

EWING, BILL
FORMAN, GEORGE

INTERVIEW.

#4463

430

INDEX CARDS

Open Range
No Man's Land
Ranching
Blizzard

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

431

#4463

Field worker's name Carl H. Mayfield

This report made on (date) June 17th 1937

1. This legend was secured from (name) Bill Ewing and George Forman
Address Guymon, Oklahoma

This person is (male or female) ~~female~~ White, ~~black~~, ~~mixed~~

If Indian, give tribe _____

2. Origin and history of legend or story The Big Blizzard of Feb. 24th, 1903, as told by the above mentioned and several others I have heard talk about it at various times.

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

Interview with Bill Ewing and George Forman
By - Carl H. Mayfield, Field Worker.

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June 17th, 1937.

THE BIG BLIZZARD OF 1903.

The open range in the Cherokee outlet was passing out with the turn of the century in 1900. Big ranches were being replaced by smaller ones. Instead of numbering their herds by thousands as before 1900, newcomers with a few hundred cattle were invading the open range in large numbers. Some had fenced large tracts of grass land to provide winter pasture after the cattle were gathered in the fall. Others thought by fencing they could hold the land against the nesters that would invade the country later.

One of the largest ranches in No Man's Land in the early days was owned by McQuillian, and known as the Ox. They claimed all the range drained by Pony Creek, as far west on the Beaver as the Anchor Dee, the Frisco Creek on the Texas line east until it emptied into the Coldwater, land drained by the Coldwater, Hackberry Creek, and the Palo Duro River from the Texas line to the Beaver River. In the late 90's small ranchers began moving their herds from Kansas and the Cherokee Strip in search of grass. The valley of the Beaver River from Beaver City west to

old Optimism seemed to appeal to most of them. The Goldwater received its share of newcomers. Many of them were making their last effort to locate a permanent home, some their first effort to establish a ranch somewhere. They all prospered with a marked degree of success until February 24, 1903.

In a recent interview with Bill Ewing, who located on the Palo Duro in 1887, the winter of 1902 -03 was mild and open until February. Cattle were in good condition and the small ranchers were eagerly looking forward to an early spring.

The worst snow storm in the history of No Man's Land came unexpectedly the night of February 24. It snowed for three days and nights. Mr. Ewing said it was the wettest and heaviest and most compact snow he ever saw, and it averaged thirty-six inches on the level. Later in the week a light rain fell, followed by a freeze. Two days later one could travel for miles on the frozen snow. George Fohman said the snow covered the ground until the latter part of April as far south as the Canadian River in the Texas Panhandle.

Cattle died by the thousands and piled up in great numbers in canyons. They started to drift when the storm struck, and usually walked over a bluff, as many as a hundred at a

time. Some of them were found in the summer roundups seventy-five to one hundred miles from the home range.

One man bought fifty-four head of young cows in the fall of 1902. When the grass made its appearance the next spring, he had only two head left. Many small cowmen were forced out of business; most of them lost their entire herd. Mr. Forman stated he has seen carcasses from the Canadian River to the Kansas line in great numbers two and three years later.

In the spring of 1903, cattle were shipped to the Flint Hills and other points in Kansas and the Cherokee Strip. Most of them were in very poor condition. The Anchor Dee ranch shipped out 165 cars, a total of 5,500 head of steers to the Flint Hills of Kansas. Many a life's saving invested in what was thought to be a wise investment, many a cherished dream of those making a humble start in a new land as well as those realizing that the day of the open range was soon to be a tale of yesterday were forced to go somewhere else or manage some way for a new start because of the Big Blizzard of February 24, 1903.