

WHEELER, JAMES

SECOND INTERVIEW

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An Interview with James Wheeler, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

By - W. T. Holland, Investigator.

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In the early days following the Civil War I was in and out of the Territory often. My people lived in Texas then, and I followed the range and worked for Zack Humphrey, who grazed cattle in the southwest part of the Territory.

I knew Buffalo Bill personally and would see him often, especially when he was working for the government and was stationed at Fort Sill.

I've seen herds of buffalo in western Oklahoma as well as in Western Kansas. These buffalo herds ranged south from the plains of Kansas into Oklahoma. I have seen as many as five hundred head of buffalo in one herd.

Buffalo Bill killed buffalo for the soldiers. They would cut out the best parts of the meat and leave the rest for the wolves, of which there were plenty.

We, however, always guarded our herd at night, and could keep the wolves out pretty easily, but we

had more or less trouble with the Mohawk and Chickasaw Indians who would raid our herds and often stampede them.

I have seen many a stampede. Of course, the Indians would be able to pick up some strays after these stampedes.

These raids, we thought, were instigated by renegade squaw-men among these Indians. Maybe the Indians did not feel too good about the encroachment of the white men, but they were usually peaceable unless stirred up by the whites.

I came to Vinita in 1885 and have been here in the state since.

I worked for John Gunter for two or three years. He ran a wagon yard and livery business. His yard was the only one in the town and did a good business in hiring out "rigs" and in "putting up" horses and people for the night.

Hundreds of pioneers stopped at the wagon yard on their way into the Territory. We had a large room for the office and people would sleep in there on the floor. They carried their own bedding. They would do their

cooking out in the yard as there were no restaurants and very few hotels then.

While the Government was making payments to the Indians for land taken over by it, the paymaster or agents of the Government went from place to place to make these payments at points convenient to the various tribes, and during this time, late one evening, a woman came in and wanted to hire a rig, two horses and buggy and a driver, as she wanted to go out to the White Oak settlement about sixteen miles west of Vinita.

The weather was bad and none of the other hands would consent to drive her out, so I had to do the job myself.

We started out, and reached our destination some time after dark. We got out and she had her friend to prepare my supper. They were very considerate of me, but when I got ready to collect my fee of \$5.00 and start on the return trip, I could not locate my passenger and never did find her for she had disappeared.

The boys had a joke on me and the worst part of

it was I had to pay \$5.00 myself for the rig.

The lady was the wife of Cherokee Bill, and herself a bad girl. I did not know her at the time I took her out, but later learned of her and her mission. She was following the Government agents and obtaining money from the Indians in any way possible, even to robbery or worse. She went to White Oak to be present at the payment.

John Gunter, Joe Harris, Bob and Jim Tettle, W. E. Halsell and John Cobb were some of the most prominent men in Vinita when I first went there.

I worked for Bill Halsell for several years and part of the time northeast of his ranch on Bird Creek. He handled from five to ten thousand head of cattle here; first, Texas Longhorns but later he became one of the first breeders of white-faced cattle and of Hereford cattle.

Three of us cow-hands were sent out southwest of Tulsa to round up some strays for Mr. Halsell. The weather was pretty cold when we started out and got

colder as we went West.

We rounded up the cattle and got back to the Arkansas River and found it frozen. There being no ferry as the river was frozen over, we were in a quandary as to how to cross. We left the cattle in Red Fork and decided that we would cross on the ice, an unusual feat I must say. The ice wouldn't support the horses afoot, so we decided to "hog tie" them and drag them over in the ice. So we downed one, hog tied our lariat to him, and we three pulled him over. We then untied him. We tied the others and slipped them across the ice in the same manner. This was done where the 11th street bridge now is, at Tulsa.

I later worked in the oil fields, hauling oil field equipment with my own teams and wagons in the Red Fork oil field and the Kiefer field.

One time, during the winter season, my wagon mired down in the main road through West Tulsa and it was over a week before I got it out.