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BEWLEY, L. A. SECOND INTERVIEW

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Effie S. Jackson,
Journalist,
January 24, 1938.

An Interview with L. A. Bewley,
10 North Main Street,
Tulsa, Oklahoma.

My father, M. N. Bewley, was born in Meade County, Kentucky, in 1848; he was a merchant. He heard later of the free land (homesteader's rights) gained in the 1889 and 1893 "Runs", so he decided to make the next Opening, Kiowa-Comanche. We left on a home-seekers' train. I was fourteen but I remember every detail of my trip "to the West". My uncle came with us; altogether there were seven in our party. El Reno had become a tent city, the center of registration, so my father decided to bring the family to Tulsa to live, then the men could go and make their registration. If unsuccessful in registering the family would be located anyway.

We rented a house at 2nd and Detroit in what is the heart of Tulsa today. My father was not successful in the land drawings (1901) and returned to Tulsa to make a living. He leased eighty acres for cotton production. Since we were from the south it seemed the natural thing

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to do. Our eighty acres adjoined Tulsa on the north. Our western line ran north a mile along the Osage line, our southern line was the Creek line. There we were with eighty acres right in the southwest corner of the Cherokee Nation, occupying what is today a main part of our north-side residence district. It has made a nice residence district, but it also made a nice cotton farm back in 1900.

I remember the passing of the last large herd of Texas cattle, fifteen thousand head, right through the center of town. The people did not seem the least bit excited but I certainly was, for it seemed to me the cattle had taken possession of the town. I followed them to the river. That is a sight I shall never forget-- those thousands of cattle swimming the river.

I went to school in the little white two-story frame building at what is today Fourth and Boston. There were four rooms and classes to the eighth grade. Later, my father went into the mercantile business at Owasso, about fifteen miles northeast of Tulsa. You could go by mail-hack, north seven miles to Turley, then northeast

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about eight miles. The bad thing about it was fording Bird Creek.

When I was fifteen years old I went to work for Bob Thornton on the X Bar Ranch in the Osage Nation, just north of Tulsa. After a year on the ranch, and a happy year at that, I went to work for Bob Lynch. He had a sort of a general grocery store and market. One experience during this time stays with me. The Delaware Indians held their annual stomp dance at their "buskin grounds" near where Sperry is today, about twelve miles north of Tulsa. The Indians had plenty of spending money in those days, receiving Government payments for their surrendered land in Kansas. They had cultivated a taste for white man's luxuries. So Bob sent me up with a wagon load of "stuff" to sell. He had a Delaware Indian who was sort of a guide to bring his wagon and we filled it with cans of beans, hams, bologna, plenty of tobacco, etc. We covered it with a tarpaulin. We made our way over the hills through Turley then around the hill to an Indian's house on Delaware Creek, where we were to spend the night. This Indian had a very nice house but it seemed strange to me that the family ate and

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slept outdoors. I got one small of the meat they were cooking and knew, hungry as I was, I would have to hunt food elsewhere. I had noticed on my way up some threshers and had recognized Charles Price, later Tulsa sheriff. I borrowed a pony from the Indian with a promise to be back at daybreak ready to take our load to the "stomp grounds". A good meal and rest at the Price's and daylight found me ready to depart to the "stomp grounds".

This "buskin' ground" was up on Bird Creek. The Delawares came with their covered wagons and other conveyances, brought camping outfits, even wigwams with them and thus housed themselves for a week's stay of feasting and dancing. The "buskin' ground" was sort of like a tennis court, only much larger. Logs on supports were arranged around it to be used for seating purposes. A huge fire burned in the center. Around the fire the Delawares danced madly. It was the Fall of the year and warm but they made their fire all the hotter and danced all the harder. The bucks wore only breech-clouts and the squaws were bedecked in all their finery with clanking shells fastened to their ankles.

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With the aid of the Delaware who brought me, I put up a sort of a stand at one end of the ground. I put my wares on display. Business was good, I believe the week's receipts were over \$1500.00. Each night a man from Bob Lynch's store drove his buckboard back to Tulsa, taking the daily receipts and bringing back supplies. The commodity in most demand was "Star tobacco". I remember toward the close of the week my supply was low. A little Indian came up and noticing there was not so very much left, bought all the tobacco I had. He had me cut it up in rather small pieces and pack it on his arm. Then, when the Indians found there was no more tobacco (until the next day) the fight started. Now those Indians loved to fight, especially if they had had a little "fire water". At least, they taught that Indian that he could not have "a corner on tobacco". It seemed to me that that was all they cared to do--eat, dance, and fight. It was the white man with his "booze" who changed the religious Indian dances of old into orgies. There was an element among the Indians who seemed to resent this intrusion. I recall that they seized the worst offenders among the Indians and tied them to trees, keeping them tied; even sometimes

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whipping them. This was especially so in the case of "Spec" Childers, a full blood. I didn't know an Indian war whoop could be as blood-curdling as he made it. They had to keep him roped up most of the time.

Most of the Indians received their money in silver, they were suspicious of paper money. I remember one old buck got some tobacco the first day I was there, he gave me a \$10.00 bill and walked off without waiting for the change. I often saw him during the rest of the week but he "paid me no mind". I didn't know what to do about it; he might resent it or not understand if I offered him the change. So I decided to play safe, I always kept that bill tucked carefully under my cigar box of change so that I could show it to him and give him his change should he ask for it. On the last day of the camp, up the old buck came, put out his hands with a grunt, I was glad to put the money in them. He had remembered all the time, but just didn't want to bother with money. It was well for me that I kept his money handy. The Indians knew what "two-bits"--"four-bits"--and "six-bits" were, that was their only way of reckoning. It was best to try to have merchandise to sell

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for those sums. If the article came to less than a quarter an Indian did not seem to know what to do with the smaller change.

I attended the last Stomp Dance held at the Creek "buskin' ground", 18th and Cheyenne today, where the old Creek Council tree is. Their dances gradually gave way to the Creek fair and races held at the fairgrounds and race track about where Guthrie and Archer Streets are today. Those horse races were great sport for whites as well as Indians.

The big time was when a circus was coming to town, we had one of the "big ones" each year. I remember back in the early 1900's one of these "big fours" came to town. The Indians moved in en masse, camping near. Of course, you know the circus plan. All the side shows very spectacular and filled with "con" and "shell" games. They certainly "cleaned those Indians". When the time came to load the circus (it had its own train) the Indians mobbed the cars. They literally held up that train. The town officials had to go to the circus owners and make them refund sufficient money to the Indians to satisfy their claims.