

HATCHEL, JAMES, JR.

INTERVIEW.

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Mildred B. McFarland,
Investigator,
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Interview with James Hatchel, Jr.,
Edmond, Oklahoma.

I do not know anything whatever about my parents for when I was a child of four a Mr. Reese Williams, who lived on a farm in Missouri, took me into his home and I stayed there until I was ten years old. During that time I learned to be an expert rider; Mr. Williams had given me a horse and saddle. I was large for my age and often passed for a boy of fifteen.

I never felt that I was wanted at Mr. Williams' home, so, having the wandering urge, I saddled up my horse and started for the Indian Territory; that was in the fall of 1878. It was cotton picking time and I was getting short on funds, so I stopped at Muskogee and got a job picking cotton, I was paid 25¢ a day and board, which included feed for my horse.

I stayed there for about two years then secured a job with the F-F Ranch, with Captain Severs, about forty miles from Muskogee. I was cook's helper on the chuck wagon and received \$10.00 a month and room and board. I had to do my own laundry; I took my clothes

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to the creek and beat them on stones until they were clean. I worked for Captain Severs for about five years and during this time I had learned to ride fence and herd cattle.

I then got a job on the 101 Ranch, owned by Zack Miller; my job there was to "break in" colts and to herd cattle. I was there during the opening of Oklahoma in 1889 but was not old enough to file on a claim at that time. I was at the starting line, however, and saw the mad rush; Mr. Miller had some stray cattle I had to drive back from the starting line. The original ranch house and bunk houses still stand on the old ranch. There were old buffalo wallows and salt grounds on the place and I rode over many old sheep and cattle trails.

I was in the Cherokee Strip when it was opened but never filed on a claim. Most of the people lived on kaffir corn and turnips.

There was a great epidemic of smallpox and the people died like flies for the doctors did not know what it was for some time.

When the Creek Indians buried their dead they

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always placed their worldly possessions with them, such as tomahawks, beads, war paint, saddles and gold. Sometimes, several hundred dollars in gold was buried with the dead and grave robbers would hide behind bushes until all the Indians were gone, then rob the grave.

I knew Crazy Snake and Chief Bacon Rind well.

I have driven many thousand head of cattle over the old Chisholm Trail. One night, two other cowboys and I were riding herd on 1500 head of longhorns close to the Brazos River; we had bedded them down for the night when a thunder storm came up. A sudden clap of thunder started the cattle on a stampede and we were a week rounding them up again.

When the Indians buried money or valuables they would blaze trees on both sides of the place with arrows pointing in the direction where it was buried.

I stayed for a time in Iconium, a small settlement in Logan County, about twelve miles due east of Guthrie, which is no longer in existence.

I was driver of a stage coach from Southwest City,

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Missouri, to Afton, in the Cherokee country. One day I was driving along in the hills when a masked man held me up. I did not have any passengers, just the mail sack. There were several shots exchanged but I stayed by the mail sack. The robber shot one of my mules and that made me mad so I shot him but did not kill him, then tied him up and threw him ⁱⁿ the stage coach, unhitched the dead mule and rode the other one on to the next stop at Echo where a fresh team awaited me. I carried the mail sack across the saddle and I sent Government men back after the bandit and stage coach.

I never had the desire to settle down until 1906, at which time I was married to a school teacher. We moved to Kansas and I started to work on the Santa Fe Railroad; I worked quite a few years on the railroad but always had the desire to ride herd on cattle once more.

I am too old now to do anything but sit and think of the happy life I lived on the plains.

