

JONES, MDSLEY D.

SIXTH INTERVIEW

13403

86

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13403

Journalist, Effie S. Jackson,
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Interview with Emdsley D. Jones,
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Tulsa.

The Chisholm Trail was followed continuously for twenty-two years by cattlemen. I only knew it north from the Red Fork Ranch, now Dover, on the Cimarron, eighty-two miles to Caldwell, Kansas. As to the naming of Red Fork Ranch, it was natural for this ranch was located on the river called at that time, the Red Fork of the Arkansas, now called the Cimarron River. In the late '60's, after the Cheyenne had been subdued and Fort Reno was established, the early pathway of Jesse Chisholm became more marked and was soon followed by cattlemen as a trail.

According to the story told my father, the first man to locate on the trail was a fellow named Reynolds. He erected an old building on the Cimarron which was the beginning of a ranch house, about one-half mile

JONES, EMDSLEY D. SIXTH INTERVIEW.

13403

-2-

from where the trail turns north from the opening in the woods on the Cimarron; Reynolds called it Red Fork Ranch. In 1875 it passed into my father's hands, he, in turn, sold it to Ralph Collins in 1883, grand-nephew of Brinton Darlington, United States Commissioner to the Comanches, Kiowas, Cheyennes and Arapahoes. The first agency among them was named for him- Darlington. Ralph Collins had been an agency employee; from Ralph Collins the ranch passed into the control of John Chapin, "Old Chape," who dragged along with it until the opening in 1889 when it became the bustling little city of Dover.

As to the old Chisholm Trail and its twenty-two years of service, 1865-1887, at first a clearly marked path; it became more distinct with each succeeding year as thousands of hoofs passed over it. The cutting by the hoofs and action of the wind caused the path, even on the levels, to become a sunken road. The fords and river banks showed deep cuts, these cuts were often 100 yards wide, while the roadway on the levels was

JONES, EMDSLEY D. SIXTH INTERVIEW.

13403

-3-

marked deep over widths varying from one rod to three. There was a timber belt of "blackjack" for a distance of seventy miles up and down the Cimarron to the east and west of us, this made sheltered feeding grounds for winter.

Cimarron River.

The Reno road, which was the road over which the stage ran from Caldwell, Kansas, to Fort Reno, crossed the Cimarron River about two miles south of my father's ranch, Red Fork Ranch, which was a relay station for the stage line at a location a short distance west of the present site of the Rock Island Railroad bridge. The Cimarron is one of the treacherous rivers of the West; for months it would have little more in its bed than an ordinary brook, then within an hour it would be a raging torrent with many quicksand beds. My father kept a yoke of oxen at the ranch for no other purpose than to pull the stage out of the quicksand. Their short legs and big hoofs

JONES, EADSLEY, D. SIXTH INTERVIEW.

13403

-4-

along with their bellies, gave them an advantage over horses or mules when working in quicksand.

The Rock Island bridge was completed in 1901. Hundreds of homesteaders were moving their families from the state to their claims and at times when the river was high there would be hundreds of families camped on the south side waiting for the water to recede. One hit upon a plan, they would tie a long rope to a wagon and fifteen or twenty men would pull it across the Rock Island bridge which was 1900 feet long. They would send men each way from the bridge to ~~flag any train that might come along.~~ It was possible to get three wagons over the bridge but not so the horses as they could not walk the ties so it became the job of my brother and myself with some other boys to get the horses over. The river was 1900 feet, because as we neared the shore about 100 feet away the horses were able to touch bottom, but we still had a swift current to contend with. We would strip off all our clothing, take the horses up stream a short distance

JONES, EMSLEY D. SIXTH INTERVIEW. 13403

- 5

so as to allow for the drift down stream, get a rope around their neck to guide them with, the men would force the horse to enter the water and then we were on our own. We never encountered any trouble until we neared the shore, when we would reach the current and the quicksand. Sometimes our horses would flounder and we would fall off but we always held on to the rope, not for our own safety but to keep the horse in tow, we would get back on again and continue across the river. For this service we were paid ten cents a horse.

Indians and Their Habits and Customs.

If you asked an Indian for a chew of tobacco, he would first take one for himself and then hand it to you.

An Indian would mount and dismount his horse from the right side instead of the left as the whites would do.

When the Indian had dog for dinner the animal was never killed in the same manner as other animals,

JONES, EMDSLEY, D. SIXTH INTERVIEW.

13403

-6-

the squaw would just slip a noose around the dog's neck and hang him to a height so his legs would just touch the ground and then they would stand around and laugh until he strangled to death. Another favorite dish of the Indians was dry land turtle or land terrapin. The Indian girls would gather them on the prairie in sacks and bring them into camp, where a large fire was built and then they would empty the terrapins alive into this fire. The squaws would stand around with sticks in their hands and when a turtle would try to escape he was flipped back into the fire until he was cooked. In other words it was "A La Carte Terrapin in the Shell."

The Indian was quick to learn to play cards, but he never cheated and he would not make any comment whether he lost or won.

It was no uncommon sight to see an Indian standing on top of a hill for one or two hours at a time. I asked my father once what they were doing, and he said, "Son, I have been in the west for years and

JONES, EADSLEY D. SIXTH INTERVIEW. 13403

-7-

that is something I have been unable to learn. I have seen Indians do that many a time, stand for one or two hours, and the only thing I can figure is he is talking to his God, and Son; never disturb an Indian when you see him standing like that." I was taught to love the Indian although I do not have a drop of Indian blood in my veins.

The most pitiful scene I ever saw was after the Cheyenne and Arapaho Nation was opened to white settlement. Each Indian was allotted 160 acres of land. The deer, wild turkeys and prairie chickens were gone, also there were no antelope or fur bearing animals to trap; this all came to pass in less than a year. The poor Indians tried hard to plow and till their land with their little Indian pony that was never intended for such work, their plight was pitiful. The Cheyenne Indians were not allowed to leave their reservation without a passport from the Indian agent at Fort Reno, from eight to ten soldiers patrolled the trail from Fort Sill to the Kansas state line, and if an Indian

JONES, EMDLEY D. SIXTH INTERVIEW.

13403

-8-

was caught with no pass he was taken back to the reservation. Sometimes an old Indian would wish to wander along the trail and would not only secure his passport, but a letter from some white man telling of his past life, how he had saved a man's life or acted as a scout, in fact, it boosted the Indian to the sky. One day an old Indian came into our ranch and handed father his pass and letter which some one had written for him. The letter read something like this. "The old (not fit to print) has killed more white men than any other Indian in the west. Make him get to hell out of your camp. He has several thousand dollars in the bank - is too tight to spend it." When my father was reading it he had to stop and laugh. The poor Indian thought he was pleased with the recommendation and said pointing at himself, "Me heap good Indian." Father fed him and sent him on his way.

A few of the young Indians would go to the Chilocco school which was just across the Kansas line south of

JONES, EMDSLEY D. SIXTH INTERVIEW.

13403

-9-

Arkansas City. The only motive they had was a few months' free feed. When they would return to the reservation they would throw their hat, coat and shoes away and cut the seat from their pants and then would wrap a blanket around their loins.

The squaws would do the marketing at the ranch. The Indians earned the few dollars they had by selling furs and hides, they had to make every cent count. Here is a way my father discovered they made a dollar go farther. We had the old-fashioned scale that was balanced with weights. The squaws would often come into the store and purchase one or two dollars worth of sugar at a time but they would buy it in twenty-five cent lots. My father thought they were buying for several different Indians, until one day he was weighing out some sugar and he noticed he always gave the down weight which meant the Indian got a few ounces more sugar, so in buying a quarters worth at a time they would gain several ounces of sugar.