

WALTON, GEORGE

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Investigator
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Interview with George Walton
Shattuck, Oklahoma

George Walton was born in Rockwall County, Texas, fifty-nine years ago. In April, 1886, his father and the family, including George and his several brothers, left Rockwall County in a covered wagon, driving several hundred head of cattle and horses, for Lipscomb County, Texas. They traveled the old Chisholm Trail part of the way then turned northwest to the old Tucker Cattle Trail and followed it well up into the Panhandle.

It was September of 1886 by the time they reached their destination in Lipscomb County where they located just six miles west of the Texas - Oklahoma boundary line and about fifteen miles northwest of the present town of Shattuck. Here they found plenty of living water and timber and abundant grass for their stock on the limitless range around them.

Mr. Walton's father registered at the booth near Higgins, Texas, for filing in the Strip and immediately after the opening he with his family settled on a homestead in the bottoms along Wolf Creek about two miles

northeast of the place where Shattuck was later founded. Walton had been into the Strip many times before it opened and had already selected a location before entering for actual homestead pre-emption. The Waltons brought to the Strip with them several hundred head of cattle and horses and established a ranch of some proportions at once.

In Waltons' vicinity in Lipscomb County, an old timer from Kansas, named Dave Wright, had been operating a sawmill for some time cutting the native timber, cottonwood largely, into very usable lumber. Preparatory to entering the Strip, September 16, 1893, Mr. Walton's father had a quantity of lumber already sawed by Dave Wright and moved to the Strip line in order to proceed building on his homestead immediately after the opening.

Their first house in the Strip was constructed of native cottonwood lumber. In those days they called it "rawhide lumber". This house was fairly commodious for that time in this section of the country. As a matter of fact, Mr. Walton's father was a man of fair means

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and therefore established a fairly good ranch headquarters after locating in the Strip.

The Waltons were cowmen not farmers. During the early period in Oklahoma they did little or no farming except to raise a little sorghum for their cattle and put up the native grass for hay.

When they located in the Strip, the Santa Fe had their line completed through this country and a little town had been started at Higgins, Texas. It had been their trading point for a while past. However in the late Fall of '93 Mr. Walton's father built a small store of cottonwood lumber, near the railroad about where the Shattuck stockyards are now located.

This store was the first building ever put up in Shattuck. The Waltons didn't operate the store long though for one Tom Miller came along and bought the stock and set up another store the Winter following the Strip Opening. Mr. Walton's father later cut up the store counter to make a coffin for the dead wife of a nearby settler. They buried her in the hills north of Wolf Creek and northwest of the present site of Shattuck. This settler's name was Joshua Daniels; his wife,

who died was an Indian squaw.

Before the Waltens left Texas and during the first few years after they settled in the Strip country, many bands of Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians prowled this section of the country, hunting and in some instances pilfering. These Indians never molested the Walton family or any of their property. Mrs. Walton used to bake great numbers of biscuits and give them to the Indians to eat when they came along. These biscuits were great delicacies to the Indians.

After locating in Oklahoma, large bands of Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians would pass by the Walton ranch on their way to and from visits to the Ute Indians in New Mexico. Near the Walton ranch house was a large lake-like pond of water abounding with snapping turtles. The Indians frequented this pond to hunt for these turtles. For this undertaking usually both bucks and squaws were divided into groups. One group started a fire close by and kept it burning, while another group took their positions on the banks of the water pond to receive the turtles from the men in the water. Another group, stripped to an abbreviated breech clout, went

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into the water in breast formation not over a foot a apart and in this fashion they proceeded very slowly in a sort of stomping with a short pace trying thus to locate and possibly catch the turtles by stepping on or dislodging them. This stomping also set in motion the turtles hiding in the pond's bottom. It was marvelous the way the Indians could catch turtles; they would dive under the water after them. The men in the water would toss their catch to the group on the banks waiting to receive them. In turn the receiving group would deliver the turtles to the group keeping up the fire.

This was the method which the Indians had of preparing the turtles for eating. With a small stick they punched a hole in the turtles body just behind either hind leg. Then a wire bent hook-like was inserted to grab and when withdrawn to remove the internal organs. This done, the turtle, likely still alive was cast into the blazing fire to roast. If it crawled out or attempted to do so an attending Indian shoved it back into the fire with a stick and if necessary held it there till the intense heat rendered

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it immobile. After being sufficiently bakéd the turtles were taken out of the fire and the outer hard shell easily removed; the inside flesh the Indians heartily ate.

These roving Indian bands traveled in a manner of their own peculiar to their race generally. The head chief led the motley procession and there followed the remainder of the number in string-like fashion, sometimes a mile or two long. Each family and its possessions proceeded intact in the line of travel, separate and apart from any other family. If one Indian owned but a single mule or pony over and above the number being ridden, the single animal was driven along with the separate family group. When time to pitch camp came usually a traveling band did not assemble; they camped in groups in some instances a mile apart from another family or small group.

In the Fall of 1897 two big cowmen, Word and Holeman, shipped in from Mexico 2500 head of real long-horn steers and ranged them over the territory between Shattuck and the South Canadian River to the south, some twenty-five miles. The outfit established tempo-

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rary headquarters a few miles southwest of Shattuck on Rock Creek. Those days cowmen fed the cattle little or nothing in this country during the Winter. Occasionally they would scatter out a few sacks of shelled corn on the grass. Cottonseed cake - the mainstay of the cowmen for Winter feed on the range these days was nearly unknown in some sections as early as 1897. It was just coming onto the market and many cowmen were not yet convinced that it was suitable for feeding cattle.

At any rate, Word and Heleman depended on grass and a little shelled corn to get their 2500 steers through the Winter that was very hard. When they rounded up the cattle the following Spring they had only 800 head left; the balance had perished during the Winter. They shipped the 800 head out of the country.

Those steers lay dead in some places so close together and in such great numbers that a man could ^{walk} on and over dozens of them without finding it necessary to step on the ground.

Mr. Walton and his brothers rode into the Word-Holeman range on saddle horses during that Winter and

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skinned a countless number of the dead steers and dragged the hides home with their saddle horses. When the hide buyer came along they would sell these hides to him at from one to two dollars per hide. Off and on for many months they would gather up loads of the bones of the dead steers which they usually sold for about \$5.00 per ton.

In 1901 George Walton filed on a claim a few miles north of his father's homestead. That same year his father bought and shipped in the first complete and up-to-date, for that time, steam threshing outfit to come to this section. He bought a sawmill, too, at the same time and used the steam threshing engine to drive the sawmill. The Waltons then sawed lots of lumber along Wolf Creek for several years following.

Mr. Walton's father died many years ago. George is now living on his homestead farm.