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BRANDON, BEN

INTERVIEW

#7646

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Interviewer, Gomer Gower,  
September 27, 1937.

Interview with Ben Randon,  
Poteau, Oklahoma.

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Born August 30, 1842, at Linn Creek, Missouri,  
Mr. Randon is ninety-five years of age at this time.

He came to the Indian Territory with his parents in  
1853 and soon thereafter went to Texas, where he remained  
until 1873 and then returned to the Indian Territory and  
secured work on the William Washington ranch, in what was  
known as the lease district in the Comanche and Kiowa  
reservations. Then, after the cancellation of leases he  
worked on the Marietta ranch in the Chickasaw Nation.

He relates that while he was employed as a foreman  
on the Washington Ranch in the Comanche country, the Indians  
were at all times complaining that they were not receiving  
enough beef from the Indian Agency and would beg him for  
permission to kill a yearling or two from time to time.  
Permission to do this would usually be granted.

For some reason or other the Indians preferred to  
catch the animal designated themselves and spurned all

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offers of the cow-punchers to rope it for them. It was noticeable that they would keep the animal running until it became very worn before it was caught. Then an agile fellow would dexterously grab it by the tail and through the proper maneuvering would soon throw the animal on its side and slit its jugular vein and then the skinning would begin. Before this was finished the leader would remove the entrails and would take for his part of the coming feast, the paunch while others would seize upon other parts and these would be eaten raw and without having been washed. The only pretense at removing the contents would be to slip the entrails through the fingers. In this form and without being cooked these parts of a slaughtered yearling were regarded as being most delectable.

In the Comanche country, ranch le sees would pay individual Indians what was called "grass money" which meant that a certain amount per head would be paid to the chiefs, of which there were quite a number. When paid this grass money, the chiefs would generally use it in efforts to beguile squaws younger and more comely than

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those who already constituted their harea. On one such occasion, one of the slighted squaws undertook to pull the hair of a younger woman upon whom the Indian chief was squandering the much-prized grass money. This hair-pulling continued until the Indian agent was called upon to put an end to it, which he did by the use of a spray of something which Mr. Brandon thinks was ether. This incident occurred near what is now Anadarko.

On another occasion a party of about thirty Indians, including some women, had eluded the watchfulness of the troops which had been detailed to keep them on the reservation and were seen by some ranch hands making their way across the country. This party was soon followed by a much smaller number of soldiers, about fifteen, who stopped at the ranch to inquire if the escaping Indians had been seen in that vicinity. The soldiers were informed that such a band of Indians had been passing near the ranch on the preceding day. The foreman of the ranch permitted nine of the cowboys to accompany the soldiers in their quest of the runaway Indians and provided the soldiers with fresh

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mounts as the horses which they had ridden hard for three days were exhausted and unable to continue the chase.

This mixed party of cowboys and soldiers came upon the object of their search very late the same day and found that the Indians had put up their tepees near the center of a rise from which the approaches from all directions could be seen. The pursuing group, realizing that night was near and that the Indians would again escape under the cover of darkness unless they were captured at once surrounded the hill and called upon the Indians to quietly give up and return to the reservation.

The Indians, instead, scattered in all directions, hoping thereby to escape through the widely flung circle of some twenty-five of their pursuers. Mr. Brandon and a companion occupied a small depression where they could not be seen except at very close range. A fleeing brave soon came running down the hill in their direction and when quite near to them, attempted to jump over them and make his escape. One of the two hidden men fired just as he was going over their heads. Cowboys in those days usually hit the mark.

Soon afterwards a squaw who had witnessed the unerring aim of the cowboy approached and sought to show by exposing her breasts that she was a squaw and therefore should not be shot. However, in her eagerness to expose evidences of sex, she also disclosed some scalps dangling from her waist. She met the same fate as the brave whose death she had witnessed. Not one of the band of Indians escaped and those who survived the battle were returned to the reservation.

Cattle thieves were extremely active in western Oklahoma at that time. Mr. Brandon relates that Tom Franklin, a well-to-do negro whose home was on Wild Horse Creek in the Chickasaw Nation, had three hundred head of cattle stolen by another negro called Caesar and driven across the South Canadian River at Calvin into the Creek Nation, where they were found in a pasture which had been especially designed for the purpose of hiding stolen stock. The outer fence of this immense pasture enclosed a smaller pasture fenced near its center. Stolen stock would be placed within this inner pasture where it could not be seen and recognized from the outside of the larger pasture. In some way, Franklin was informed of the whereabouts of his stolen cattle.

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He provided himself with a force of men sufficient in number to cope with the number of men usually employed by Caesar and approached Caesar's home, a large white house.

Caesar was at home and Franklin quickly told him that he wanted his cattle. He was told by Caesar that the gates were all locked and that he would go into the house and get the keys. At this, Franklin drew his sixshooter and ordered Caesar to tell his wife to bring the keys. This was done and while Caesar was guarded by one of Franklin's men, the cattle were rounded up and driven out of the pastures and put on the trail for home. Mr. Brandon does not recall just what punishment, if any, was imposed upon Caesar.

Mr. Brandon also relates an occurrence in which a whole train-load of beef cattle was stolen from Bill Morris, who ranched in Texas and the Indian Territory, and whose brand was open A S A, in range vernacular means that the A is made without the horizontal bar. The thieves in this case had "cold-ironed" the cattle and changed the brand to A S A, so it was charged, and were apprehended while attempting to sell the cattle at Kansas City. This occurred soon after the Cattlemen's Protective Association was formed.



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Morris and some of his men, including Brandon, had just arrived at the stockyards with a train-load of cattle and called the attention of the inspector for the Association to the seemingly changed or altered brand. A very lively argument was had over the affair.

The inspector finally proposed that he would select two men to examine the brand and that their decision upon the matter of whether or not the original brand had been altered would be taken as final and binding upon the contestants.

A man in the employ of Mill Morris, though this fact was not known to the inspector, and Mr. Brandon were selected to make the examination of the brand. These two men, after roping and tying one of the animals, quickly agreed that the brand had been altered and that the original brand had been that of Mill Morris - on A S A, whereupon the inspector ordered the cattle held until their ownership could be established in the courts.

On the following day, the inspector met the two men whom he had selected to examine the brands on the streets and explained to them that both he and the men accused of

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altering the brand were unaware that they were in the employ of the man who made the charge that the brand had been "cold ironed."

When the matter of the ownership of the cattle was taken into the courts, it was found that the brand N S N was the legitimate brand of Matt and Nellis Wolf, who had been accused of altering the brand A S A, and they were declared to be the legitimate owners.