

YOUNG, CALVIN L.

INTERVIEW

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Investigator, Elizabeth L. Duncan,
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Interview with Calvin L. Young,
Medford, Oklahoma.

The Cherokee Strip was familiar ground to me before the Opening. When I made the run, it was my fourth trip into this community. It was also my fourth run, for as a young fellow I followed the runs as moderns follow the world Series.

My first trip across the Cherokee Strip was when I was a lad in my teens, riding down from my Kingman County, Kansas home to see the opening of Old Oklahoma in '89. After watching the Indians dance at Fort Reno, I awaited the signal gun at Anadarko and followed the runners to spend the night in Oklahoma City, a mushroom city of tents, with fifteen thousand inhabitants on that first night of its existence.

Failing to meet my people at Edmond as I had expected to do and as the provisions one horse carried on that long trek through the wilderness were nearing the vanishing point I made my way home as best I could. On the old Chisholm Trail across the Strip I rode beside disappointed home-seekers who gave me two feedings of corn for my horse, as she had been without grain more than a week. When I camped, my mount, with uncanny

intelligence, knowing I had the corn for her, refused to taste the fine, late April grass at her feet until I had yielded to her persistent nickering and had given her the grain after which she grazed contentedly.

On one of my many trips between our new home near Edmond and our former home at Zenda, Kansas, I was delayed a half a day by Red Rock Creek on a rampage north of Perry. Reaching the Salt Fork River at the 101 Ranch, it too, was very high. While I hesitated, undecided as to the safety of attempting to ford it, a big Indian rode up and plunged into the stream. Thinking I could go if he could, I plunged in after him and followed him across safely.

In the Spring of '83, a cousin and myself were scouting in this region to select locations for settlement. We camped on the site of an old ranch on the NE 35-24- , Range 3, which was later the site of our first post office, Sibley where Miss Myrtle Johnson's father was the postmaster.

In the morning my cousin who thought himself suffering from a bad cold was broken out with the measles and the nearest doctor was at Guthrie, a long distance across trackless country with a lumber wagon. He suffered no ill effects but left before the race and still lives in Michigan, never returning even for a visit.

We made the Run from the South, starting at Orlando. Until about an hour before the signal gun we remained in camp a mile from the line to rest our horses and avoid exciting them. All but one of our party of seven mounted men rode one pony and led another, changing mounts frequently for we knew we had a long, hard ride ahead of us to the very center of the Strip and tests had showed that our small ponies would make much better time ridden turn about. Father and two other men were in a spring wagon. Our bunch was easy to locate, as we carried the banner, "For Christ's Crown and Covenant," which our Covenanter forefathers had followed to Scotland's battlefields. All seven horsemen and my father staked claims.

On the way back home from the race we were sleeping in our camp on the banks of Black Bear, southeast of Garber, when one of my cousins was bitten by a rattlesnake. We had no medicine of any kind and not even a sip of whiskey could be found in any of the many surrounding camps. Our grub-box did contain a plentiful supply of onions, which my brother-in-law, Jim McFarland, recalled were said to be effective in drawing out snake bite poison. So we cut an onion in half and applied it to the wound. When one onion was green with poison, a fresh one was

applied. We broke camp and drove all night toward Cathie and medical assistance continuing the onion treatment. It was highly effective, for my cousin was scarcely ill from the bite and recovered in record time.

Some weeks later I had been up here looking after our claims and started to walk to Enid to the train. I slept in the dry bed of Red Rock Creek, about twenty miles this side of Enid. In the morning as I walked up the creek, I met a large otter, which I shot through the head with the small six-shooter I was carrying for protection. To my chagrin I had no knife in my pocket. Rather than give up the fine pelt I carried the otter, and the thirty pound burden seemed like three hundred pounds to me before I reached Enid but I had the otter.

From the middle of January '94 we lived in a "soddy" on my claim until we had built the house across the road for my brother-in-law, Jim McFarland. I spent the winter hauling the lumber for that house from Perry and brother John, who was a carpenter, and Father and I built it. Our chief entertainment was the discovery of new neighbors as they moved in, finding out who they were and where they came from and making their acquaintance.

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Once I was driving four horses from here to Kansas and camped near the Great Salt Plain. The horses grazed about the wagon as usual until after dark, when with much snorting, away galloped all four. There, I was, many miles from nowhere, with only a wagon. There was nothing I could do but wait for morning. Finding a settler in the morning, he and I rode his team six or seven miles toward home and found and captured the frightened horses, so I continued my journey.

Billings was a lively prairie-dog town in '93. Most of Billings lies on my father's claim, as the Billings water tower marks the southeast corner of his quarter. Where there are prairie dogs there are rattlers, for the dogs burrow down to water and the rattlesnakes simply move into the dogs' comfortable apartments with a water system. The industrious dogs are powerless to evict their poisonous tenants.

Between water holes, Father was waiting to test their depth ahead of the plow on the present site of Billings. He felt a sharp bite on his heel. Turning around to see what had bitten him, he heard a rattler's warning "buzz" but could not retreat quickly enough to avoid being struck again on the toe by the very large, old rattler. I sucked the poison

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out as well as I could, immediately; and someone rode out for Dr. Brafford who brought him through a serious time.

We had our first religious services in May of '94 in a booth of poles covered with branches from Bunch Creek in "Indian arbor" style on the southwest corner of J. C. Noonan's farm, where our first Pleasant Valley School was later built. The Reverend Mr. Snavely was one of our ministerial visitors.

One time my good friend Tom Brown had arranged to help us move three hundred head of cattle into Kansas. He came over to Bobbitt's where we were herding and told us he had been exposed to smallpox and dared not go with us, but would send Ed Majors with us in his stead, which was the beginning of a life-long friendship with Ed. We still exchange Christmas letters. He lives at Hinton.

Our district cornered Prairie Center on the southeast and we did not travel back and forth so readily as now. I also herded cattle in the districts, as no fences made it necessary to herd our usual run of three hundred head to utilize the fine wheat pasture. When the issue as to whether Oklahoma would enter statehood wet or dry impended, I gave prohibition lectures and chalk-talks in school houses and churches in six counties, including Dayton School house in my itinerary. I bought

Mr. Vacin's telephone on the old farmer-owned, Dayton line.

July 16, 1932, a great, shaggy, 101 Ranch buffalo with a disposition as ugly as his looks elected to spend the day in our heretofore peaceful community. He leaped our fences nimbly with a standing jump, plodded through our fields and drank from our west pond. Neighbor boys spent a thrilling day trying to corral him. A circus would have attracted less attention in the neighborhood, and his sudden appearance at a home or to a threshing crew in the field caused as much consternation as an African lion would have.

When the 101 Ranch cowboys came for him the buffalo eluded them, outran their horses, chased farm horses round and round the pasture, circled the golf course several times with the cowboys in mad pursuit. Escaping his pursuers by an agile leap over the fence, he struck out with a long leaping lope similar to a coyote's gallop. He covered miles with an incredibly few bounds. Galloping down the full half mile length of Billings' main street he spread consternation and alarm among the busy Saturday evening crowd. Turning into the residence section with the excited townsmen at his heels, the buffalo crashed across lawns and through chicken pens too high to hurdle, stopping for

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nothing until a cowboy finally lassoed him, threw him and loaded him into a truck, ranchward bound.

Forty years previously buffaloes roamed this land at will, but I never expected to be able to show my wife and daughter a buffalo on our own place; demonstrating what incredible speed and agility these awkward looking beasts possess and how formidable a herd of them must have been.