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INTERVIEW WITH JESSE McDERMOTT
HENRYETTA, OKLAHOMA.

FIELD WORKER BILLIE BYRD.
May 13, 1937

THE McDERMOTT STORE AND OTHER INCIDENTS.

Hale Bowman was a white man who operated a store at Wealaka, Indian Territory. He sold this store and with an Indian wife arrived at the home of L. H. McDermott, an Indian, in Section 21, Township 11, Range 10, which was about three and one half miles southeast of the present Okemah.

Bowman quickly noticed that the locality seemed promising and ideal for a store. He asked McDermott for permission to establish a store. This permission was granted and the store was first begun during the month of August, 1891, in the east part of a bin of the farm barn on the McDermott place.

When the store began and did operate, people heard of it and came for twenty-five miles away to trade. It was a queer and funny sight to see a thriving store, with the customers and traders walking in and out amongst the barnyard fowls and farm animals.

L. H. McDermott was always the moving factor behind the

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business. Upon agreement, McDermott and Bowman ordered a saw mill from the David N. Brown Machinery Company of St. Louis. This machine was shipped to Muskogee, it being the nearest shipping point to the McDermott Trading post.

When the saw mill was in readiness, trees were cut down and logs brought to the saw mill and made into lumber. Enough lumber was made to build a one long-roomed-store building. The new location for the store was a little to the north of the barn store and in September, 1891, the new store began to operate and do business.

The business of the new store demanded more and more merchandise and a grist mill and post office were soon added to the McDermott trading post, with L. H. McDermott, himself, as the postmaster. The mail was carried from Muskogee in a hack by a negro named Lemuel Holmes. Jesse McDermott carried the mail as far as Welty, about fifteen miles northwest of the McDermott store. Welty is still in existence with a population of about two hundred people. The mail carriers received \$200.00 a year.

FARMING

Twenty-five acres was the biggest cultivated farm within

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a radius of twenty-five miles during 1891 and that farm was owned by L. H. McDermott. Of course, other smaller tracts of land of ten or five acres were tilled to plant only gardens and smaller patches of corn.

CATTLE

All over what is now Okemah and vicinity was the cattle range of McDermott. There was a pasture that was called the West pasture and another called the East pasture. The fattest and best of the cattle in the East pasture were culled into the West pasture to be kept there for ten days to rest and get in shape for the market.

Eufaula was the nearest shipping point but the McDermott cattle were driven to Red Fork which was on the Frisco. The reason the cattle were not driven to Eufaula was because the country East was timbered, too wooded, too hilly, and there were too many streams to cross.

An average of a thousand head of cattle were shipped during a year. There wasn't much price for cattle at the time for some heads brought only three to five dollars. The money received in the sale of the cattle was used to purchase supplies for the store. More cattle would be taken in payment

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for supplies from the customers by McDermott. More cattle would be sold at shipping time and more supplies for the store bought.

A shipping point was made possible later at Holdenville when an extension was made on the Rock Island from McAlester to Holdenville which made connections with the Katy line.

When the Fort Smith railroad was laid through the present site and vicinity of Okemah, the shipping point for McDermott was from his home and the range.

OUTLAWRY

Bill Cook was the name of the outlaw that made a raid on the McDermott Store one time. A favorite expression of that day was to ask another, "How's your fat?". When Cook entered the store to rob it he asked McDermott, "How's your fat?". Cook was caught a short time afterwards and was taken to Fort Smith. Mr. McDermott was called to identify Cook. When he reached Fort Smith he immediately went to see and identify Cook. Upon recognizing Cook, McDermott said, "Hello, Bill, how's your fat?".

At another time previous to the above story the well-known outlaw Bill Dalton stayed at the home of McDermott for

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one night. The next morning, McDermott requested that Dalton break a bronco which was very wild. Dalton did. Shortly after breaking the bronco, Dalton left for Tulsa, where he was joined by his two brothers, Bob and Grat, and another man whose name is not known. The four journeyed from Tulsa to Coffeyville, Kansas, arriving there two days after leaving Tulsa. As the story is told these men are quoted as remarking that they could equal or break any outlaw's record of robbing two banks at one time. They successfully did rob a bank, but in an alley of the city of Coffeyville, Kansas, the law was quicker and not one of the gang lived to rob again.

L. H. McDERMOTT

L. H. McDermott had \$100 at the time of his marriage and his wife had one black eared cow; but at the time of his death, caused by the runaway of a team accident, May 25, 1895, he had saved \$75,000 and had 5,000 head of cattle on the range. The \$100 was money earned for labor on the building of the Creek Council house at Okmulgee.

The family burial grounds are at the old home place of the McDermotts, Section 21, Township 11, Range 10, in what is now Oklahoma County.