

RATLIFF, JOHN L.

INTERVIEW

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RATLIFF, JOHN L.

INTERVIEW
BIOGRAPHY FORM

Form A-(S-149) #106399

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name Ethel B. Tackitt.

This report made on (date) April 26 1938

Lone Wolf, Kiowa County, Oklahoma

1. Name Mr. John T. Ratliff

2. Post Office Address Hobart, Kiowa County, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 724 South Main Street

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month October Day 10 Year 1855

5. Place of birth North Georgia

6. Name of Father William Ratliff Place of birth Virginia

Other information about father Served as Confederate Soldier

7. Name of Mother Catherine Staple, Ratliff Place of birth Alabama

Other information about mother Very industrious

Made cloth and clothing for the family

Notes or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and story of the person interviewed. Refer to Manual for suggested subjects and questions. Continue on blank sheets if necessary, and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 6 sheets

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Ethel B. Tackitt
Investigator
April 26, 1938

Interview with John L. Ratliff
Tobart, Oklahoma

I was born in the north part of the state of Georgia,
October 10, 1855.

My father, William Ratliff, was a native of Virginia
and served the Confederacy; he was a tanner by trade.

My mother, Catherine Staple Ratliff, was born in
Alabama, and like many of the ladies of that time looked
well to the rearing of her children. She spun thread from
cotton and wool which we carded by hand at home, the cotton
and wool both were grown on our own farm, and from this thread,
on her own hand made loom, she made the cloth and our cloth-
ing by hand at home. We children were taught to card and
to knit our socks, stockings, gloves and caps.

There was not much worry among children about enter-
tainment in the evening, for each child had his assigned task
to complete before he was free to play and as my childhood
came in the time of the Civil War and the years following,
little time was given to amusement.

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I came to Texas and settled at Rogers in Bell County where I farmed, and I decided that I wanted a home in the Indian country which the Government had been opening for white settlement from time to time.

The Cheyenne and Arapaho Indian country had been opened in 1892 and I was positive that the Comanche and Kiowa Indian country was going to be opened for white settlers likewise, and I wanted to know what kind of country it was before I made an effort to get a claim there.

I sold out everything I had, taking the money, my wife, and children went to Weatherford, Texas, where we took the train for Washita County in the Cheyenne country. There I bought a wagon, team and a camp outfit and with my family started out to look over the country. Washita was not very well improved as most of the people were living in dugouts where they had lived while proving up on their claims.

We camped down on Washita River near a little village called Shelley, I do not think there is any town at all there now, but there was a very good cheese factory at the place, that purchased milk from the farmers and helped quite a lot in making a living for them.

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I took my family, after looking over Washita County, down into the Kiowa Indian country which is now Kiowa County, It was not open for settlement then and the Indians were camped along Elk Creek, Washita River and near Saddle Mountain and on Rainey Mountain Creek.

There were no roads except wagon tracks and the grass was high and rank. There were thousands of cattle all over the country, while deer and antelope were to be seen grazing like cattle. They would even venture up near to look at anything red or attractive about a wagon. Quail and prairie chickens were as common then as doves are now. There was not one thing in the valley where the county seat, Hobart, now stands, except the natural growth of timber on Elk Creek.

The trees were of such size and thickness, that they would be astonishing to people at this present time, as many have been cut down and destroyed by the great fires that later swept the country. This timber was cotton-wood, elm, hackberry, red-wood, wild grapevines, plum bushes, pecan trees, walnuts and many other kinds.

The valleys were well covered with Mesquite that grew much larger than the present trees, for these were old. The

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Blue stem, sage and Mesquite shrub formed a heavy carpet over the prairies. The Needle grass with its sharp points that gave name to it, when ripe waved like white floss in the breeze and was just about as inflammable as pine shavings.

There were a few ranches in the country but most of the cattle were handled by line camps as the cattle were supposed to be only pastured on the land and no substantial buildings were put up by the outfits that owned them. Usually, the line riders lived in dugouts.

There was an Indian mission at Rainey Mountain also a mission on Elk Creek, south of the present town of Hobart. Some of the Indians had houses on lands which they had accepted as their home; these houses had been built by the United States Government in an effort to bring the Indians to a more civilized and permanent manner of living, but the most of the Kiowas yet lived in tepees and in groups along the creeks.

After this trip we returned to Washita County and I rented an Indian lease on Washita River and continued to farm, but I had my mind made up that when the Kiowa country opened I would try to get a claim there for I thought

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the country beautiful.

The Indians were very much displeased about the Opening and many of the older ones would have prevented it if possible, for they were wise enough to know that it would mean the end of their natural way of living and their wild life would vanish forever. This was a great grief to them and they cannot be blamed when we witness the destruction which has taken place.

Before the Opening, which took place in July of 1901, a great fire started near the Rainy Mountain Mission. It was never known just how it started. Some thought the Indians started it to drive out the white people, but it could have been started from the camp fire of some careless white man just as easily, and with just about as much reason as to lay the blame upon the Indians.

It was a most awful fire, before the wind, over dry grass, burning off most of the country. Cattle and animals ran before it making for the watering places. People who could not get out of the way, back fired against it and the Indians protected themselves in this way also. When the Drawing time came the burnt over region rendered the heat almost unbearable to travelers.

I went to Fort Sill where I registered, but I failed to

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draw a lucky number and therefore did not draw a claim.

I then purchased a relinquishment from a man by the name of Jackson for I was determined to win a home in Kiowa County. I lived on it and proved up on it and for many years it produced a good living for my family. I thought it would produce a good living for my wife and I as long as we lived. She is eighty-one and I am eighty-two and we love it, but I grieve to be forced to say that it now hardly pays its taxes. We live in Hobart and no one better knows the change than we.