

RATLIFF, J. A.

INTERVIEW

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LEGEND & STORY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

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Field worker's name Robert H. Boatman

This report made on (date) January 11 1938

1. This legend was secured from (name) J. A. Ratliff

Address Route #2, Blanchard, Oklahoma.

This person is (male or female) White, Negro, Indian,

If Indian, give tribe _____

2. Origin and history of legend or story Early days and customs
of pioneers.

3. Write out the legend or story as completely as possible. Use blank sheets and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 4

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Robert H. Boatman,
Investigator,
January 11, 1938.

An Interview with Mr. J.A. Ratliff,
Route #2, Blanchard, Oklahoma.

I was born in the state of Texas, February 20, 1877.

At the age of seven years I came with my parents from Texas to Oklahoma, then the Indian Territory. It was in 1884 when first we settled near the Red River at the foot of what is known as the Rattlesnake Mountains* in the Choctaw Nation. The country was just a very rugged country, filled with Indians and wild game; such as turkey, deer, antelope, bear and panther.

The place where we first settled was rightly named Rattlesnake Mountains, for rattlesnakes were there in abundance and could be seen in bunches of from one to eight or ten. It was a known fact if water got scarce in the regions occupied mostly by the snakes they would migrate often from ten to twenty-five miles to some other section of the country where water was plentiful. The rattlesnake requires plenty of water and drinks its water in the same manner as a cow or horse.

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Buffalo bones were in abundance, being the remains of carcasses of the buffalo that had been slaughtered by hunters prior to this period from 1800 to 1890, many hundreds of tons of these bones were collected and hauled to Vernon, Texas, where they were sold for \$7.50 per ton. These bones were ground by machinery and used for commercial fertilizer.

The very early pioneers were known as squatters, and these people met with many hardships. In the year 1884 there was no fence in the territory, this was known as the drift fence and was on the line between Texas and the Indian Territory. It was used for the purpose of keeping cattle from drifting across to Texas from the Territory.

As I remember my first home consisted of a crude log cabin covered with boards that were rived from timber and covered in clapboard fashion. It had a puncheon floor with a stick and dirt chimney. There were very few white people in this country then and each and every family stayed at home and attended strictly to its own business. The principal food consisted of corn bread, butter, sweet milk and beef. The Choctaw and Chickasaw Indians were friendly tribes of people, though they were very peculiar. Very few of them could speak

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English. Sometimes from three to six or eight of them would come to our house to be fed. They would not enter the house; they would just stand or sit around outside.

When a meal was prepared Mother would walk to the door and motion to them, then they would file in single file. After eating they would offer their thanks by bowing and making motions, after which they would take their leave. When an Indian decided to move he would ride a pony, dragging his tent and poles; the wife and children walking behind carrying the rest of their belongings, which consisted mainly of a few blankets and a few cooking utensils that were mostly made of clay and hand-made.

The Comanche tribe of Indians was a very different tribe of people. They were in some ways very treacherous. I was personally acquainted with and was a personal friend of Quanah Parker, chief of the Comanches. Quanah Parker was a man of great intelligence and was well educated. The Comanche tribe was noted for thievery and many times they would raid other tribes, taking away their belongings.

There were no schools at all and my education was secured at Fort Smith, Arkansas, (which consisted of three months.) This

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covered my entire schooling as I grew up and began a life of my own. I entered the ministry of the Gospel. I was very successful in my work. For the past several years I have given most of my time to the duties of my country as a police officer.

I married Miss Maggie Barnett, a native and a daughter of the Muskogee tribe. Our home is seventeen miles west of Russell and our place consists of some five hundred acres of land and we have a modern home.

(* O. present day m/a Oklahoma City Rattlesnake
 You will find one in the Creek Nation near Okla.
 Editor's note.