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Field Worker
August 20, 1937

COW TOWNS

Interview with Ras LeForce, Vinita, Oklahoma.
R. F. D. 1.

My name is Ras LeForce. I live on the LeForce cattle ranch, eight miles northwest of Vinita, on R. F. D. 1.

I first came to the Indian Territory with my father and brothers in the early 80's and we settled in the Pheasant district, near the place where we now live. I was never married, but one of my brothers, Sam LeForce, married a Cherokee girl, Sarah Keys, and after farming a few years we drifted into the cattle business and we are among the few cattlemen who are still in business.

Vinita a Cow Town

When we first came to the Indian Territory, Vinita was strictly a "cow town". That is to say, cattle raising was the principal occupation of the people and Vinita was the shipping point for all northeastern Oklahoma from the time the Katy railroad first built through the territory in 1871, until allotment, when most of the cattlemen went out of business.

In the early '80's the Texas cattlemen began leasing pastures in the Cherokee Nation and grazing their cattle here in-

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stead of holding them all in Texas. According to the Cherokee law a white man could not hold cattle here in his own name and he had to hunt up some Indian and let him hold them in his name.

~~This gave many of the Indians chances to get into~~ the cattle business, and some of them did well. Many of the white men married Indians girls and held the cattle in their own names and some of these white men became immensely rich.

Some of them, I recall, who were in the cattle business in Northeastern Oklahoma and who were termed inter-married citizens, and got rich at the business, were James O. Hall, W. C. Patton, George W. Clark, Dr. F. B. Fite, Dr. E. B. Frayser, J. C. Hogan, W. E. Little and W. E. Halsell.

William E. Halsell of Vinita was the first early day cattleman to be termed a millionaire. His brother-in-law, Dan Waggoner, who married Halsell's sister was in the cattle business in a big way down in Texas, in the early days of the cattle business, and furnished Halsell cattle to start up on and by the early 90's Halsell was rated as a millionaire. He built the first brick residence in Vinita and it is to this day looked upon as one of the largest and best in the city. He built several brick business houses in Vinita and then moved to Kansas

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City, where he purchased a lot of business houses. He moved from there to California, where he died in 1934, and his body was brought back to Vinita for burial in the Fairview cemetery.

Ewing Halsell, of Vinita, succeeded his father in the cattle business and being the only heir to his father's estate except his stepmother, was left in a good way to succeed in the business and is doing so. He is still in the cattle business in a big way.

~~Other early day cattlemen.~~

The following is a list of other early day cattlemen I remember, as being in the business, some in a large and some in smaller ways;

~~Governor Selow, Davis Hill & Co., G. W. Hayes, S. H. Mayes, LeForce Brothers, E. B. Frayser, Ed Gwartney, J. O. Hall, G. W. Clark, W. C. Patton, Dr. B. F. Fite, Pat Skinner, W. W. Miller, Bert Oskinson, George Harlan, John Franklin, J. C. Hogan, W. A. Graham, Wm. "Boog" Little, Freeman Nidiffer, Wm. Howell, J. M. Carselowey, T. M. Buffington, Dave Landrum, John Landrum, Heber Skinner, Henry Traitheart, Jim Martin, I. N. "Newt" Williams, Ben Sanders, Bill and Henry Sayers, Jim Skinner, John F. Warren, F. B. Fite and Charley Hawkins, R. R.~~

Taylor, Dave Allen, Mat Hawkins, S. S. Cobb, Grayson Mills, A.P. Goodykoontz, Frank Skinner, J. B. Curl, G. W. Green, J. A. Foreman, B. W. Rider, J. A. Thompson, W. C. Chamberlain, J. T. McSpadden, D. H. Lipe, A. Boudinot, Jess B. Mayes, B. F. Milstead, J. W. Elliott, John Countryman, Louis Rogers, the Cherokee Orphan Asylum, Evans, Hunter & Newman and others.

Marks and Brands Advertised

Back in the days when the cattle business was flourishing in the Cherokee Nation it was not an uncommon thing for some fellow who was none too good to be a "cattle hustler" to take the brand and mark of some well known cattleman, make a branding iron like the cattleman's and then go to driving off the other fellows cattle. This practice got so bad, that the National Council passed a law that when a brand and mark was advertised in some paper of general circulation, no other man could use the brand or mark. The stock men began to advertise their brands after that in the only available papers they could find.

"The Indian Chieftain" was the oldest paper in the Cherokee Nation in those days, having been established in 1883 by Ex-Senator Robert L. Owens and others. I give below a list of marks

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and brands, as advertised by that paper, under date of August 17, 1883.

A. Boudinot, Tahlequah, Branded *N* on left side. Some branded CC on hip and shoulder, either side, with various marks. None sold only to ship. Range-Illinois river, four miles east of Tahlequah.

Jesse B. Mayes, Pryor Creek, I. T. Cattle branded *P* on left side. Swallow-fork and under-bit in one ear and under-slope in the other.


R. R. Taylor, Vinita, I. T. Cattle branded X on hip and T on side. Marked crop off left ear and split in right. Range on Locust Creek.

B. F. Milstead, Prairie City, I. T. Cattle branded on both sides ll on hip and on side. Range on head of Horse Creek.

J. W. Elliott & Co. Vinita, I. T. Cattle branded on left hip and shoulder CE. Hog marks, underbit in each ear. Range on Cabin Creek.

John Countryman, Echo, I. T. Brand (*70*) Seven-up, either side. Mark crop off left ear, under-slope off right ear. Range Horse Creek, Cherokee Nation.

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Evans, Hunter & Newman, Evansville, Kansas. Half breed cattle all branded on left side and hip  Some ear marked and some marked with what is called the Jingle Lerb mark, various ear marks, Range Comanche County pool.

Louis Rogers, Chetopa, Kansas. Cattle branded F on left hip. Marks- split and bit in right ear, and swallow-fork in left. Foad brand I on hip. Range- Cabin Creek.

James M. Carselowey, Vinita, Cattle branded (C) on left hip. Marks- underslope in right ear and under-bit in left ear. Range on Cabin Creek.


Thomas M. Buffington, Vinita. Cattle branded Ox Yoke on side. Marks crop off right ear. Range on Mustang Creek.

Cherokee Orphan Asylum. Cattle branded (A) on left side. Marks- smooth crop in left ear, and underbit in right.


A. P. Goodykoontz, Vinita. Cattle branded (P). Mark split in left ear. Range- ranch on Pryor Creek, fifteen miles west of Vinita.


W. G. Patton & Co. Vinita. Cattle branded WP on side. Horses branded same on left hip. Range, Rock Creek.


Frank Skinner, Vinita. Cattle branded RS on right side. Overbit in left ear, crop and over-bit in right. Range Rock Creek.

J. B. Curl, Coffeyville, Kansas. Various marks. JC on left hip, or side, and saddle stirrup () on right side of hip. Range on Curl Creek.


G. M. Green, Vinita. Cattle branded VG. Mark-crop off left ear and crop and split in right ear. Range near Vinita, I. T.

J. A. Foreman, Oologah. Cattle branded JF () on right side. Marks- Underbit in left and overbit in right. Range eight miles north of Claremore.

J. C. Hall, Vinita. Cattle branded  right side. Horses branded same on left on left hip. Range between Cabin and Pryor Creeks.

B. W. Rider, Pryor's Creek. Cattle branded, Heart () on right side. Mark-Crop and split in left ear and swallow-fork in right ear. Range Pryor Creek.

J. A. Thompson, Vinita. Cattle branded JT on right side. Mark-Under-half crop in left ear and split in right.

W. C. Chamberlain, Vinita. Cattle branded  on right side. Mark- overslope in left ear.

J. C. Hogan, Pryor's Creek. Cattle branded IXI left side. Mark-Swallow fork and underbit in right ear, and underslope in left, Range Pryor Creek.

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Nathaniel Skinner, Vinita. Cattle branded NS on right side and hip. Mark- underslope in right ear. Range, Bryor Creek, 20 miles south of Vinita, near M. K. & T. Road brand, Lazy H on loin - I.

J. T. McSpadden, Vinita. Cattle branded TM on right side. Mark- Crop off left ear, Underbit in right. Ranch on Cool Creek. Road brand D. Crop and split in left ear, swallow fork in right ear.

D. W. Lipe, Cowala. Cattle branded DL on right side, Mark- Crop and underbit and overbit in right ear, swallow fork and underbit in left. Notched in back. Range between the Verdigris and Caney Rivers.

An old Vinita Leader, under date of April 26, 1900, contains the following advertised brands. This and all of the above also carried the picture of a Texas steer, with the brand shown on the animal, just as it would show on the real animal.

Governor Below, Adair. Branded Lazy G. and Lazy B, on either side. Any one having knowledge of such cattle report to John F. Warren, of Adair and all just expenses will be paid.

Davis Hill & Co., Cattle Branded HIL, on right side, various ear marks, Range 2 miles west of Vinita. Address, Vinita.

G. W. Mayes, \bar{M} , on either side. Mark, crop and under half crop in each ear. Range east of Pryor Creek, Pryor Creek.

J. S. LeForce, Vinita. Cattle branded $\widehat{L L}$. Some have U right hip, and O, left loin. Mark-crop and two splits in each ear. Range 10 miles northwest of Vinita.

E. B. Frayser, Vinita. Cattle branded Oo, on right side. Horse brand the same. Range on Big Cabin Creek seven miles west of Bluejacket. Cattle of this brand sold only for shipment. \$100 reward for conviction of stealing cattle of this brand.

Free Range

Prior to Statehood everything was free range in the Cherokee Nation, you could turn your cattle loose and let them go anywhere they wanted to go. All the fencing the cattlemen had to do was to build a drift fence, to keep the cattle from drifting off too far. Sometimes a single line of fence would be built for fifteen or twenty miles, just to keep the cattle from drifting clear out of the country.

Cattle attached.

Back before Statehood the firm of LeForce Brothers went down round about Westville, in Adair County and bought a bunch of cattle from Joe Garrett. Joe had bought the cattle in

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Arkansas sometime before and had not paid the tax on them. I think the tax was 50 cents per head for introducing the cattle into the Cherokee Nation. Anyway, when we started to move the cattle Zeke Proctor was sheriff of that county and he attached several hundred head of cattle and held them, until Joe Garrett went to Tahlequah and purchased enough scrip to pay the tax on them. He bought the scrip for about 50 cents on the dollar, making his tax only half price.

Annual Round-up

Once each year, usually along in the fall about shipping time the cattlemen had what they called an annual round-up. A mess wagon was loaded with provisions, a cook was secured, and a hand or two from each ranch was sent along to make the rounds of all the cattle ranges in the country to gather in the cattle that had drifted here and yon during the year. Each man was supplied with the brands he was supposed to gather, and as fast as they were gathered up they would be put into one large herd and driven along the route which they were covering. When the last range had been covered the cattle were cut out and each man was given the cattle that belonged to his ranch and they were driven to their respective ranches. Some were shipped

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to market and others were kept through the winter, until another year.

Man Shot on Round-up

While camping on the J. O. Hall ranch, on Rock Creek, east of Adair, on one of these round-ups some cowboys got drunk one night and one of them, down in the pasture a little ways from the house decided to shoot the light out, up at the ranch house. He fired away at it and the bullet went right through John E. (Red Cloud) Duncan, who was sitting on a rail fence, between him and the light. Duncan was put in a hack and rushed to Vinita, where Dr. Oliver Hagby, one of Vinita's first doctors succeeded in finding the bullet in Duncan's vest pocket, after much probing. Duncan recovered and is living in this 1937.

No More Free Range.

There was no more free range in the Cherokee Nation after allotment of land and I can almost count the cattlemen who were left, on the fingers of one hand. I know what a struggle we boys (the LeForce Brothers) had to get range for our cattle. We bought all the land we could pay for while it was cheap and leased up a lot more and we just kept on adding a little more, until at one time we had ten thousand acres.

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that we owned and leased and we have had as high as ten thousand head of cattle at one time, since Statehood. When at the highest peak we got people with large pastures to graze the cattle for us at so much per head.

Proof that Vinita is a Cow Town

It was in 1909 that Ewing Halsell, one of the few cattlemen to stay in business after Statehood, phoned one of his men to bring in a little bunch of cattle from one of his ranches near Vinita. The cowboy came driving them right up main street and in making the drive into town, about ten miles, had made a two year old bull pretty mad, and by the time he got to town he was awfully mad. He made a dive at the first fellow that appeared in the business section of town and ran him right into Bill Rains' livery barn and ^{they} went right on out at the back end. They turned him out the back lot and started him up the street again, when he spied a man going into the Jumbo Dry goods store. He went right into the store after him, and all the clerks fell under the counter or climbed on shelves but the bull paid no attention to the frightened clerks but went right on through the store and out the back door. He kept on playing his pranks, trying to take the town until the officers were called on and killed him.

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Buys Remnant of Cattle

When the cattlemen quit business, about allotment time, many of them sold the remnant of their cattle to other local men who were going to stay in business. LeForce Brothers bought what cattle W. C. Patton and Co. had and L. N. (Newt) Williams bought the remnant of Wm. Little's cattle. Others shipped out to Kansas City and St. Louis markets.

Other Cow towns.

While Vinita was the center of trade for the early day cattle business, the M. K. & T. and Frisco Railroads which passed through the Territory in 1871 made it possible for the cattlemen to load and unload cattle at any of their towns on the lines. They built stock or shipping pens at every town along their lines and this saved the cattlemen many long drives.