

NICHOLSON, W. J.

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Effie S. Jackson
Field Worker, S-149

June 21, 1937 W. J. Nicholson--Beef Chief
Interview at his home 501 N. Santa Fe St.

During the year 1885 to 1886 Mr. Nicholson; called "Uncle Billy", by his friends and "Wo-haw" (beef-chief) by the Indians, worked under Government contract to distribute beef to the Arapahoes and Cheyennes in western Oklahoma. His headquarters were at Anadarko and Darlington.

" I was born in Linn County Iowa, at Springville in 1865. My family moved to Mitchell County Kansas in 1872. I went to Texas with my father, a sheep buyer, when I was thirteen. In my later 'teens, I was a horse wrangler on a Texas ranch. It took eight or ten horses per cowboy as we changed horses twice a day. All of this country was open range with round-ups every spring to get cows and drive them to market over the Chisholm Trail to Dodge City Kansas, then by railroad. I remember our first headquarters was at Ft. Remo, but this later became a 'remount' fort, and as many as two thousand horses were raised there. The Government bought all beef on foot at two and a half to three cents per pound. They bought about fifteen thousand head of cattle per year. This beef was

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issued to the Indians every two weeks. Darlington was the headquarters for Cheyennes and Arapahoes and Anadarko, for the Kiowas and Comanches and later Chickasha was headquarters until 1896.

Short Tooth

" We had various experiences with Indian Chiefs, for these Indians were still wild. One I recall with a Cheyenne Chief named Short Tooth, a mean 'son-of-a-gun'. He would not allow any herds to pass through the Cheyenne reservation without paying a beef toll. He came to me and demanded thirty beeves as a toll. I had a fine chap named Jeff Howard in charge. I gave him an extra lasso and let him wander over toward the Indians seemingly to find a stray horse. Short Tooth started at once to make his demands. Jeff told him to wait until next day and he would try to get the cattle for him (these were good beef cattle, we had to keep them). Short Tooth said, 'No wait.' Jeff said, 'wait,' Short Tooth said, 'I'll stampede cattle,' and adding a few words and signs. At that he grabbed a blanket to

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stampede the cattle. Jeff in turn seized his lariat and gave the Indian such a whipping that he couldn't see. Short Tooth in his misery and anger called out, 'See here, Short Tooth be back, all warriors, whites be gone, none left.'

" Jeff called his cowboys, seven or eight together and I told them what had happened and said, 'Now, if any of you want to leave, Now is your chance'. Short Tooth did not return and our cowboys heaved a sigh of relief.

" A week or ten days later another herd went through the reservation. Short Tooth asked for beef toll and got it. Asked if he had seen the other herd (ours), Short Tooth said, 'Yes heap bad men, no good, whipped Indian'.

" Indians in the wild were great beggars, but improved with civilization.

Black Coyote and Bob Tail Wolf

" I remember once when my own gang tried to pull a joke on me. A tailor at the agency had died, his

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only worldly possessions consisting of a tailor made
cut away suit. The suit was sold to pay burial expenses,

and I bought it as an act of kindness. I happened
to lose my coat, the rest of my clothes were at the
agency, so I put on the cut away. We were on the
reservation of old Black Coyote, a Cayenne Chief, who
hated Kansas men. I had to go for five/^{hundred}head of issue
beef. As a joke the cowboy hangouts at Darlington,
knowing about what time I would return told old Coyote
that a Kansas man would cross the river with a herd
of cattle between three and four the next afternoon.
They said, 'Now you scare him and make him give you
a lot of beef!'

" Black Coyote got Bob Tail Wolf, a mean Indian,
to go with him to the river crossing. I crossed the
river and there were those two mean Indians ready to
stampede my herd. Then, even though I was dressed in
the cut away they recognized me and returned to the
agency. The boys said, 'Well, Black Coyote, how
many beef did you get?' Very sullenly Black Coyote
said, 'No ketch him'. Then the boys said: 'Way

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didn't you get beef? Did you see Kansas man?' Old Coyote said, 'No, no Kansas man heap big Texas son-of-a-gun.')

Old Trails

"The best known trail around here is the Turkey Track Trail. This started at the Turkey Ranch (about '86 or '87 I believe) and extended to the loading pen at Red Fork. The Turkey Track Ranch belonged to a Cincinnati, Ohio, Company and a fellow named Jerome was manager. This ranch was located on Kuchee Creek east of what is now Cushing, and north of the Cimarron and Arkansas Rivers.

"You know how rough and hilly it is around Drum-right, well that's the way it was as you started out from Turkey Track Ranch. The hills sloped north to the Cimarron River, then you crossed Tiger Creek, where it splits the divide, then follow the divide from there on. It slopes to the Arkansas River, and then you hit level ground on what we always called 'Timmie Fife's Prairie', just west of Red Fork. The

loading pens were at Red Fork which was the western end of the railroad at that time. The Bar-X-Bar Ranch north of the Cimarron River, owned also by a Cincinnati Company used this trail, as did other ranches in the vicinity."

Chisholm Trails.

"Many stories have been told as to what herd was the first to go over what is known as the Chisholm Trail, (Center Trail the oldest). I will tell the story as Billy Blair, the well known cattleman told me. Billy at that time was a cattle buyer at Abilene, Kansas, which was the western end of the Union Pacific Railroad.

"This was about 1875 or '76, ('75 I think.) Up to that time no cattle had ever been shipped from Texas. There were large ranches there and owners found themselves 'cowpoor' with thousands of cattle not worth fifty cents apiece locally. This happened to be the case of an orphan girl, whose parents had left her a large ranch, near Austin, and about five thousand cattle. Her foreman told me that in her desperation she decided to get them to the Kansas City market.

"She fitted up a covered wagon for herself and her foreman and his cowboys started on the 'long trek'. They

traveled by the north star, taking their bearings at night. They planned to get to Kansas City but their calculations went wrong, and they ended at Abilene. Blair said there were four thousand head left (five thousand started) and he bought them paying twelve to fifteen dollars apiece for them.

"The next year, 1876, old John Chisholm followed by other herders began using this trail, known as the Center Chisholm Trail, from about Austin or any Texas ranch, across the Red River, through Oklahoma about half way between what is Oklahoma City and El Reno now. Then just east of what is today Caldwell, Kansas, and on to Abilene. Later there were branches off the main stem. The last prong was made by Bill Halsell trying to make a short cut to Kansas City. The western prong was made by herders making for Dodge City, Kansas, and the Comanche Pool near Medicine Lodge, Kansas.

Billy Blair--Cattleman.

"Among famous cattlemen of the early day should be listed Bill Blair who was known as 'Uncle Billy' to his friends. Born in Indiana in 1852 he came to Texas when he was eighteen. He had his cowboy training, but soon realized that cattle buying and selling was the future

business. So back he went to Abilene, Kansas, which was the western extension of the Union Pacific Railroad, and went to buying cattle. He formed a partnership with Major Drum, and a man named Evans of Kansas City, and they formed the famous Comanche Pool. With the opening of the Chisholm Trail, and the extension of the Santa Fe Railroad west to Medicine Lodge and Dodge City newer cattle lands were springing up in western Kansas and settlers absorbing old cattle lands in eastern Kansas so Blair moved his Comanche Pool Company to Medicine Lodge Creek and established headquarters.

"As the years went on, railroad extensions spreading like wild fire in Kansas, the settlers shoving the cattlemen out, Blair moved his Comanche Pool again. This time to the Cherokee Strip with headquarters just south of Kiowa, Kansas which was the Rock Island Railroad extension. This was a big ranch and was called the Comanche Pool of the Cherokee Strip. The blizzard of 1886 brought such heavy losses that Blair and Evans sold out to Major Drum in Kansas City. In 1888 Drum sold out to Col. D. R. Fant of Coliad, Texas. He was a boss who had the beef contracts with the Government. I had charge of moving the last of the Comanche Pool-ten thousand head of cattle and horses to the Arapaho District.

"Nothing daunted, Blair started all over again, went to Midland, Texas and got another ranch. Then in the 90's Blair heard of 'oil feed' for cattle. He was behind the game with 'grass-fed' cattle and decided to try the 'oil feed' plan. So he sold his Texas ranch and went to Little Rock which was the home of 'oil feed'. It seems that some one had found cattle there getting fat on cotton seeds and hulls which had been thrown away to rot. So for seven years Blair tried the 'oil feed' plan, but only broke even. The cost of shipping the cattle to Little Rock, fattening them, and then shipping them on to Kansas City, St. Louis or Chicago markets was too heavy. In 1897 he sold out and went to Wagoner, Oklahoma 'to get back to grass' as he said.

'Well, you know it's a small world. Our Government contracts were over in 1896 and I had been selling off a lot of old saddle horses and was on the look out for something. I was staying at the Bernard Hotel in Wagoner, and imagine my surprise when I heard a familiar voice saying, 'Billy what are you doing here?' There was Uncle Billy Blair.

" 'Looking for something to do' I said.

" 'Well, says Uncle Billy, where can I get 'on grass' again?'

" 'Up around Tulsa is the best place I know.' I replied.

" 'What are you doing?' 'Looking for a job,' I replied.

" 'Well, Billy,' said Uncle Billy. 'You go up there and rent a good ranch and take care of it for me'.

" So I rented the Salt Creek pasture, between Keystone and Mannford-eight miles long and six miles wide, and stocked four thousand cattle. The lease ran out in two years and I could not get a new lease so I leased the Dr. Bland ranch where Oilton is now, for a few years. Then Blair went up in the Osage near Hominy and took up some of the old 3-D Ranch. He kept ranching interests until his death about ten years ago. He never lived on his ranches. After he came here in '97 he lived at the Brady Hotel, and then when the new Tulsa Hotel was built, he lived there until his death. He was a straight up and down man, no foolishness about him. All he knew was to vote the Republican ticket and talk cattle.

" One of Blair's favorite stories was about his partner Allwell. Allwell was from San Angelo Texas, a big boastful fellow, one who had married money. He went with Blair to Little Rock in the 'oil feed' venture. Now back in Texas where everything was primitive and simple Allwell was happy. As he said, 'My wife just wore a calico dress on the ranch and I thought she was the prettiest thing I ever

saw. My two little boys in their barefeet and overalls looked fine to me, but when we got to Little Rock with its city airs it took a fifty dollar dress for my wife to look nice (she thought), and black hose at two dollars and a half a pair were needed for my little boys to cover up their legs with the short knee-pant suits they had to wear in the city. I am going back to Texas."