

RATLIFF, JOSEPH.

INTERVIEW

9203

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BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Fioneer History Project for Oklahoma

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Field Worker's name Linnaeus B. Ranck.

This report made on (date) November 12, 1937. 193

Name Joseph Ratliff.

Post Office Address Shattuck, Oklahoma.

Residence address (or location) _____

DATE OF BIRTH: Month August Day 16 Year 1873.

Place of birth Williamson County, Texas.

Name of Father _____ Place of birth _____

Other information about father _____

Name of Mother _____ Place of birth _____

Other information about mother _____

ote. or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and
tory of the person interviewed. Refer to Manual for suggested subjects
nd questions. Continue on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to
his form. Number of sheets attached _____

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CONFIDENTIAL

LINCOLN B. RAY
Investigator.
Nov. 18, 1937

An Interview With Joseph Ratliff
Shattuck, Oklahoma

Joseph Ratliff was born in Williamson County, Texas, August 16, 1873. The winter of 1895 he left Texas and landed in Kiowa, Kansas, January 28th of that year. Kiowa then was the end of the railroad. He was headed for the famous Box T. Ranch in the Texas Panhandle, the headquarters of which were some twenty-five miles north west of where the town of Shattuck, Oklahoma, was later founded. To reach his final destination an overland trip of about one hundred and sixty miles faced him. Fortunately for young Ratliff he contacted a ranch freight wagon in Kiowa from the K H Ranch for a load of supplies. The K H headquarters were about one hundred and twenty-five miles southwest of Kiowa in the Cherokee Strip country. Down through the wilderness young Ratliff rode the freight wagon to the K H headquarters, being on the road about three days as best he can recall. He remained over one night with the K H's and the next morning the ranch foreman, Chas. Balford, hitched a span of mules to a buckboard and

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took Mr. Ratliff to the Box T. Ranch well up toward the headwaters of Wolf Creek. His sister lived at the Box T headquarters, her husband, Frank Biggers, being the Box T foreman at that time.

The Box T cattle used to range over the western part of the Strip country more or less; therefore since Ratliff worked on the Box T Ranch for a number of years, he was in Oklahoma Territory about as much during those early days as he was in Texas.

Since he was only eleven years old when he came down through the Strip to the Box T over the line in Texas, he attended school the summers of '85 and '86 two summer terms as he described his early-day schooling in this section of the Southwest. The school was conducted under a cottonwood tree right out in the open. In case of rain the teacher and five pupils, the total attending, retired to the former's dugout which was located near the site of the classroom.

During those early days those on the Box T Ranch received and sent their mail at the Buzzard Roost Stage Station to the east of them in the Strip. At Buzzard

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Roost then was the only post office in this entire section of the country. Some of its patrons lived many, many miles from it. To receive mail at Buzzard Roost during its life as a United States Postoffice, the mail was addressed thus: "Buzzard Roost Stage Station, Indian Territory."

All of the Box T's supplies were freighted overland from Kiowa, Kansas, down through the Strip till about 1889. Ratliff made trips to Kiowa occasionally too with the regular ranch freighter.

In 1885 Dillard Fant, then a large and prominent cowman of the Southwest was ranging a herd of cattle down in the Cheyenne-Arapaho country. Millard F. Word was the foreman in charge. Word and the other cowpunchers with the cattle had a camp in the vicinity of the present site of Leedy, Oklahoma. It was during the summer of 1885 that such serious trouble developed in the Cheyenne-Arapaho Reservation. For a while it seemed that a major outbreak of the Cheyennes was so imminent that the Federal Government rushed some 5,000 troops to the proximity of the Cheyenne country.

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Fant's cowpunchers and the Indians had not been getting along so well. Allegedly the Cheyennes were stealing cattle from the Fant herd. Also they lurked stealthily in the vicinity of the cowboys' camp, and given the first opportunity they never failed to swoop in and eat and carry off the camp eatables. Fant's cowpunchers, of course, grew weary and impatient with the Cheyennes' pilfering and in exasperation conceived of a plan, rash but summary, of stopping some of it.

Little Robe, then a prominent Cheyenne Chief and one of the last of the Cheyennes to become pacific toward the white man, they knew was the leader in most of the stealing the Indians had done. They had fed him on occasions at their camp and, therefore, knew his great relish for stewed, evaporated apples. Cautiously they laid a trap for him and his companions.

Before leaving camp one day the cowpunchers took special occasion to cook a large pot of beans and a pot of their dried apples and left them. In the pot of the apples they put a quantity of strychnine. It was a sure bet nearly that the Cheyennes would pay their camp a call

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during their absence, and in such event they knew that Chief Little Robe would appropriate the stewed apples to himself and limit his companions to the contents of the bean pot. As the cowpunchers had anticipated Little Robe and others stole in while the boys were gone. The wily, mischievous Little Robe devoured the apples; and so quickly did the strychnine take effect that the Indian chieftain died violently on the spot.

This rash and indiscrete prank on the part of Fant's cowboys so enraged the Cheyennes against them that they were obliged to flee the country in order to save their lives. Only with the protection of soldiers were they able to return and remove the Fant cattle from their reservation. Mr. Ratliff declares that he knows this incident to be positively true.

In 1897 Mr. Ratliff filed on a "waterclaim" of a mile strip along Wolf Creek near the old Fort Supply Military Reservation. This was done for the benefit of a ranchman of that locality by the name of Wright.

Shattuck has been Ratliff's headquarters for many years last past.