

RABURN, S. C. (MRS.)

INTERVIEW

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Investigator.
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Interview with Mrs. S. C. Raburn
Hartshorne, Oklahoma

Her Husband's Trips with David L. Payne

I was reading in a history not long ago about David L. Payne and his trips into the Indian Territory with settlers, and the writer made the remark that it would be interesting to know what sort of people made those trips with Payne (Mrs. Raburn said). Well, I know what one of them was like, for my own husband was with him on three of his trips.

Tom, that was my husband who is dead now, made his first trip in the Spring of the year; we had been married ten years then, so that would make it in 1880.

If I remember right that was Payne's first trip into Indian Territory, too. People were just beginning to use the word "Oklahoma" in referring to these lands.

We lived in Hackett City, Arkansas. Payne was up in Kansas calling for people to come and help him, and Tom heard the news. He got pretty worked up over the matter; nothing would do but he must go. I don't

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think he cared so much about getting land as he did having the adventure of the trip.

I stayed at home to look after our four children, and to sort of keep up the home while Tom was away. We lived on a farm, and there was stock to care for. Tom told me a lot though when he got back. And I remember some of the things he told me as plain as day, even if it has been forty-seven years ago.

I remember how excited Tom was before he went to join Payne that first time. Payne was saying that there were millions of acres of rich land to be settled. This land was up around where El Reno and Oklahoma City are now. It wasn't assigned to any tribe of Indians; it had been given to the Seminoles and Creeks, I think, but they had turned it back to the Government. Cattlemen were grazing cattle on this land, and Payne was saying that it ought to be opened for settlement so people could make homes there.

Tom left in a covered wagon drawn by a team of mules that he had been using to farm with. He put bows on our farm wagon, and stretched a canvas cover

over the top. He swung a bed in the wagon; I helped him make a mattress for it.

Tom took food along, too; a person didn't depend on buying supplies from stores as much then as present day people do. He took flour ground from our own home-raised wheat, home-cured meat, peaches dried on our farm, home-made lard, and things like that. He took a rifle, of course, and meant to get fresh meat by hunting.

Some of the neighborhood men went with Tom, but I'm not sure now just who they were. Tom Roddin went with my husband in 1882, and he may have gone on that first trip too.

Tom

It seems to me that said they went first to Arkansas City, and then to another town called Caldwell. Anyway, they went up in Kansas and crossed the border there into the "Indian Territory."

A lot of people had planned to go, but they got frightened when soldiers warned them against the trip. A lot turned back, and only about three dozen or so actually made the trip.

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Tom said they struck right into the middle of the "Unassigned Land" and made a camp where Oklahoma City is now. I think that was in April. Tom said they called it "Camp Alice." It was against the law to sell whiskey in the Indian Territory, but they put up a saloon there anyway.

Years later my husband often remarked that history didn't tell about that trip actually as it was. For that matter, all the histories I've read told only meager accounts, with practically no details.

Well, soldiers came and arrested Payne, and Tom came back home. I remember he came in sick; he had a pretty serious case of malaria. He was bedfast with it, and I had to nurse him for I don't know how long.

You'd think that would cure him, but nothing of the kind. He was as enthusiastic as ever. I can't say I blame him; it isn't every day a man gets to go adventuring into unsettled frontier country. I would have liked to go myself if it had been possible.

It must have been two years later that he made his second trip. It was after the crop was laid by in August.

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Including my Tom, eight men went from Hackett City this time. There was Tom Roddin and his son John, George and Bill Schuler, Buck Fry, and a German named Bowers. I have forgotten the name of the other man.

They went off like a bunch of boys going to a picnic. They took two covered wagons, with four men to a wagon. They felt certain that the weight of public opinion would make the soldiers leave them alone this time.

That was the trip that Tom staked out his claim to the land on the North Canadian River. He said he picked out some rich bottom land and carved his name and the date on a large rock there. The river made a big bend and formed a natural fence on three sides of the land. He said that was the sort of land that a man could be proud to own. He never did go back to it, though.

The soldiers came and arrested Payne again. They told Tom and the other men that they had to get out. The soldiers told them that if they went peace-

ably and at once they could choose their own route out; if the soldiers had to use force they would put the men out the nearest way, and that would be straight north across the Kansas border.

It was dusky dark, and the men were eating supper. Bowers, the German, jumped up and went to his wagon; he hitched up his team and pulled out that very night. All the men from Hackett City went with him. I remember how Tom used to laugh about Bowers being so scared.

They struck out through the Indian Territory toward home. They had all sorts of adventures on that trip; some serious, and some downright funny. That's all Tom could talk about for months after he got home.

Once they came to a river and couldn't find a place to cross. There were spots where the horses and mules could swim across, but it would be too deep for the wagons. They finally had to let the wagons down over a small cliff with ropes; the river had a rocky floor there, and the water was only a foot or so deep. Then they pulled the wagons across by hand. They took the stock to another place and made them swim across.

Once they got lost, somewhere in the Cherokee Nation. They met a lone Indian who was walking, and asked him for directions. Tom said he wouldn't say a word; he just grunted and started on by them. They were desperate, and Bowers got out and grabbed the Indian by the arm. Then the fellow told them what they wanted to know, using gestures and making signs. Finally he grinned and asked them in good English if they had any chewing tobacco.

Once they got snowbound and had to stay holed up in camp for about a week. Tom went hunting one morning and got lost. He said he kept hoping he would find the camp over the next hill, but the afternoon came, and he was still lost. At last he got the idea of back tracking himself. He got back to camp just as the sun was sinking. The others were just about to go out and look for him.

Well, they had no more than got home than Tom heard that Payne was planning another expedition, and Tom started getting ready to go again. He tightened up the tires on his wagon; he was good at things like

that, having been apprenticed to a blacksmith for two years when he was a boy.

He left about the middle of January this time, I think it was. He said later that there was a large crowd gathered up in Kansas for this trip; nearly a thousand people, some of them woman and children.

That's when Payne sold the certificates. A certificate was a slip of paper that was supposed to entitle the bearer to settle on land in the Indian Territory. It cost about two dollars.

Everyone thought that the Government would surely let the settlers stay this time, since there were so many of them. But it turned out like all the other expeditions did. Payne was arrested, and the others were sent home.

That was the last trip Tom made with Payne. Payne died soon after that. In a way it looked like all those trips were just a waste of time for Tom, because he never made a penny out of them. But I don't know; he had a million dollars worth of fun. And it isn't every man who can say that he was with David L. Payne, the boomer.