

WHITE, JOHN W.

SECOND INTERVIEW.

9380

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LEGEND & STORY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field worker's name Linnaeus B. Rasch

This report made on (date) November 15, 1937

1. This legend was secured from (name) John W. White

Address Shattuck, Oklahoma.

This person is (male or female) White, Negro, Indian,

If Indian, give tribe _____

2. Origin and history of legend or story _____

3. Write out the legend or story as completely as possible. Use blank sheets and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 9

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Linnaeus B. Ranck,
Investigator.
November 15, 1937.

Interview with John W. White.
Shattuck, Oklahoma

The Chain C Ranch was a neighbor to the old H Steeple Ranch that flourished in this section during the middle 90's of the past century. It embraced practically all of the area now comprising Harper County. It was established about the time the H Steeple set up farther south in the latter part of 1893. It was one of the largest cattle ranches ever operating in the Cherokee Strip, though as observed it was established in the extreme northwest corner of the Strip territory and after the opening of these lands to settlement.

It is significant that great cattle ranches were established in the western part of the Cherokee Strip after it had been opened to settlement. It was an expensive and risky undertaking to establish ranches on public lands subject to homestead entry. It cost a great deal to build about two hundred miles

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of good three wire fence using cedar posts set thirty feet apart not to include the cost of the other ranch improvements. The Chain C Ranch fenced and cross-fenced their range, about two hundred miles of fence in all.

The cowmen and cowpunchers of those early days, now old men, will declare to us that they did not think this Western part of the Strip would ever be settled. It was rough, sandy and rocky land generally.

Shrewd business men were the large majority of the cowmen of fifty years ago in these parts. They had observed the opening of the Cheyenne-Arapaho Country the year before the Strip opened. And when the Strip opened over a year later the Western part of the Cheyenne-Arapaho lands were practically all still unsettled cow country. Of course, as these old ranchmen say, this encouraged them to return to the Strip with their herds after it opened. There never had been a better cow country than the Cherokee Outlet and they were lured back to it for a last

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stand against the settlers. The ranchmen believed that the settlers would never undertake farming such a country as this was.

These same ranchmen and early-day cowhands will tell you that Oklahoma's Dennis T. Flynn and his Free Homes Bill ruined many a cowman ranching on public lands in Oklahoma Territory when the Free Homes Bill passed Congress June 17, 1900. The cowmen did not anticipate this piece of legislation and they believe that had not such a measure been enacted into law, cattle ranching would have continued supreme as an industry over the Western portion of the Cheyenne-Arapaho Reservation and the old Cherokee Outlet for at least another twenty-five years.

Considerable credence could be accorded such a belief for it is a matter of fact and record that very few settlers filed on claims in the Western one third of the Strip, for example, until after the turn of the century and the passage of the Free Homes Bill. Further proof of the soundness, in part at least, of

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the old-timers' theory is borne out by the fact that only a very scattered few men had homesteaded here and there over approximately the western one third of the Strip as long after it had been opened to settlement as eight years. The same was true in large part of the Cheyenne-Arapaho country. Within three years after the benefits of the Free Homes Bill were in effect, practically all of the public domain in the Cheyenne-Arapaho country and the Strip unclaimed by homesteaders prior to June 17, 1900, had been pre-empted.

The Chain C's were a Texas outfit from Wilbarger County. Headquarters for the ranch was established at Doby Springs in the country about the headwaters of Buffalo Creek, and about eight miles west and a mile or so north of the present site of the town of Buffalo, County seat of Harper County.

Here was an ideal location for the Chain C's headquarters - abundant living water and native timber.

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The topography of the range in this locality was broken and gulchy, too, affording good shelter for the ranch stock. It was quite near the center of their range since their west line was No Man's Land or Beaver County. Their north boundary the Kansas state line; and they ranged east nearly to the Cimarron River, and on the south joined ranges with the old H. Steeple Ranch on the divide east and west between Buffalo and Beaver Creeks. Beaver County was also the Eastern boundary line of the old L. E. Ranch of the Oklahoma Panhandle.

An early-day Texas cowpuncher named Tom Hudson was the Chain C's foreman. He with a crew of Texas punchers trailed a herd through to the Chain C Ranch. All the cattle in the herd were steers it is claimed; and furthermore the ranch handled mostly steers brought up from Texas and in the course of time shipped either to market from the ranch in the Strip or sold possibly to some other cowman before leaving the Chain C range.

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Every acre of school land within the range the outfit leased from the Oklahoma Territorial Government and the ranch cowpunchers each filed on a "water claim." Until the range was fenced the Chain C cattle were held within the ranch area by "line riders"; in other words, cowpunchers were each given a certain section of the outer boundary of the ranch to ride daily to turn back to the home range any of their cattle threatening to venture beyond the ranch boundary.

Of course, these line riders had to have a place to sleep and eat; or in any event a base or location from which to carry on their work and most of those men riding line were taken too far from the ranch headquarters to return for either "chuck" or lodging from day to day. Therefore "Line Camps" were established for those working on the extremities of the Chain C range. Usually a small and rude dugout served this purpose; or if the camp was to be more or less temporary a small tent was put up.

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At this camp the line rider slept and ate most of the time. It was a lonely life, that of a line rider. About once each month the Chain C freight wagon made the rounds of the line camps with "chuck" for the cowpunchers and shelled Indian corn for the saddle horses being ridden by the line riders.

This early-day ranch of northwestern Oklahoma Territory carried on for about ten years. The Fall of 1902 the last and final round-up of this corner of the Territory was had and the Chain C outfit was included in the region which the round-up outfit worked; as a matter of fact, Tom Hudson, the Chain C foreman, was also the foreman or captain of this last round-up.

Dennis T. Flynn, his Free Homes Bill and the settlers had dethroned the cowmen in this quarter of Oklahoma Territory and even the old Chain C. The Spring and early Summer of 1903 the last of this once famous ranch outfit went back to Texas.

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The old Chain C headquarters at Doby Springs is now in possession of one Ace Soward who maintains sort of a small ranch about the headquarters. During the intervening time, or since the Chain C outfit left the locality in 1903 to the present time a small ranch has been perpetuated there.

For these several years past a very good annual rodeo has been held at Doby Springs and thus the spirit, at least, of the Chain C outfit and the wild cow country that region used to be is being recast in a manner commemorating an industry that belongs to an age past and gone.

In the days when ranching was really ranching every cow outfit was known and referred to by its brand. Early-day brands, many of them, became famous. A ranch's brand was as much to a ranch as a coat of arms was to a feudal lord of ages ago. Therefore, I am setting forth below in clear replica the brand of the old Chain C Ranch.

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Note that one C is inverted or reversed. A bar connects the two letters having the effect of a connecting link; hence the brand was called "Chain C".