

MATNEY, JOHN H.

INTERVIEW

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Journalist, James R. Carselowey,  
April 14, 1938.

Interview with John H. Matney,  
Vinita, Oklahoma.

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Old Indian Days.

My name is John H. Matney. I live in the city of Vinita. I was born in Kansas on July 1, 1868. I first came to the Indian Territory in 1836. We had heard of the wonderful opportunities in the Territory and we rigged up three covered wagons and loaded our household goods and a few farming implements on them and headed for the Indian country. It took us fourteen days to make the trip from Kansas to Claremore where we first settled in the Dog Creek Hills, a few miles southeast of Claremore. On the way down we noticed a great difference in the Kansas roads, and the ones we traveled in the Territory. The Kansas roads were narrow and had some work done on them and people were just starting up hedge fences on each side of the road but when we struck the Territory, there were no lanes.

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It just looked like a wide open prairie with but few houses scattered along the way, and they were along the creeks and rivers.

#### Hedge Fences a "Jonah."

The early day Kansas farmer had been educated to the planting of hedge fences and began the practice back in the early 90's. They were told that they would not only break the force of the wind but at the same time would solve the post problem, which was quite a problem in the days when the large Kansas prairies were first being broken and fenced, and even today there is much fencing to be done. In those days the traffic was all done by horse and buggy.

One has but to make a trip up through Kansas now to see what a "Jonah" the hedge fence is to the modern traffic and highways. The roads are still narrow. I think thirty-three feet and the trees have grown out over the road until it is all that two automobiles can do to pass each other on those Kansas lanes. No longer than yesterday I saw a man who had just made a trip from Chetopa to Coffeyville on Kansas Highway 188, and he said they were so narrow that two cars

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could scarcely pass and that it was necessary for safe driving, that cars should slow down when they met.

Several years back, when automobiles first took over the traffic, the Kansas Legislature passed a law to cut out all the hedge fences but the farmers rose up in arms and fought the measure so hard that it was never enforced. The farmers told them that they were willing to cut out the corners at intersections, so that it would be possible for drivers to see around the corners but they would not give up their hedge fences.

Since the dust storms have appeared the past few years, the United States Government is urging the planting of trees throughout all the prairie countries in Oklahoma and it is being done but we have the advantage over the Kansas farmer as our highways are already laid out wide enough to take care of motor traffic while the Kansas farmer is still battling with the problem of wider roads.

Claremore's Population in 1886.

When we landed at Claremore in 1886 the population

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of that town was sixty people. The Atlantic & Pacific Railroad now called Frisco had just been built through that part of the country and came to an end at Sapulpa. Only one train each way was run, that is a passenger train. John Bullette, a Delaware Indian, was the first postmaster of Claremore. He had a little country store out in the Dog Creek Hills and moved it to town after the railroad passed through.

Joe Chambers, Senior, had also moved his store into town, and had turned his country postoffice which he called Ponlas over to John Bullette. Joe Chambers, Senior, was the first merchant of Claremore with John Bullette a close second. The name of the postoffice was changed to Claremore when it was moved in from the Dog Creek Hills where it had been in operation since about 1863. Other merchants who were there when I came were Frank Nicholson, a son-in-law of Jake Bartles, for whom the town of Bartlesville was named. Jake Bartles was the first merchant in Bartlesville. He owned a country store where the town of Bartlesville was located before the Katy Railroad came through, and a town was established. Jake brought in the first

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oil well in Oklahoma on his land near his store. Rosenthal & Lindsey and G. H. Harlow were two other merchants who had stores in Claremore when I came there. On my way down from Kansas the roads were very muddy and bad. After reaching the Territory we came down through Coody's Bluff and found a little country store and post office which was operated by a man of the name of Brown. Along the edge of the prairies we saw droves of deer, fifteen or twenty in a drove, and the prairie chickens were as thick as blackbirds.

#### Cattle Business Flourished.

The cattle business was flourishing in the Territory at the time I first came and there were many cattle ranches around Claremore. I remember seeing Sam S. Cobb of Vinita come through Claremore one day with several thousand head of Texas cattle which he had brought in from the west. Dock Demy was one of the early day cattlemen at Claremore and he hailed Cobb to buy some of the cattle. Cobb sold him his pick of a thousand head for \$20.00 a head.

#### Joe Queen-Outlaw Killed.

Times in the Indian Territory were a great deal wilder than I had been used to back in Kansas. There

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were plenty of good citizens here, but the outlaw element from all the adjoining states was using the undeveloped country for a hide-out. They would commit depredations across the line in other states and run across the line in the Territory and hide.

An outlaw of the name of Joe Queen had been stealing cattle and horses pretty freely in this part of the country and the sheriff, Ed Sanders, got a tip he was in the neighborhood where I was living. My brother and I were in Claremore one day, and when we returned home we found our yard full of men on saddle horses, every one of them armed to the teeth. We were both scared to run and also afraid to go on home, but as we had not committed any crime we decided to approach these men. When we got there we found that they had just agreed to meet there at our place and go from there to the place where the outlaw was in hiding.

They parleyed for quite a while as to the best method of finding out whether Queen and his gang were at the house where they had heard he was and finally a man of the name of W. R. Sullivan said he had a scheme.

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He would discard all of his firearms, put on an old slouch hat, leave his coat and take an old bridle on his shoulder and pretend to be hunting an "old grey mare." The ruse worked and he walked right up to the door and saw the two outlaws sprawled on the floor resting. The outlaws did not seem to take any alarm, but they must have done so for before the men could get back and surround the house, the women folks were leading the outlaws' horses to the back door, and they were fixing to leave. The fight started as soon as the sheriff rode up, as the outlaws came out shooting and made for their horses. Joe Queen was killed on the spot but his partner made it to his horse and got away. This was in the Dog Creek Hills near Claremore.

Heard W. W. Hastings Speak in 1888.

About the year of 1888, while I was living at Claremore, Joel B. Mayes was a candidate for the office of Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation and W. W. Hastings, who looked to be then about twenty, came there with a crowd of campaign speakers and made a speech for Joel B. Mayes who was running on the Downing ticket.



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A big political speaking had been freely advertised, and as the campaign was drawing to a close, there was a very large crowd present to hear the young orator and his opponents. The speakers came in with well filled satchels of documents, and accused each other of all kinds of crookedness and it looked to me as if there was to be a fight on the platform before the speaking was over. The speakers flashed papers in each others' faces and said, "You know you can't deny this."

Along toward the last of the speaking a lawyer of the name of Ridge Paschal got up and spoke. He reminded me much of a Hard-shelled Baptist preacher, only instead of having an "ah" at the end of each sentence he made a hissing sound. Hastings, who followed him, told the audience that Ridge Paschal was the "Hissing Goose."

This made Paschal so mad that he arose, when Hastings had finished his speech, and asked for a few words in reply, which was granted him. He said, "Ladies and gentlemen, you have heard what Mr. Hastings called me, now I want to tell you what you have just listened to," and pointing his finger at Hastings, he

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said, "That, ladies and gentlemen, is the American Ant Eater." Hastings' candidate won the election and Joel B. Mayes was elected, but died in office while serving his second term. That was exactly fifty years ago.

I Moved to Vinita in 1888.

One of my neighbors, John G. Schrimsher owned a farm up east of Vinita and he wanted me to move up on it and in 1888 I moved to the Schrimsher place about two miles east of Vinita, where I stayed five years and moved on the McClellan place two miles south of Vinita. My brother, Dave Matney, married an Indian girl and we bought the McClellan place for her and built a stone house on it. I farmed there with my brother for twenty years.

Started Carrying Mail in 1909.

In 1909 I started carrying mail on rural route No. 1 out of Vinita. It was the first route established and I was the first carrier and I carried it continuously for twenty-four years. I carried the mail for several years by buggy and horse but after cars begin to appear

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in the country and the roads got in better shape, I bought a Model T. Ford and used that until I retired in 1933.

The postal regulations are such that when a man reaches the age of sixty-five years, he is compelled to retire on a pension. During the twenty-four years I carried this route no inspector ever visited me and I did not get the scratch of a pen from them, which is unusual, as most of the boys were continually getting a letter reprimanding them.

Letter of Commendation.

After I had retired I received the following letter of commendation from the postoffice department at Washington, D. C.

OFFICE OF POSTMASTER GENERAL  
Washington, D. C., July 3, 1933.

Mr. John H. Matney, Rural Carrier,  
Vinita, Oklahoma.

My Dear Mr. Matney: Your long and creditable record in the postal service has been brought to my attention. You were appointed in 1909 and have served 24 years and 4 months, closing your career, as a rural carrier

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at Vinita. You have the consciousness of having performed your duties to the entire satisfaction of your government.

I congratulate you, upon your loyal and efficient service, and cannot forego the opportunity to express my personal wish for your continued happiness and contentment. Very truly yours, James Farley, Postmaster General.