

SELLERS, O. C.

INTERVIEW

#7101

379

TERRITORIAL DAYS.

An Interview with O. C. Sellers, white,
age 72, 9 miles south of Okemah, Okla.

Billie Byrd, Field Worker
Indian-Pioneer History
8-10-37

The life of the Muskegee-Creek Indians during the Territorial days showed no advancement in the way of living, education or Christian work. The Indians had their leaders, yet they made no move or efforts to progress but lived the same lives day after day, mostly in sleeping, eating and hunting.

During that time the white men were allowed to settle in the Indian Territory and there were no restrictions as to the number of members of a white family as it would still cost a dollar a head in a family for them to pay before these people could settle.

A ranchman keeping any cowboys would have to pay \$1.00 each for his boys and for anyone else working for him, but he did not have to pay for the cattle or horses that he owned. The money received from the white settlers was turned over to the tribal treasury.

The ranchman would pay ten cents an acre for land

that they were going to use for pasture and grazing purposes for their livestock. This money was also turned into the tribal treasury.

All the land within the boundaries of the Indian Territory belonged to every member of the tribes within their designated areas. All the Muskegee-Creek lands belonged to the members of only the Muskegee-Creek tribe and there was just one way to rent these Indian lands and that would be, by coming to agreement with the first Muskegee-Creek Indian that was encountered. There were no written agreements or contracts. The white farmer and settler would pick out some spot that he wished to cultivate and state what he wished to plant and on this oral understanding the lease of land was taken as being complete.

When the white settler had completed his payments or settling fee and after he had completed his agreements with the government officials who looked after the tribal affairs, he was at liberty to deal with the Indians for land for farming and other purposes. All sorts of people completed such understandings with the Indians and they

were the ranchers, farmers, traders or even the common outlaw and horse or cattle thief. The "squatters" tried to make settlements without payments of fee but were found out and driven out of the country.

To keep peace among the fee paying white settlers and some of the hostile Indians that were not in favor of white settlers, the Indian Lighthorsemen group was organized from picked men of the Muskegee-Creek country and maintained by the government. These men would ride through the country on the lookout for trouble makers or wanted men. A white settler found in the Indian Territory without the payment of fees had to pay the required fee to the proper persons right then or be forced to load his belongings into his wagon and be driven out of the Indian Territory.

Some of the Indians favored the tribal government and wanted the life of the territorial days to go on, some believed in the spirits but a few were in favor of progress. The territorial days were full of the free way of living. The land did not belong to any certain person and each Indian could go where he wished and followed no set rules.

Sometimes the cattlemen drove their herds across the Indian Territory from Texas or Kansas without making any arrangements with the Indians. The length of the cattle drive extended as much as two miles long and it was then that the Indians would raid the cattle and drive off some. Agreements were sometimes arranged between the Indians and cattlemen whereby the cattle owners agreed to give the Indians at least one hundred head of cattle if they were permitted to make their drives. If there were no agreements, skirmishes occurred between the whites and Indians.

The Zippie Trail began at Fort Smith and proceeded on by way of McAlester, then to what is now Wetumka and in a northwesterly course into Dodge City, Kansas. There was no great cattle market in Oklahoma so that long cattle drives to Kansas City or St. Louis were necessary.

Jim Daughtery owned the South 7-D ranch, which was located at the spot where Wagoner is now. His herds consisted of longhorn cattle and his shipping point was St. Louis. There was a railroad stop at Claremore so that he loaded his cattle there.

Herds of longhorn cattle were brought to the Daughtery ranch from Florida or Alabama for grazing until fattened and then they were shipped to market. He leased land from the Creek tribal government at ten cents an acre and his whole ranch was at least thirty-five miles across. The longhorn cattle that Daughtery owned sometimes had horns that were so long across that it was impossible to manage them into and out of the cars. Some were put into the cars by turning their heads sideways. Each cowboy to every cattle car was paid ten dollars a round trip to St. Louis. His duty was to keep the cattle from lying down at the stopping of the train by punching the animal that laid down with a long stick and forcing it to stand up. An animal lying down would be injured or trampled to death by the others.

I have been in a saddle and on a ranch for thirty-five years and during these thirty-five years I have seen cattle from corner to corner in Oklahoma. There was so much driving in and out and shipping in and out of cattle in Oklahoma and Indian Territory that these two places were known as cattlemen's kingdom.

McDermott was another man who was the owner of large herds of cattle. He maintained and operated the trading post known as the McDermott store, east of what is now Okemah and after the railroad was put through from Fort Smith, and Okemah was established, McDermott went out of business and it finally became a ghost town.

Garner was another small trading place on the banks of the Canadian River, southeast of and near the present Hanna, McIntosh County, Oklahoma. This trading post was doing good in its business with trade far and near, but another trading post was established by a man named Depew at the present Hanna and Garner went out of existence and the merchandise moved to quarters established at Hanna.

I happen to know a lot of the elder Indians, and I saw Chitto Harjo (Crazy Snake) at the time he was arrested and taken in a wagon to Muskegee for trial. He was never in favor of the allotment^{or} with the work of the Dawes Commission. He wanted his tribesman to settle peacefully on the plentiful acres of their lands and he thought that 160 acres was too small a place for any

Indian.

The work of the Dawes Commission was fully carried out, and it was after the Light Horsemen, Soldiers, and other Indians favoring the allotment system engaged in several battles with the Chitte Harje forces that they were forced to file claim.

The bootleggers of these early days when caught with the goods were taken to Fort Smith and kept in jail. and the officers would get rid of the liquor by selling it and keeping the money received in their office as payment of the prisoner's fine. The prisoner then would be set free.
