

RIDINGS, SAM P. INTERVIEW

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

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Field Worker's name Elizabeth L. DuncanThis report made on (date) January 14 19381. Name Sam P. Ridings2. Post Office Address Medford, Oklahoma3. Residence address (or location) Medford, Oklahoma4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month December Day 1st Year 18685. Place of birth Highland County, Ohio.6. Name of Father C. C. Ridings Place of birth Highland County, OhioOther information about father Served from 1861 to 1865 in the Union Army. Family came from Virginia.7. Name of Mother Elizabeth Myers Place of birth Highland County, Ohio.Other information about mother Family came from Pennsylvania.

Notes or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and story of the person interviewed. Refer to Manual for suggested subjects and questions. Continue on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 9.

Elizabeth L. Duncan  
Journalist  
January 14, 1938

Interview with Sam P. Ridings  
Medford, Oklahoma.

I was born in Highland County, Ohio, near the city of Hillsboro, on the first day of December, 1868. There were but two children in our family, a sister who was younger, and I.

When I was a very small boy my parents left that country and emigrated to the extreme Western frontier. They made the last part of this journey in a covered wagon. I was so young that this trip was, to me, rather uneventful. There was but one outstanding circumstance which made a vivid and lasting impression on my mind. That circumstance was: That we had not progressed far when I lost my hat and was compelled to make the remaining portion of the journey bareheaded. This was the beginning and my initiation into the frontier life which I was to see much of, and which was really to claim me during most of the fifteen years ensuing.

We first landed, in the Fall of the year, in Barton County, Kansas, stopping some nine miles north of Great Bend

and remained there until the following February. This was truly a frontier settlement at that time. Our principal food supply, during the time that we lived there, was rabbits trapped on Blood Creek. In the coming February, we moved to the extreme southern portion of Kansas, settling near the line of the Indian Territory, east of Caldwell, in Sumner County.

The country to which we removed and in which we permanently settled, was only partly taken up at that time. During the remaining portion of that winter, and for some time to come one of our principal articles of food supply was jerked buffalo meat which was hauled in from the plains country and sold to the settlers.

In these primitive surroundings my boyhood days were spent. At that time the buffalo had just left the plains abandoning their paths and trails which stretched across the prairies as far as the eye could see. They had also left many and extensive buffalo wallows, barren of grass. These buffalo wallows were depressions or holes dug in the ground by the buffalo. They dug up the sod with their short stout horns and threw the dirt over their backs with their hoofs. This dirt settled in their hair keeping the flies from biting them and this

process also left holes in which the water would settle when it rained and the buffalo could then wallow in this water and mud, making the depressions deeper. The long hair on the front of their heads became so packed with soil and caked so hard that a pistol ball would not penetrate it. These buffalo had also left as an evidence of their annihilation unending patches of white bones over the prairies, each showing where one of these monarchs of the plains had been slaughtered. When the grass was burned in the springtime these numerous white patches could be seen as far as the vision extended.

There were but few schools in the country at that time and these few had but very short terms of school each year. Thus, attending school did not seriously interfere with or molest boys in their communion with Nature and the study of Nature's laws.

During these few years my time was taken up assisting on the farm and caring for the family cows which grazed on the surrounding open and unoccupied country. These cows became more numerous as the years increased; but they did not increase as fast as the aspirations and ambitions of

the boys who guarded them. These boys were ever inquisitive to explore and investigate the wide and expansive portions of the world lying beyond the western horizon, and there were but few of them who had the spirit and audacity to face this Western World, who did not investigate and enter this portion of the country. These were the happiest days of my life. They were days which were filled with excitement and new experiences. I have often realized how well the portions of a song, current on the frontier at that time, applied to my life. This portion of this song runs as follows:

"I have crossed the Rocky Mountains

And seen the Indian wild;

And chased the deer all through the brakes,

When I was but a child".

During this portion of my life I traveled over and learned to know much of the West. What I learned during this period I value as highly as any other portion of my education. It would be impossible to even touch on this experience for the reason that it would be unending. These days have passed into history and much of it is set out in my recently published book, "The Chisholm Trail".

I have always lamented that I was not born fifteen or twenty years earlier. If that had been the case, the wild place of the frontier or beyond the frontier would have claimed me for all time. Even then, however, I could see the breaking up and final dissolution of the frontier and plains. In an attempt to keep abreast with the progress of time and the course of the World, in the Fall of 1886, I started to school. This I did with an attempt to retrieve at least a portion of my lost opportunities to gain an education. The next six years saw a rapid improvement and advancement in this regard. The summer seasons, however, being vacation time, I spent in my old haunts in the surroundings that I loved and with my old associates, whose association I cherished more than any other. They always welcomed me back to their ranks. They were the most trustworthy friends of my life. In the stability of friendship and trustworthiness as well as in patriotism the World has sadly retrograded instead of advancing. I continued my studies and just prior to the opening of the Cherokee Strip or Outlet to settlement in 1893, I graduated from the University of Kansas.

At the time of the opening of this country for settlement, I took a claim adjacent to the town of Jefferson, then the station of Pond Creek and the site of the Old Pond Creek Ranch. I had frequented this country in my travels over the plains. I was among the first elected county attorneys of Grant County. I took part in the Railway Wars and County Seat fights in this vicinity. I have practiced law in this county continuously from the time of the opening of the same to settlement up to the present time with the exception of two years during which time I resided in and practiced in the State of Washington. I am a member of the Old Time Cherokee Strip Cow Punchers Association, a life member of the Oklahoma State Historical Society, I am a Thirty Second Degree Mason, and belong to many other fraternal organizations.

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My main object now is to see that the history and memory of the Old Frontier is preserved to posterity and the history of these times properly recorded for the use of the generations that come after us.

The records of the appellate courts of this and other states will stand as long as these reports are read as evidence of my work for over forty five years as a member of the bar of these states and as a practitioner in these



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jurisdictions. Perhaps in the future, the greatest appreciated service of my life will be my recently published book, "The Chisholm Trail". This will not be on account of any superior merit in a literary way, but from the fact that it will be accepted as the words and reminiscences coming direct from one of the actors in the days and years of the last of the Old Frontier. Men can no more write correctly of the life and history of any people or period from information than an artist can paint a picture from description without seeing the subject. They may think it is correct but the ones who know, know it is not. Generations which follow us will realize this fact and the words recorded by these actors, themselves, will increase in importance as the years advance and when all of these actors have ridden over the Western divide to the "Last Roundup".

Much of this history has been distorted and much damage has been done to the same by unreliable fiction. Some of this is set forth in elegant language and from a literary point of view is entitled to much credit, but from a historical point of view it is more than worthless and should not be accepted as authentic history and should not be tolerated without the criticism which it merits.

Like most men of the Old West, I hesitate when it comes to writing of myself and of my own doings. I would much prefer that others would do this portion of the writing, the principal reason being, that my opinions might not coincide with the ideas and opinions of others and if such should be the case with any one, that one would perhaps think I was egotistical. In fact, I will not do such writing. I have been criticised from the fact that in *The Chisholm Trail* I have told nothing of myself. Whatever people know of me, they will get from others and if it is not correct I will not be the cause. Having a little bearing on the years of my activity, I will, however, quote a portion of an article appearing in the *Cherokee Messenger* of February 16, 1937. This article is written in reference to my book *The Chisholm Trail*, heretofore referred to, and the portion I desire to quote reads as follows:

"Sam P. Ridings was well qualified to write such a book, having had personal knowledge and experience in the things of which he has written. The first time the writer saw the pioneer barrister, he was arrayed in high heeled boots, broad-brimmed hat, long-tailed coat, and wearing

long flowing black hair. He resembled General Custer, or the pictures we have seen of the general. He looked, too, like that lovable pioneer character, Scott Cummins, hailed as the pilgrim bard of northwestern Oklahoma".