

THOMPSON, AL

INTERVIEW

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INTERVIEW WITH AL THOMPSON
By Jerome M. Emmons, Field worker

Mr. Thompson, a part Delaware, lives five miles west of Okmulgee on Lake road and one mile south.

MIGRATION

We moved from Illinois to Ottawa, Kansas, where we lived for a year. In October, 1869, I moved with my parents moved down into the Indian Territory, East of what is now Bartlesville.

My grandfather, Joseph Godfrey, was running a trading post there, with Ed Mosley, a partner. My grandfather was a half Delaware Indian. He died in 1872 of Spinal Meningitis. He had been living there for six years when we moved there. He was appointed the first Indian agent to the Osages, Cherokees and Delawares. As a Quaker preacher, He converted lots of Osages.

There were 1500 (Big) Osages camped at Black Dog Town, under Chief Black Dog. At

Tally Springs, not counting women and children, were camped 2000 (Little) Osages, under Chief Tally.

TRADING POST

When payments were due the Indians, my grandfather would call them in and pay them off in gold. Then he would sell them groceries and equipment until his store was empty. If my grandmother, my mother and other white people didn't want to go without some staple foods for a while they had to get theirs first.

It took three weeks to go to Lawrence, Kans. and get food. This was hauled in a large wagon to which oxen were yoked.

Sugar, flour and coffee came in barrels. The store handled these, extracts, corn and later potatoes. The Indians sometimes drank the extract and had to be told how to plant the potatoes. Sugar was sold by the tin cup full. The Osages, unless the squaw did the buying, would get a gallon of the brown sugar and eat it. They weren't used to much sweet stuff, except wild honey.

GAME

Buffalo, deer, turkey, cattle and wild hogs provided meat for Indians and pioneers. I used to beg buffalo meat from the Osage women. This had been obtained by hunting trips to the west. A small, blue type^{corn} called squaw corn and pumpkins were about all the vegetables raised locally. I sure enjoyed the pumpkins prepared by the Indians. They would fill them with brown sugar, cover with dirt and roast in the fire until done.

I was just about six years old, when Old Big Joe, an Osage, came around with a new bow and some arrows and wanted me to try them out. I took them and went about a hundred yards from the house, where there was an old gobbler who had been trying to call off some of my grandmother's tame turkeys. I fitted the arrow to the bow and drove it through the turkey. I took it back and Big Joe drew out the arrow and gave it to me and took one of my arrows. He was sure proud of me. I took the turkey in to my grandmother to cook and we had a feast, in-

viting Big Joe and another Indian friend.

HOME

My parents built a cabin near my grandfather's trading post. It was built of logs, with padded bunks for beds, attached to the inside walls.

My mother cooked in the fireplace and baked in a dutch oven.

My grandmother's first stove was a Charter Oak, with short legs in front and longer ones behind and an oven above.

OSAGES

Some of the Osages stole me one time and took me over to Black Dog Town. They burned my clothes, stained my skin with walnuts, dilated the pupils of my eyes with jimson weed, braided my hair and dressed me in breech cloth and leggins. They then took me back, with some other little Osage boys about my age, and my father didn't know me. This sure amused the Indians. They had at one time wanted to adopt

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me, but my father wouldn't agree to it.

In addition to the Osages camped at Tally Springs and Black Dog Town, there were about 2000 (Big) Osages camped on Pumpkin Creek under Big Hill Joe.

My grandfather's brother one time killed an Osage man, by splitting his head open with an ax. It cost him 10 blankets, 10 guns, 10 horses, 10 sacks of flour, etc. to get his brother, Sanford, out of the Indian camp alive. Later, Sanford Godfrey and another brother were killed in the Indian wars, under General Custer.

I have heard the Osages chanting around a fire - "we kill the white man". They, the Pawnees, the Delawares, the Kiowas were still hostile to the white man.

Black Dog wanted to fight the white people, which they later did near Arkansas City. Some of the Osages didn't want to fight. Black Dog took their women from them and sent them, with one old woman, up into Kansas. They were called Kaws (cowards).

MARRIAGE

The Osages didn't permit marriage with a negro by any of the tribe. The young girls sometimes had bells tied to wrist and ankle and watched over by an old Osage woman.

If she married a negro, however, she would be shot from a horse, usually by her father and the negro tied in a sack and drowned.

BURIAL

The Osages used to take care of the dead in this manner: The body was wrapped in a blanket with bow and arrows and enough cooked food for 30 days (one moon). The whole wrapped in a buffalo skin and laced up with rawhide. This would then be suspended in a tree over the creek or river. In the event the dead man was large, his horse would be killed and tied near the body.

When the body fell into the water and was carried off, they thought it had gone to its eternal resting place. I have seen eight bodies in one tree.

HORSES

My father had a big, white horse of Kentucky Messenger stock, which the Osages tried to trade 20 of their horses for. They wanted him for use in their ceremonial dances. My father always refused to trade. They would 'borrow' the horse anyway, for we would find him all painted up some place where they had left him.

EMPLOYMENT

In 1874 or '75, after the great grasshopper plague, we moved to Iowa.

On our return, I started farming. I first put in 500 acres of flax and had to buy new wagon beds and covers to carry it to market. I sure got the man told who suggested that I raise that slick stuff.

Then I started to work on the Curry Comb ranch in the Cherokee Nation as a cook. I received \$20- and my board. In a few months, I started riding and my pay raised to \$35-. David Stilt and Cal Watkins, the owners, had started this ranch after the Civil War. They leased 20

square miles of land. It was, of course, unfenced and at the spring roundups we would drive out other peoples cattle, as well as gather our own beef for shipment.

When some big company bought the ranch, we, not caring to work for it, left. Some of the boys went to Texas and some to South America. I got the 'S.A. fever', but never got farther than El Paso.

At Fort Worth, I went to work for the Sheriff, Walt Mattox. He sent 5,000 head of cattle from Supply to the Cherokee Strip and started a ranch.

In Texas, I signed up with the Rangers for two years service. On my first assignment, the capture of some Mexican and white rustlers, I captured an Outlaw and received an \$1800- reward from the Governor at Austin. Our station was at Toyah, and we worked all up and down the Mexican border.

I went from Pratt, Kans. to South of Coffyville where I lived about 12 years. This was in 1889. I added land to my Delaware Headright and once owned 1500 acres, worth about 30,000 dollars. My brother killed a man and that broke

RAILROADS

The Santa Fe and the L.L.G. R.R.'s raced to be the first to cross into the Indian Territory. The M.K.T. beat them to the line, stopping at Coffeyville or rather Parsons, a cattle shipping point later moved back to Coffeyville. The M.K.T. R.R. later pushed on down to Denison, Texas. In 1870, trains were running from Parsons, Kansas, to Denison. Engineers used to kill deer from the train, until they caused a wreck and the practice stopped.

The Missouri Pacific was soon running from Coffeyville to Fort Smith. The Santa Fe ran from Caney to Bartlesville and later to Tulsa.

The Mexico, Kansas City and Orient built from Kansas City to Alva first and then Woodward and maybe south.

I remember the railroads had a hard time crossing the Choctaw Nation, as these Indians were very much opposed to them.

TRAILS

I have ridden on the ^{Chisholm} Chism and the Old

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Texas Trails, but am more familiar with the Old Whiskey Trail. I used to live at Colbert, six or eight miles North of Dennison, Texas. This trail ran from Dennison to Coffeyville, going past Okmulgee about a mile to the East. ~~The trail was used by horse thieves and whiskey runners.~~

FARMING PERMIT

A family wanting to farm in the Territory had to pay \$.50 for this privilege. If they wouldn't pay up they were to taken to the state line.

DEPUTY U. S. MARSHALS

I was a Deputy U. S. Marshal and worked in the Cherokee, Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations.

Some prisoners were taken to Paris, Texas and some to Fort Smith. Judge Parker was on the bench at Fort Smith when I was Marshal. Parker's ambition was to hang 100 men. He did hang 96 men and two women. I had to fight to save some of ^{the} prisoners.

For a while, I lived with Charlie Bearpaw, north of Tahlequah, while working as a

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marshal. If I wanted an Indian for some crime, I would just send word and he would surrender. I would save them from any punishment if I could. Most of the marshals were well liked. Afterwards they got to be overbearing.

I captured Robinson Camp north of Boggy Depot in a cabin. He had killed three men and one boy. The boy for riding past his place singing. I waited all night and when he came out of his cabin the next morning, I arrested him. I took his gun and handcuffed him and we rode into Atoka for breakfast and then to Fort Smith, where he was hung.

I got a \$2000. reward for his capture.

I met Belle Starr near Limestone Gap one time. She sure did curse because I was wearing a star. I told her that I wasn't looking to arrest any women.

Bud Ledbetter and I were looking for the Cook gang one time when a negro, Tom Langsford, told another negro- 'Here comes that Ledbetter and Thompson, you better travel. We didn't pay any attention to him.

Bill Pigeon was one Indian outlaw in the Choctaw Nation that the marshals didn't want very bad. He was plenty tough.

Some Negroes from Alabama were going to prove that they were of Cherokee blood and take some land in the Cherokee Nation. They settled over on the Verdigris river. There were about a thousand of them drilling to fight if necessary under Ed Campbell as General and his brother, Charlie ~~as~~ Lieutenant. These men were both negroes.

The U. S. Marshal told me to take a bunch of men up there and run them off. Twelve of us took a cannon from Fort Smith and obtained another, made by a blacksmith, from Coffeyville. We set up this artillery on a point overlooking the Negro camp.

I went down to the camp to see if they would leave on my authority. If they didn't I was to give a signal and the men were to fire on the camp.

I called out the Negro in charge. I said "Are you the Negro in charge of these Negroes?"

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He said, "Yes, I is General Campbell". I said "I don't give a damn who you are; I am going to give you five minutes to disband," and showed him the cannon. He asked me to give him 10 minutes but I told him, "no-only five. He got up on a stump and made a speech to the mob and they left in a hurry. I took Campbell to Fort Smith where he was fined \$250-."

HORSE THIEVES

I had been up to Pauls Valley and returning home to Colbert, when I saw a man riding fast and leading a horse. I told him to stop; I wanted to talk to him. He just kept on going and I shot him under the arm.

The horse, I soon saw, was Old Fred, a horse that John Moppen had sent to Kentucky for. I started home when I ran into John Moppen and Dan Collins. They rode up on either side of me and I knew that they thought that I had stolen the horse. I told them what had happened and we rode back to Ball's store to verify it. There lay the man I had shot from his

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horse lying on the Old Whiskey Trail.

John apologized for his implication and Dan Collins said "That dirty skunk. He ate dinner at my house yesterday."

When we got home, John, Dan and I took a drink of whiskey and John reached in his pocket and gave me \$500-.

ROBBERS ROOST

There was a place called Robbers Roost on the East side of 12 mile prairie, down near Beggy Depot.

COW TOWNS

I knew Hunnewell, Arkansas City, Caldwell, Dodge City, etc. when they were shipping points for cattle and full of danger for the weak. The fastest man with a gun sometimes lived the longest.

ROBBERS.

I knew Geo. Cook, Henry Starr, Ed Newton, the Daltons, Dick Broadhouse, I. Powers, Slaughter Kid, who was raised near Wagoner and other outlaws in the Indian Territory.

COURTS

When I quit as a U. S. Marshal's Deputy Jake Yoles was the Marshal. Soon afterward, Judge Parker was removed from the Bench. I think he had a mania for hanging people.

RELICS

I used to own a pearl-handled revolver, which had belonged to Jesse James and had his initials engraved on the handle. It was stolen from me.

I used to have some Indian scalps from Indians whom I and others had killed. The Osages liked ornaments in their hair. They would flatten out a silver dollar, drill a hole in it and braid it into their hair. I used to have some of these.

TOWNSITES

My father, Col. Coffey, N. B. Blanton, my father's brother-in-law, helped lay out the townsite for a town in Kansas. Col. Coffey and N. B. Blanton flipped a chip that had been spit on to see who the town would be named after.

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N. B. Blanton's son-in-law, E. T. Flynn, now of Oklahoma City and formerly of Guthrie, helped to get free land for Cherokee "Stripers". He and his wife fought for this. He was elected as a delegate to Washington