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ATKINS, J. L.

INTERVIEW

#12148

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Hazel B. Greene,  
Journalist,  
Nov. 11, 1937.

An Interview With J. L. Atkins,  
Soper, Oklahoma.

When my brother and I decided to come to the Indian Territory, in 1889, his wife and I came on the train from Dardanelle, Arkansas, to Goodland, Indian Territory. He came through the country, with my pony hitched to a cart or jumper. It took him a week or more to make the trip. My wife and family followed later, when I had established a home for them to come to.

My wife's brother met us at the train at Goodland and took us to his home out on the Green Walker place close to Nelson, about three miles northeast of Nelson on Sugar Creek. He met us with a wagon and we struck out across the prairie; there was not much road, mostly trails but there were a few wagon tracks and sometimes we followed them and sometimes we did not. We went mostly by direction and there were no fences to keep us from going just any way we wanted to go.

I have lived the most of my life around Nelson, Soper and Atlas. Sometimes we would move away and stay for awhile but we always came back. We had for neighbors such people as the T. L. Griggs, Judge Thomas Oakes, the Colberts and Nelsons, and we liked them; they were fine people. I lived

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six years on the Colonel Cole Nelson place. I believe that J. B Jeter bought it after Colonel Nelson died.

We worked hard, had very little money, but we made a good living and had good times. In summer we would build brush arbors and have preaching and sometimes a meeting would go on for weeks. In winter we would hunt. I had a pony and hounds and did the deer-driving for them, but I never killed many deer. I would get so excited when I would see a deer that I would have a buck ague; then I could hardly get a bead on him, so I seldom ever tried to kill a deer.

My wife was just as handy with a gun as I was. She would kill hawks, turkey and squirrel, We farmed, but did not raise much stock, just a little for our own use. I would work with stock for other people though. I would pen wild horses or cattle for them. These prairies were covered with wild horses and cattle.

When a man took a notion that he wanted to break a pony to ride or work we would round up the bunch that the pony ran with and pen them. We would sometimes have to drive them several miles to get them penned but we had it to do because that was the only way to catch one of them. The only time they had ever had a rope on, was when they were branded as

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colts and some of them were six and seven years old.

Sometimes a colt would escape the branding iron for a year or two, but he finally got it.

For a long time, every range-rider knew the owners of the herds of wild horses whether they were branded or not. The range-rider could also read the range like an open book. He would know whether a strange bunch of horses or just one horse and rider had been on the range he was accustomed to riding. He would read the signs. To a practiced eye, all hoof tracks are different.

Another thing I worked at in winter was rail-making, before wire fencing was introduced in our country. My brother and I would go into the river bottoms and make the rails for one cent each. One winter we made twenty-five thousand rails for Mr. T. L. Griggs, at 1¢ each. Then when the railroad was being built from Ardmore to Arkansas, I peddled meat to the railroad workers. Later, I substituted as mail carrier for my brother, sometimes when he would be sick or something. He was mail-carrier from Soper to Atlas but not for long. The Atlas Post Office was abolished soon after the railroad came through.

I never played politics, I did not know how but if they wanted a brush arbor built or a school house, I was right

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there ready to work. My wife taught one little subscription school under a brush arbor, one summer, then we all "fell to" and built a school house for the white children. The Choctaws had plenty of schools for their children. They had a few neighborhood schools but they mostly sent the boys to Spencer Academy and Armstrong Academy, and the girls to New Hope and Tuskahoma.

Things were a little inconvenient sometimes but we did not mind. We had to go to Antlers, a distance of fifteen miles, for a doctor before Dr. W. N. John located at Spencer Academy. Dr. Nash was at Antlers, long years before Dr. John came to Nelson.

I think Nelson was named for Colonel Cole Nelson, a preacher.

Two miles south of Soper is Hunter Springs Church, where full blood Choctaws used to hold big meetings, back thirty-eight and forty-eight years ago. They would come and camp and bring food enough to last for weeks and have a big time. We used to go to these meetings and enjoy them. About two months ago, my wife and I found out that they were going to have Choctaw meeting out there one Sunday. So we just walked out there to attend a Choctaw meeting once more. It was nothing like they used to have. There were only about twenty

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people there and none whom we knew. They had mostly come from up about Boswell and brought their preacher with them and after preaching, of which we did not understand a word because they had no interpreter, we went home. They always had interpreters at these meetings in the early days. There was no big dinner like they used to have, even a one day meeting.