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Mr. Grant Foreman,
Director, S-149,
September 8, 1937.

An Interview with Mrs. Etta Stocking,
1309 Second Avenue,
Los Angeles, California.

Opening of the Cherokee Strip.

In 1893, when President Cleveland opened the Cherokee Strip in the Indian Territory, I was living in Cripple Creek, Colorado. Much interest was taken in the opening of that strip of land and many from there were going to make the Run. Somehow I had a calling to make it, too. My grandparents had pioneered in Ohio; my parents had heeded the call "go west" and had pioneered in Kansas, so naturally that spirit of adventure was in my blood.

I was the owner of a fine cow pony, Billie. I had many a sleepless night wondering how I might carry out my dream and how could I get Billie to some Kansas town along the border was my problem. I knew two men who were going to drive to Caldwell, Kansas, Mr. T. W. Stocking and Mr. Meeker, with whom I made arrangements to take my pony with them. Later, I took the train for Caldwell, mounted my pony and rode to Hunnewell, Kansas, which is very near the Kansas line and from where I intended making-

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my dash across the border. Looking south from here the beautiful view of fine grazing land increased my enthusiasm for the possibilities of a home. I was determined, if possible, to secure a quarter section of this land for myself.

All along the border were guards to secure an even start for everyone. The signal was to be given at twelve noon, September 16, 1893. At that time there was a long string of adventurous souls eager to go. Many were horseback, others in wagons, buggies, carts and some on bicycles and a few on foot. At 11:59 A.M. a shot was heard, given by an unauthorized person and the race was on. The lieutenant fired his shot a moment later when all were already across the line.

The Chikaskia River with its steep banks lay a short distance ahead. I followed the trail as closely as possible knowing that it would lead to a fording place. Others when they came to the bank of the river, unless they were horseback, had to come to the fording place, Rock Falls. Those who were in line resented those who came and tried

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to squeeze in and this caused much confusion, much yelling and waving of flags. In this wild scramble some of the horses were frightened, especially by the waving of flags which were given us to stake our claims. As I rode down into the water I went around the slow moving file and on across. Not a flag was raised but a cheer was given me.

The water at this fording was only three or four feet deep and probably twelve feet across. As soon as the river was crossed the crowd spread out like a big fan and claims were staked quickly. I rode on a mile and a half turning from the trail to the center of the section which is now the Southwest quarter of section two, Township twenty-eight north, Range two west. This part of the country had lately been burned over by a prairie fire but on this ground the grass was still standing. I staked my claim, unsaddled my pony and let him enjoy that grass. At that time I defied public opinion by using a man's saddle. I wore a divided skirt made with a large overlapping box pleat in the front and back so that when I was out of the saddle it had the appearance of a regular skirt.

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My shirtwaist and sunbonnet completed my dress for the occasion. I carried a blanket and a light lunch knowing I would need them if I secured a claim. That night was a long quiet one, not even a coyote calling. I know, for I did not close my eyes. I was not afraid but just anxious for what might happen. Daybreak this Sunday morning was a joyous sight; the sun peeped through the trees which lined the banks of the Chikaskia River to the east of me.

Most of my neighbors, as well as myself, had a second person staking on their claims. However, this was settled peacefully for those who were there first acted as witnesses; the second claimant moving on towards Salt Fork River where there was much more desirable land.

I shall never forget that Sunday morning there. I had all that land and nothing for breakfast. I saddled my pony; rode as near as I could guess to the four corners of that claim and headed for Hunnewell where I could get some bacon and coffee. I think it was the best bacon I ever ate as the hands on my watch said 10:10 P.M., the 17th, almost twenty-four hours since I had had a square meal. "The pioneers

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never missed a meal but sometimes it was a long time between meals.

Monday morning I went to the lumber yard, bought lumber for a house, hired a man to haul it to the claim for me, and put up a box house 12 x 18 feet, and did the required amount of plowing. I was anxious to do all that was required of me to secure that homestead and to show there was no doubt about that quarter of land being taken. Later I went to Arkansas City, Kansas, where I took the train for Perry, Oklahoma, where the land office was located, secured my filing papers and returned to my claim. Leaving my pony with a neighbor I returned to Cripple Creek.

When again in Cripple Creek I learned that neither Mr. Stocking nor Mr. Meaker had secured a claim. I was sorry for them since they made it possible for me to secure one, although I could not farm. Mr. Stocking made me this proposition. He would do the farming for me, take care of my pony and would love and protect me the rest of his days if I would consent to give a half share in my land for a Stocking. This I did and on the

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fourth day of March, 1896, we were united in holy wedlock and became a pair of stockings. We came to our claim and that was our home for some years as we went through years of drought as well as years of good crops, but always years of happiness for us both.