

SURRELL, BILL

INTERVIEW

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Interview with Bill Surrell
Atoka, Oklahoma

Investigator - Etta D. Mason
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THE CATTLE INDUSTRY IN THE INDIAN TERRITORY.

The Indian Territory was well adapted to the cattle industry. This was proven by the number of cattle that were stolen during the Civil War. At the end of the war one half of the Territory was still in the buffalo range.

Owing to this fact, the establishing of the stock industry was almost impossible but with the opening of the cattle trails from Texas to shipping points in Kansas, the men driving herds of cattle over the Indian Territory began to observe the quality of the soil, the water supply and the grasses suitable for grazing. As a result the ranges of the Five Civilized Tribes were re-stocked with cattle.

When the buffaloes were gone, the grass grew as luxuriantly as before and remained ungrazed so herds were driven in, ranch buildings and corrals were built and a new era in history was begun.

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The buildings at the headquarters of a ranch were constructed of whatever material was at hand. In most localities the buildings were of logs and where the timber was large enough, the houses were built of hewed logs but in localities where the timber was small the houses were built stockade fashion with the logs set into the ground, sawed even and spiked together with a plate at the top and the cracks were plastered together with clay. Most of these stockade buildings had dirt roofs.

One of the big events of each season was the "roundup" where all the cattle in the country was rounded up and identified by brands. The roundup was systematically carried on and it usually took a week or ten days to finish the work.

The riders were always accompanied by a chuck wagon and the cook was expected to keep a supply of hot food and coffee for any late rider who might appear.

Strangers who appeared at the roundup camps were supposed to dismount, hunt tin cups and plates

and help themselves to food and coffee. The stranger was always a welcome guest at the round-up camps.

The round-up also was a means of bringing the ranch owners and riders together, to get acquainted. This cultivated a spirit of comradeship and unity of purpose which was so essential, within the range cattle business.

Soon the Indian Territory became a target for the land hungry politicians who began to try to crowd into the cattle country. The roundup also made the ranchmen familiar with the different brands within a radius of one hundred miles.

As ranches were isolated, life became monotonous to some extent. But at times people came from the states and organized hunting parties. These hunting parties helped to rid the county of wolves, cattle rustlers and horse thieves.

At times there would be news of an Indian outbreak.

The cattlemen and their herds were as important and picturesque as the Indian and the buffalo had been

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and the cattleman has his place in history as
much as the Indian and the buffalo have their
places.