

RICE, JOHN L. INTERVIEW

#4172 388

RICE, JOHN L. INTERVIEW.

4174

Anna R. Barry, Interviewer
Indian-Pioneer History
May 26, 1937

Interview with John L. Rice,
407 N. Rock Island, El Reno, Oklahoma.

I was born April 27, 1875, in Elk County, Kansas, but grew up in Missouri and Oklahoma. My father, Theodoric B. Rice, ^{was} a native of Bath County, Kentucky. He was a printer by trade and followed that vocation in early life. Later he became a farmer. Soon after my birth in Kansas he moved to Missouri and in 1889, the year of the great opening, came to Oklahoma. He made the run and filed on a claim in Canadian County. From that year he gave account of himself as a farmer until his death, in 1911, at the age of sixty-seven.

EARLY TOWNS IN CANADIAN COUNTY

While history dips its pen in its roseate hues to relate the deeds of the pioneer homebuilder on the broad plains and fertile valleys of this "Beulah Land" there was another band of unsung heroes, whose foresight and energy builded the hamlets, towns and cities which today are the pride of Oklahomans and the wonder of the world.

RICE, JOHN L. INTERVIEW.

4174

2

Here in Canadian County I will name some of these early towns and dream-towns.

The first time I came into what is now Canadian County was in September, 1889. I came with my brother, Will, to see our "claim," and we stopped at the dream town of "Rock Island," a country store in the northern part of the county. The merchant in charge was a fine looking, sprightly man by the name of Dave Bothell.

Mr. Bothell explained that his "town" was on the survey of the Rock Island Railroad and was destined to be a splendid little city, but alas for Dave, the Rock Island changed its survey, and Rock Island "died a-bornin'!"

Then, as we came farther south we saw a fine little city with busy merchants, with streets filled with traffic and with every indication of a real city.

This was Reno City. Then we crossed the river and I said to Will: "What are those houses there on the hill?"

And Will replied: "Oh, that's a townsite, called El Reno, backed by a man named Major Foreman and several others, but I don't think it will ever amount to any-

thing." But when the gentlemen promoting the building of the great Rock Island Railway came into Reno City and demanded one-half of the lots in the entire townsite as a bonus for entering the city, and they were refused, they came to the builders of El Reno and made similar demands. Upon their acceptance the survey was turned aside from Reno City and ran a few miles west through government land to El Reno. The fair little city of Reno City died as suddenly as a delicate flower in a hard freeze, and having no other place to go moved many of its houses to El Reno.

At that time the western boundary of the county was the meridian which runs through the present city of El Reno.

While the towns were struggling for existence on the western side of the county, we had the same conditions on the east side. In the northeast part of the county J. W. Bennett had founded a country store with the usual hopes of a country town, which he called Mathewson. This store served its surrounding territory for a number of years till the Fort Smith and Western Railroad was built and then Piedmont and Richland were

RICE, JOHN L. INTERVIEW.

4174

4

started. Of these three towns, Richland still has one or two stores and serves its immediate locality, while Piedmont is a nice little town with a bank and several mercantile stores, blacksmith shop, oil station, and a lot of the finest citizens God ever blessed a county with.

Before Piedmont was built there was a country store and post office called "Eda" a few miles southeast of the site of Piedmont. This post office was discontinued when Piedmont was created.

Coming down south from Piedmont vicinity we reached the beautiful valley of the North Canadian and there we found two townsites struggling for supremacy-- Harrison and Frisco.

Harrison was situated three miles east of Frisco and put up a vigorous fight for existence, having constructed one of the finest hotels in this part of the then "territory". But in the town struggle that followed the superior ability of the Frisco men soon overcame Harrison and they did it in such a manner that little or no ill feeling resulted.

Then we came to Frisco, one of the best towns

RICE, JOHN L. INTERVIEW.

4174

5

in the entire territory. Here was a town built as a home town. Sixty veterans of the Civil War and their families were the center and around this was assembled a band of men with clear vision and high ideals. Frisco was recognized as one of the up-and-coming towns of the Territory. I remember that in 1890, the republicans of the territory held their first territorial convention here and they came driving in with new brooms in their whip-sockets and made what we would call "whoopee." The inevitable county seat fight came on between Frisco and El Reno. My family was partisans of El Reno. I remember late in the summer of 1890, Major Foreman, Rube Hickox and several other El Reno men came to our farm and inquired for my father. When father came in, these gentlemen asked him what his politics were and father told them he was not interested in politics and did not know just how to classify himself. At this reply the delegation was jubilant and said that was just what they wanted and insisted that father run for the territorial legislature as an independent with El Reno backing. Father consented and the El Reno men put up a good fight. On the day of the election they sent men

RICE, JOHN I. INTERVIEW

4174

to all towns where the majority were interested in
 Reno. However, the man they sent to Reno City gathered
 the men around him and told them that it was better to
 vote the Democratic ticket than to vote any of the
 ticket. This turned the tables and the Democrats
 Although the candidate was my father, the
 say that his name was on the ticket
 of the county
 present in the county, and
 cities proposed
 Reno. The election resulted in
 nadian and some rise as the
 ever, the selection
 court and Reno

up the Canadian
 its survey selected
 put the finishing
 Following the
 gation of business
 of the Frisco and some of the "network," spoke the

RICE, JOHN L. INTERVIEW.

4174

7

calumet and bring peace to all parties. This delegation offered to Jim Godfrey, who had been first mayor of Frisco, Judge Canon, J. R. Coykendall, Ed Deupree, Eli Rhodyback and perhaps one or two more to give them lot for lot in El Reno for their holdings in Frisco, if they would move to El Reno and give their influence in building up the county seat. The gentlemen named from Frisco met and indignantly refused to consider the offer.

Personally, while I respect the spirit of loyalty to friends and a cause, I have always regretted that these fine gentlemen could not see fit to accept this generous proposition because I feel that if they had come to El Reno and brought their energy, initiative and talents today we would have a much greater and better El Reno.

While the contest over the county seat was pending in court a small band of men conceived the idea of building a town in the exact center of the county and strive to locate the county seat there. With this idea in view a townsite called Canadian City was laid out on the farm now owned by Robert Hurst, two miles east of Banner. However, this move never amounted to much.

RICE, JOHN L. INTERVIEW.

4174

8

When the Rock Island Railroad built in from the north and by changing its survey killed Rock Island and Reno City, it created two new towns and one of them is twins. The town of Okarche was located on the present county line between Kingfisher and Canadian counties. However, at the time of its location, Canadian County extended six miles farther north, the northern tier of townships being later transferred from Canadian to Kingfisher. This town gets its name Okarche from the first syllable of the three names Oklahoma, Arapaho and Cheyenne.

When the Choctaw Railroad entered the county from the east there was a spirited fight over the selection of the right-of-way, but finally the road was routed up the south side of the river and this for-

ever put an end to the hopes of -risco. However, it gave us Yukon, one of the best little cities in the state.

Yukon is one town in Oklahoma that has enjoyed a steady growth and today is the home of many retired families who have wrested a competence from

RICE, JOHN L. INTERVIEW.

4174

9

the wonderful soil adjacent to it and can now take life easy. It is also noted as one of the best milling points in the southwest. It is also being sought as residence property for many who work in Oklahoma City and want a beautiful place in which to make their homes.

When the Choctaw Railroad came through this county the little town of Cereal was laid out, midway between Yukon and El Reno. This has always been a good trading point. Later the name Cereal was changed to Banner. Five miles northwest of the present site of Banner was a country store and post office called Liberty which served its community until 1904, when it was discontinued.

In '89 or '90 there was a townsite laid out one mile south and one-half east of the present West Point Church. This town was called Thurston and its founders, Alexander Spencer and a man named Rice, had great hopes for its future. However, it lingered a while as a promise then as a country store and finally went the way of Goldsmith's "Deserted Village."

When the Frisco Railroad built into Oklahoma

RICE, JOHN L. INTERVIEW.

4174

10

City from the southwest that great empire builder and founder of cities, C. G. "Grist Mill" Jones, laid out and built Mustang, in the southeast part of the county. For a number of years Mustang was a flourishing little city being especially noted as a great fruit and melon shipping point, but the San Jose scale ruined many of the splendid orchards surrounding the place and misfortune caused them to lose their bank so today the once flourishing little place has lost some of its early glory but if its great hearted people can only have moderate crop conditions it will rise again.

In this rambling story I have enumerated the towns and near towns located in that part of Canadian County opened in 1889. On Monday, April 18, at high noon, 1892, the great Cheyenne and Arapaho Indian Reservation was opened to settlement to the white man. After this reservation was opened a strip of land extending west for a distance of eighteen miles from the South Canadian River to a point even with the north boundary of the county was added to Canadian County and later when the Caddo, Kiowa and Comanche

11

country was opened, in 1901, the southwest part of the county known as the "Walnuts," was added.

I will not go into detail in regard to all the hamlets, towns or cities laid out or hoped for in this part of the county. There was a post trading station at Fort Reno and an Indian Agency trading point at Darlington, while a few years later an Indian school was established at Caddo Springs. The soldiers have been removed from Fort Reno and the trading post abandoned.

"Caddo Springs," as the Indian school was formerly called was ordered to be changed because it conflicted with the name of the town of Caddo in what is now Bryan County. The then superintendent of this school was named Shell and when called upon to suggest a name for the school gave the Latin equivalent for Shell which is Concho or Conch.

• When the Choctaw built west, the townsite of Calumet was laid out and a beautiful little city now marks the school. Calumet has always enjoyed a large Indian trade and is an exceptionally good market for agricultural products.

RICE, JOHN L. INTERVIEW.

4174

12

In 1912, the Democratic party of Canadian County selected me as candidate for clerk of the district court.

In 1899, I married Miss Fannie Coykendall, also an '89 ~~er~~, a daughter of Captain John R. Coykendall, captain of Co. G, Eleventh Illinois Volunteer Cavalry.

We are the proud parents of three fine sons, Kirk, Roderick and Gordon.

At the present time I own my father's homestead.