

JONES, W. FRANK.

INTERVIEW.

7434.

Effie S. Jackson, Interviewer.

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Interview with W. Frank Jones  
225 $\frac{1}{2}$  N. Rosedale, Tulsa.  
Deputy U. S. Marshal 1897-1917

#### Early Railroad Development.

Since I first entered Oklahoma as a boy eight years old, I have been interested in watching railroad development in the Indian Territory. After the first spurt of activity there was a period of almost twenty years of slow development, then came the rush years from 1895 to 1906. Those were my most active years as the "law" was used constantly to keep order and protect money shipments over new lines. As a United States Deputy I found my duty was often that of a train guard.

In 1878 my parents, brother and an uncle, Nelson Jones, and his wife, left Fayetteville, Arkansas, for Texas. My father was a farmer and felt that Texas held a better opportunity for him. ~~We had our covered~~ wagons, mule teams, and such household possessions as bedding and cooking utensils. It is easy to remember

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the towns we passed through on our way to Texas through the Indian Territory. They were so few and far apart. From Fayetteville to Grand Prairie in Arkansas we struck a wagon road southwest into the territory. The first town was Tahlequah. This was rough, hilly country. I remember the springs at Tahlequah. It was just a small town, and was the Cherokee Capital. The Council House was where the court house is now. It seems to me there were not more than three hundred people there, most of whom Cherokees. They were progressive, like the white people. We came on through Ft. Gibson which was an old abandoned fort and cemetery at that time with just a keeper for the cemetery, then to Muskogee where we intercepted the Katy Railroad running southwest. It was a town of possibly eight or nine hundred population with prairie all around it. We followed the Katy from there on. I understand every alternate section was given to the railroad by the government. On these the railroad placed a switch

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and section house so there were far more switches, all named, than there were towns. Later on in the history of town development many of these switches became towns. During allotment of lands the railroad only retained one hundred and eighty feet on each side of the switch, and not a whole section.

Out from Muskogee we first struck Summit Switch, Oktaha (switch and section house), then Checotah. About all there was to Checotah in those days was a large stockyard with unloading pens. Cattle were shipped to that point and unloaded to go to pasture to be fattened. In fact, the gate to large grazing grounds was right at the railroad. There were not more than twenty-five or thirty houses there at that time. W. E. Gentry and Lerbance had a general store and there was also a post office. I remember the home of Amos McIntire, a full-blood Creek. On south by Onapa was another switch, and then open prairie, pastures, no houses. Next Cathey

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switch, then Eufaula with probably two or three hundred people. Eufaula was a trading point for the Indians between the two Canadian rivers.

There was coal mining at Canadian and Reams close to McAlester. Most of the miners were Pollocks and Italians. I have heard J. J. McAlester tell how he founded this town at the cross roads. He was a full-blood Choctaw Indian. He became a United States Marshal in 1894. From McAlester we went down the Katy Railroad to Stringtown. This was as far as the Katy extended at that time, though they were surveying on through to Denison.

We went by wagon road to Denison. It cost a dollar a wagon to cross the Red River on the ferry.

The Atlantic and Pacific Railroad, later the Frisco, came from the Monett Branch to Vinita and in 1882 to Tulsa, finally crossing the Arkansas River including Red Fork, then on to Sapulpa about 1893. Sapulpa was the

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terminus for sometime before the extension into Oklahoma City. About 1904-'05 came the branch extension from Sapulpa to Okmulgee. This gave Sapulpa railroad prestige. It was then built to Henryetta. Okmulgee was an old town and had the Creek Council House. The railroad went through the allotment of Hugh Henry who laid off the town site of Henryetta. The coal industry development aided its growth. Grading on beyond Henryetta at Coal Creek Crossing the Frisco met a snag. An Indian opposed right of way on his land. This was the first opposition I know of that was met by the Frisco. He chopped down trees and threw up sort of a primitive bulwark. The railroad officials complained to the Creek Agency at Muskogee. The Agency sent their Lighthorsemen, and United States Marshal, Leo E. Bennett sent Ledbetter, John O'Brien and me to Coal Creek. We arrested the Indian for interference and the Indian Police took him to Muskogee. Then the Lighthorsemen returned and

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protected the railroad until the survey was completed. After that the Indian was released and no further trouble ensued. This set sort of a precedent for procedure for other Indians who might have opposed the railroad. The railroad went from Henryetta to Weleeka, <sup>to</sup> ~~Netumka~~, an old Indian trading place, and then to Holdenville.

The Rock Island had already made Holdenville, which became a town site in 1897, then to Sasakwa. (This was where John Brown, Chief of the Seminoles lived. I had headquarters in his home at different times during lawless periods in that vicinity.) From Sasakwa the road was built to Allen, a new town site, and to Ada, an old Choctaw town, then to Denison, Texas. This was quite an important connection from Sapulpa, from which this line branched.

In 1897, when the Rock Island extended from McAlester to Holdenville, the town was laid off and construction begun in advance of the railroad. This line

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went on to Wewoka. I was under U. S. Marshal Rutherford at that time and was sent to Sasakwa, near Wewoka, to keep order. I had my headquarters at the home of John Brown, Chief of the Seminoles. Most of the workers on the railroads were negroes and Mexicans. There was a great deal of drinking and gambling. From Wewoka the line went to Seminole, on to Shawnee, an old Indian trading post, then to its terminal at Oklahoma City.

I remember when there was a huge payment to be made to the Seminole Indians at Wewoka. The Indians would accept payment in silver. This silver was sacked and put on a freight car. The car was loaded with sacks. I was placed in charge at McAlester to guard it to Wewoka where payment was made. The Indian Light Horsemen were also on guard. John Brown, Chief of the Seminoles, and his brother, had the only store in Wewoka. They had extended credit to the Indians during the years they had

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been waiting for their payment so that the Indians only saw the money long enough to turn it <sup>over</sup> to the Browns. They in turn banked it as soon as possible in Muskogee and McAlester. Silver money was a nuisance.

I was always a very welcome passenger on the Ft. Smith and Western Railroad. It came through from Ft. Smith about 1898 to the first new town site of Heavener Stigler, an old town; Crowder, which was formerly a water pump station on the Katy, Indianola, a new town-site Hanna, a new town site <sup>thence to and</sup> Dustin, <sup>^</sup> Okemah and on to Oklahoma City.

Another branch road I recall was the one on the Katy beginning at Wybark switch, five miles north of Muskogee, about 1904 or '05. It went northwest to Tallahassee, an old Indian Mission location, Porter, Coweta, an old town, Broken Arrow, new location from the old one farther west, Alsuma to Tulsa. From Tulsa it went on to Osage Junction to join another Katy branch which came



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down from Parsons, Kansas, by Bartlesville. It missed Pawhuska by a few miles, but ran through Hominy to Osage, Cleveland, and Oklahoma City. The nearest point the Katy came to Pawhuska was Nelagoney, from there a trolley car with a gasoline motor took passengers to and from Pawhuska.

About 1910 the Midland Valley built from Ft. Smith to Stigler, Wagoner, Muskogee, Haskell, Bixby, Tulsa, Pawhuska, and on to Wichita, Kansas.

These are only a few of the early day railroads, but they are the ones in northeastern Oklahoma with whose construction and development I was associated as a guard and peace officer.