

LAMAR, L. B.

INTERVIEW

#6817

W. T. Holland,
Interviewer.
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An Interview With L. B. Lamar,
Pioneer Merchant of Tulsa, Okla.

Having a sister in Sherman, Texas I decided to go there. This was in 1900. I met a merchant there by the name of J. W. Coker, who had a big store at Sherman and in several towns in Oklahoma. I persuaded him to let me manage a store for him, so he employed me to open and run a store for him at Wagoner. I ran this store for him four years.

Wagoner, at that time, had a population of about fifteen hundred and was a good business town. While there I studied the embalming business and passed the examination before the board at Oklahoma City and received a certificate to practice. Very few bodies to be buried locally were embalmed at that time, but those that were to be shipped out were embalmed. Then there were few licensed embalmers in the state in 1901.

I buried whites, Indians, protestants and Catholics. Business there was very satisfactory and especially did I like to sell to the Indians. Very few of the older Indians could speak or understand English, so they

LAMAR, L. B.

INTERVIEW.

6817.

-2-

made signs, grunted and pointed out what they wanted, and not being concerned much about the price, were easy to sell to. They were well supplied with funds by the government. Some of the business men of Wagoner at and during that period, from 1901 to 1905, were J.M. Hall, Walter's Brothers, C.C. McKinney, J.E. Ellington, Miller Brothers, and Claud C. Mays

Dunlap and Taylor had a big department store, the largest in town, and they did a big volume of business, and a good portion of it was to farmers and was credit business. Farming was the principal business around there, and the farmers were fairly well to do.

Fred and Terry Parkinson were ranchers and handled great numbers of cattle. When I left, or during my stay in Wagoner, I had saved some money, and with this capital, I came to Tulsa and opened a store at 110 East First Street in a frame building. Here, at first, I carried clothing, men' suits and work clothes, shoes, etc.

I remember I sold good suits of clothes for eight and ten dollars, and the best shoes for two dollars and a half.

LAMAR, L. B.

INTERVIEW.

6817.

-3-

After a while, I added a line of groceries and turned my store into a general merchandise store. I did fairly well there. I lived at Second and Elgin Streets in a small frame cottage. Tulsa, when I came there, had no sidewalks and no paved streets, although it had about three thousand population.

It was not unusual to see a wagon mire up in the mud of the streets, in the winter. I have seen them mired in front of my store on First Street. Hitching posts prevailed then, instead of parking lots.

Of course, like other towns of the West, Tulsa had its rough edges. The cowhands and Indians would celebrate occasionally, shoot up in the air and ride hard into and out of town, but they never molested me. A man used to have a store in the alley back of my place of business, where he handled booze. Most of the whiskey came to Tulsa from Keystone. The bootleggers housed it without any trouble from officers, it seems. They were very rarely arrested or molested. I knew all the business men of that day, and now there are very few who have been in business continually in Tulsa as long as I have.

The Vandever Brothers have been in business, I think, since 1904 and I started in 1905, and have been in the mercantile business ever since.

I married Julia Horton of Sulphur Springs, Texas in 1901, just before I came to Tulsa. One of my closest Indian friends was Bill Brewer, who is still living. I think at Salina, altho he still owns property near Sand Springs at Bruner Station or the Sand Springs Railway. He often visited us and also invited my wife and me to go to Indian dances. We have attended many of their socials and dances at Tulsa, Sperry, Hominy, Catoosa and other points, and in most cases the Indians were orderly and well behaved. We rarely ever danced or took any part in their activities; we just sat in the sideline and watched them, and of course these festivities had their amusing sides. Tulsa had three churches when I came here. Baptist, Methodist, and the Catholic Mission. Pastor of the Baptist Church was the Reverend Mr. Youngblood.

I stayed for ten years at 110 East First Street, then in 1915 I bought a place and built a store home at 1340

LAMAR, L. B.

INTERVIEW.

6817.

-5-

East Fourth Street, Tulsa, where I now am located and have been since 1915. Since 1901 I have not been out of my store very much. When I came to my present place the town extended only one block further east, then the farms set in, while now, I suppose it extends probably three miles further east.

As I said, I have known all of the early business men of Tulsa. Some of them are still here, such as, Vandever Brothers, Dr. Sam Kennedy, The Clintons, McBurney Brothers, and others have gone away or have died, and very few men who were in business in 1905 are now doing business in Tulsa.