain ordered scouts out in every direction and slowly they moved on.

In the very last wagon were two Jews driving a white mare. On the side of their wagon was painted some kind of a bread sign. Every thing like this is noticeable in a new country. Sort of stands out like a brand. The Jews had paid their money and joined the group for protection.

When the caravan reached Todd's Ranch east of Okeene, they decided to camp. My friends and I had not been in any hurry to go as we could not pass such a long train of wagons and in the rough, grassy country. It was impossible to go around them. To stay in the rough track or road was bad enough on horses.

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I suggested that we give them something to be scared about and when the last sign of the white mare, the two Jews and the bread wagon went over a small hill we began to shoot and to drive as fast as we could.

The Captain began to drive the wagons to form a large circle, and put the horses on the inside. We began to pass the last ones up and they begged us to stop with them as we would likely be killed. But we acted as if we were just too scared to stop and whipped the horses on and went right on.

I heard later that the travelers had stayed in this camping -place all night and that the captain had placed scouts around the camp who had watched for Indians all night long.

#### WILD GAME

If it had not been for the wild game no one could have lived through those early years in Oklahoma. Bread and meat kept us from starving.

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One time, another man and I went out from Kingfisher with two shot guns and in an hour we killed one hundred and fifteen prairie chickens. We loaded these chickens into a wagon box and hauled them into town and gave them away. Not every one had a gun or ammunition and all could use a few prairie chickens.

Wild turkeys were plentiful in those days. I have seen large cottonwood trees as heavy with turkeys as you have seen the trees heavy with crows the in last few years. The branches would be black with turkeys. They would live on grass hoppers in summer and on acorns in winter. You have never seen the oaks as they were when I came, along the creeks and hillsides. The leaves would fall from six inches to a foot deep. We used to have snow here, too.

The turkeys would get down off the trees and scratch the leaves away and the whole hillside would be black when the prairie around would be white with snow. When we wanted a turkey we went to a roost and shot one.