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Interview with Charles A. Hildreth,
Stringtown, Oklahoma.

The Opening of Oklahoma Territory.

I was born in Kentucky but my father came to the Indian Territory before the Civil War. I remember many incidents during the war as my father was a soldier. After I grew to manhood and married we moved to the Northern part of what is now Oklahoma. The Government had reserved nine sections of wooded land from which wood was supplied to Fort Sill for the soldiers stationed at that place. I was put in charge of the work by Sergeant Williams. This was before the opening. The contractors received \$6.50 per cord for cutting and delivering the wood to Fort Sill.

There was great excitement when the opening became certain. All the camp workers had disbanded and had moved over the boundary line in order to be in the run. Only five other men and myself, who had duties in the camp, remained. There were thousands of people gathered on all sides, in every vehicle imaginable, ready for the opening. Many became over anxious and slipped by the soldiers over night and many of these people

staked claims and held them. No one can describe the excitement as the people poured into the country and began to establish towns and farm homes and began the planting of crops.

Most of the people were rank strangers to each other, but became neighbors almost overnight. Each person was eager and willing to help any one less fortunate by lending plow, tools seed or livestock to help out. Even the children caught this neighborly spirit. The men who stayed with me in the timber camp, and myself, were the last to stake claims but only two out of the six were allowed to hold their claims. We were all classed as "Sooners". The two who stayed fought for

their claims through the courts and won. The rest of us gave up our claims and moved away.

After I lost my claim I moved to Stringtown and I worked on the M. Bar ranch and the Y Bar ranch on Jack Fork Creek; both these ranches were owned by R. Miller. I am now eighty-seven year old and have spent most of my life in the Indian Territory. I did missionary work among the Indians and whites in the early days and knew Cyrus Byington, the Wrights and many of the other noble missionaries in the Indian Territory.