

REYNOLDS, JOHN M.

INTERVIEW

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Mary J. Stodton,  
Interviewer,  
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WHEN CATOOSA WAS "WILD AND WOOLY"  
LONG BEFORE STATEHOOD.

John M. (Pap) Reynolds, is a pioneer citizen and friend of the hunters and fishermen of the Catoosa neighborhood, in the southwestern portion of Rogers County. While Mr. Reynolds, who is now past eighty, declines to discuss, at length, incidents in his early life, or boyhood days he talks freely on things that occurred in the early days of Catoosa, where he has resided for more than half a century; his advent into that section being simultaneous with that of the Frisco Railroad.

He came to work on the bridge then being constructed across the Verdigris River, two or three miles northeast of Catoosa and camped on the east bank of the river, opposite the mouth of Spunky Creek. The scenery was new and strange to him and while he lay on his pillow, gazing up into the skies, lo and behold, a shot rang out. A murder had been committed, a murder that is, even yet, unsolved.

Mr. Reynolds worked for the construction company until the bridge was completed and trains ran into what later became the town of Catoosa. Then, at the solicitation of parties connected with construction work, he and his

wife, who is long since dead, opened an "eating house", which soon became very popular. It was not only popular with men employed on the works, but with officials of the Frisco and cattlemen who flocked to Catoosa after stock yards and loading pen were opened. He says all cattle shipped to St. Louis markets from the Creek Nation, and all that part of the Indian Territory to the south and west, even parts of Texas were driven to Catoosa for loading onto cattle trains. When their work of loading was completed they usually "went on a spree" before returning to the range, and "shooting up the town" was a feature on the program seldom neglected.

Mr. Reynolds tells interesting stories about Indians, cattlemen and outlaws common to that period, but delights in referring to his "eating house" and the way in which meat was supplied. The principal meat was fish and the flesh of deer, turkey and other wild game which were killed or captured by himself.

Although well along in years and still very active he has practically retired, making his home with his son-in-law and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Bill Conley, and having lots of fun playing with their twin daughters. He delights in going fishing in the Verdigris River, the lakes

near by, or Bird and Spunky Creeks, in close proximity.

In the eighties and nineties, when the Frisco only ran as far as Tulsa, and later to Sapulpa, Catoosa was the largest of the three towns and was known far and near as a hunter's and fisherman's paradise. Railway officials and their friends from Saint Louis often visited that place for recreation, outing and adventure, and "Pap" Reynolds was always called, and could be depended upon, to show them the best hunting grounds and fishing holes and actually kill the game or catch the fish, in the event they were not "lucky". He is still regarded as one of the best fisherman in the entire country.

He says tradition pointed the fact that the James and Younger boys, Missouri outlaws, had a rendezvous near the Verdigris River, on the west bank, and a few miles northeast of Catoosa, where they had hidden their treasures, taken in various holdups. About twenty years ago, he says, parties came from Kansas City with what purported to be a map showing the hiding places. His familiarity with the country enabled him to lead them to the place described in the map and to actually locate a tree near a large boulder, under, or near, which treasures were supposed to have been hidden. At their request he went

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back to Catoosa, with instructions to return with food and other supplies in three days, should they not show up at Catoosa. When he returned with the supplies he found where several holes had been dug, some of them filled up and others left open, but no treasure hunters were to be found. They had vanished, as he puts it, into thin air; but a few days later he received a sealed envelope through the mails containing a substantial amount of paper money. This, he supposed, was his reward for what he had done for them and he has long wondered if they actually found anything of value. Other searchers have probed the community since then but so far as he was ever able to learn, found nothing.

According to Mr. Reynolds many well known outlaws, the James, Younger, Doolin, Cochran, Jennings and Starr gangs, had friends and hiding places in, and near Catoosa. Several serious shooting scrapes occurred in Catoosa in the older days, and several murders having been committed. He remembers distinctly, the killing of Sheriff Jim Musgrove, of Cooweescoowee District, Cherokee Nation, by "Frog" Davis. Davis was a full-blood Cherokee and friend of Musgrove, who was wanted by Federal authorities, who were unable to apprehend him. Davis was in hiding on

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Bird Creek, a short distance away, which fact was well known to Sheriff Musgrove, who had known Davis for a

long time, in fact, they had been good friends. He was

not wanted by the state, although of course neither Musgrove

had no intention of arresting him, but he was wanted by

Federal authorities to contact "Pro" Davis, and it

was possible to do this at Bird Creek. The sheriff was

not too sure of the sheriff's ability to do this, but he

gave the deputy a check on the sheriff's ability to do this

at Fort Smith. Musgrove started to go to Bird Creek,

both in the interest of the order of the state and

of security. He started to go to Bird Creek, but he

started to go to Bird Creek for this purpose. He said

that he was of the opinion that the sheriff would not

deserve to see him, but he was not sure of the facts.

To this Musgrove said he had a few more things to say

understand and would at least "talk things over." Accord-

ingly, the sheriff told him that he was not going to

who was a close friend of Davis, succeeded in getting

where he was staying, in the morning of the day of Bird

Creek. Instead of coming, or at least receiving his

friends who came with him, he was told that Davis had

alarmed and poured a volley of shots out of a window of the

cabin. Musgrove was killed and Flipping barely escaped with his life. The entire police force of the Cherokee Nation then took a hand and in due time Davis was captured. He was first tried, and convicted, in the district court at Claremore; the case was reviewed and judgment sustained by the Supreme Court of the Nation, at Tallahassee, where he was later hanged. All this occurred between 1893 and 1896.

When Oklahoma became a state and the county seat was located at Claremore and oil was developed near Tulsa and other railroads came in these towns grew into thriving cities, while Catoosa degenerated into a small country town, still of considerable importance as a community center, but passing of outlawry and the cattle industry deprived the picturesque little town of its importance and grandeur. "Pap" Reynolds still insists that it is the "best town in the world", regardless.