

MCARDLE, COLLINS

INTERVIEW

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Field Worker, Nannie Lee Burns,  
September 4, 1937

Interview with Collins McArdle,  
103 L. S. E.

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#### McARDLE'S STORY.

My father and mother were of Scotch-Irish descent and my grandfather came to this country and landed in North Carolina.

With the true pioneer spirit they drifted west with the hardy men seeking excitement and homes in the new country.

My father, Collins McArdle, settled in Kansas. I was born 16 miles southwest of Leavenworth, in Garfield County, February 26, 1872. I do not have the dates of my parents' births.

#### Boyhood Days.

I was one of the younger children of a family of twelve children and my life was typical of the average boy's life of that day. A large family in a small house, a little school, much farm work, few pleasures and seldom going anywhere. Perhaps once a year we would get to go to town, usually in the fall. Being one of a numerous family, my services were not needed at home as much as money, so I began to work out when in the early teens.

### The Run.

When the Strip was opened in 1893, I was waiting with my father at Marshall, Oklahoma, to make the run. We had arrived a few days before. It was a motley collection of people who were there, like ourselves, wanting land. Most of them, however, were sons of the soil like my father, who wanted a home for his family. Gathered here, too, was the speculator and the unscrupulous ready to take any advantage offered.

Some had their families with them in wagons waiting to follow the man when he should locate his claim if so fortunate. Some in buggies, dressed as for a fair, some had horses that had little chance of winning in a race of any distance, in fact, every type of humanity was represented in the crowd gathered along the six mile line early on the morning of September 16, 1893, waiting for the gunshot that was to be the signal to go.

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~~Father was riding a sorrel and I a copper bottom mare.~~

Each man carried with him a stake with which he hoped to stake his claim.

At the sound of the gunshot, we were off. The best horses, of course, soon forged ahead, all shouting and yelling. Mules turned somersaults, those who had the better horses were the ones that mostly aimed for the farther locations.

I finally spotted a location four miles north and three and a half east of Marshall. Father had stopped a mile and a half farther back. I tied my handkerchief to my stake and then the problem of sticking it into the ground; the ground was so hard that you could not drive it down. This was solved by finding a spider's hole and putting the stake in it. In spite of the soldiers' efforts to keep people out of the country to be staked, as we ran we saw men already ploughing a strip around the location selected by them. At another place the ashes of a camp fire some days old. We had to return to Enid to file that night on the land we had selected. It was an exciting time. There were some who had failed and were bitter; some were claiming the same locations or rather their lines overlapped.

Enid, as a town, sprang up over night and Perry in almost the same time. Neither father nor I had any difficulty but the next few days was as exciting as the run. At one

time I saw a party of four drive up to one man that was ploughing and warn him to get off of the ground. He was ploughing <sup>with</sup> a team of mules and he had some hay in the wagon as feed for his mules. He unhitched as if he were going to comply with their wishes and drive his mules to the wagon. The men thinking they had succeeded were taken by surprise when he, reaching under the hay, got his gun and covering them with it, forced them to do the driving away from the claim, leaving the man who was ploughing in possession.

I saw another man run off a claimant with a knife. Soon the Sooner was mostly wiped out and we settled down to the reality of living and building such shelters as would tide us over the winter. Some lived in camps all that winter but most of the people built a permanent shelter.

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Before the opening this had been a cattle country and great herds had grazed over the entire country and in preparation of the opening the soldiers had tried to round up and drive out all the cattle but many were left that would escape or were overlooked in the rounding up of

them. We, as well as all of the rest, when meat was needed, would go out on the range and kill a cow. Sometimes we would divide with our neighbors. In this way we had meat for the first winter.

There were some ranch buildings on the Strip that were thrown open and some were fortunate enough to get a place to live without having to build it. This country had been fenced in the big pastures, using wire fencing. I have seen some amusing things by just watching.

Here on Old Cherokee Trail I saw my first prairie dog. You have heard various stories of the prairie dog and the rattlesnake. I've watched them. If a rattler enters one of the prairie dog's holes, you will see the dogs get busy and fill the hole with dirt and tamp it down hard and in this way they try to fasten the rattler in the hole and eventually he dies. We used to go to the buffalo wallows and catch the prairie dogs and take them a long way from there and turn them loose just to see them run. I have seen a rattlesnake coiled around a cactus plant and then I've seen the prairie dogs nip off ends of the

cactus plant and place it in a circle around the base of the plant. The snake will never crawl through this circle and will finally die there. There seems to be war between the rattler and the dog.

#### Other Items of Interest.

There are three main cattle trails through this part of the country, namely, the Old Cherokee Trail, The Chisholm and the Santa Fe. In some places they may not be over four miles apart and in other places they are sometimes twenty miles. Fords, crossings, hills, and the general contour of the country make these differences.

The Canadian is one of the most treacherous of streams. It is so full of quicksand.

Once I saw a wise stranger who had heard of the stream and did not know it, unhitch his horses from the buggy and put the harness in the buggy and push his buggy across the railroad bridge just behind a freight train. Then he returned and riding one horse and leading another he took his horses across. I have ridden across leading other horses with a rope around their necks, fixed so that I could tighten the rope and make the horse feel as though he was strangling and when he does this he will begin to swim.

Another time, Elam Traven and I were crossing the Canadian River. He was walking beside the wagon when suddenly he dropped in the sand to the pits of his shoulders and we had to work fast to get him out. His father was the soldier that was sent to get a report on the "Benders." Many people had disappeared after they had gone into the cafe business. They went in to eat and no trace was found of them afterward. Mr. Traven entered the place apparently to get something to eat and they ushered him into a second room and mentioned him to a seat at a table where his back was against the curtain across the rear of the room. He refused the seat and it was discovered that there was a pit just back of the curtain and the person to be disposed of, when seated at this table was struck from the rear, toppled over backwards into the pit and the body was afterwards disposed of. Many bodies were afterwards found in a field nearby. Through his activities the report was made that made it possible to wipe out the Bender Gang.

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#### Army Life.

I had not tried to improve my claim but had continued to hire out and in 1896 was getting \$13.00 per month and my keep. I had occasion to be in Fort Leavenworth and saw



the soldiers there, well dressed, and living a much easier life than I was, so I decided to join the army. I sold my claim of 160 acres for \$1200 and gave the money to my father to build a house and barn for the family, and on July 3, 1896 I enlisted in Co. "A" 20th U. S. Infantry at Fort Leavenworth. Eighteen months after I enlisted I was made a Corporal and three months and three days after that I was raised to Sergeant. I served through the Spanish-American War. We landed on the Island June 22nd and was there during July, August and September. When my company was to sail for the Philippines I lacked three months of having served my time and as I did not wish to re-enlist; rather than to have the expense of sending me home from there at the expiration of my term they discharged me here.

#### After Life.

After my discharge, I returned to my father's and for the next year worked on a cow ranch in the Comanche Reservation. Ever since I left the service till I moved to Miami, four years ago, I have been a peace officer.

For thirteen years I had a mail route in Garfield County.

In 1907 I married Moleine Covington at Newkirk, Oklahoma. We have had five children.

#### World War.

When the World War came, I volunteered for service and was sworn in at Joplin, Missouri, and was placed in charge of the Recruiting Office at Springfield, Missouri, in the General Service Infantry. I remained here till the Draft Law went into effect when I was transferred to the Jefferson Barracks. From there I went to Camp Grant, Illinois, as Supply Sergeant and was discharged after the war at Camp Dodge, Iowa.

#### Later Life.

After the war, we settled in Vinita, Oklahoma, and I worked three days in the refinery. I was made a Peace Officer there and there I remained till four years ago when I resigned and came with my wife and youngest daughter to Miami for the benefit of your college.