

INDEX CARDS

Ranching--Creek Nation
Leasing--Creek Nation
Perryman, Legus
Perryman, George
Ranching--Cherokee Nation
Tulsa
McKellop, Albert Pike
Cattle--Shipping
Cowboys
Rogers Family
Muskogee
Allotments--Leasing

Reminiscences of D. H. Middleton
A Ranchman of Indian Territory Days
Given to Miss Ella Robinson-research worker

It was along about 1880, that there was a general exit of stockmen to the Indian Territory, caused by the extreme drouth at that time in Texas. The ranchmen would feed their cattle during the winter months, beginning to ship them out about the first of April; at which time the grazing was fairly good.

I began shipping my cattle in 1890, from our ranch near Abilene, Texas to Tulsa, Indian Territory. The first year I leased my pastures from George Perryman and his brother Legus Perryman; the latter was an ex-chief of the Creek Nation. Legus had succeeded in having the Creek Council pass a law permitting cattle to be pastured in the Creek Nation.

The Cherokees would not allow cattle from Texas to be shipped into the Cherokee Nation; so the only way the Texas stockmen could gain access to the Cherokee Nation was to put them in the name of some Cherokee. This plan did not work out so advantageously always, for once in awhile the Cherokee owner failed to release his claim to the owner of the cattle.

I leased all the land bordering on the Cherokee Nation from Tulsa to the Verdigris river, near Catoosa. This pasture extended from East to West about twenty miles and from north to south about six miles. At that time Tulsa had one general store and drug-store and a small frame building near the Frisco depot was the best hotel. While near Tulsa, a friend that I enjoyed, whose companionship I greatly appreciated, was Dr. Sam G. Kennedy. He later married an Osage girl, from one of the

-2-

best families of that Nation; her allotment proved very valuable in oil. Harry Hall was another very pleasant friend in those days.

In 1892, I leased my pastures near Muskogee, along the M. K. T. tracks from Muskogee to Checotah, maintaining a Ranch house near Oktaha, shipping my cattle to and from that point. I leased these pastures from Perry Murphy and A. P. McKellop.

We kept on hand from eight to ten thousand head of cattle; if I found that I did not have enough cattle to fill the grazing capacity, I went to southern Texas and bought more to add to the regular herd. At that time cattle could be bought very cheap, especially in the spring. One year I was able to buy several thousand head at six dollars a head.

It was interesting, as the season advanced, to watch the cattle gradually fatten and become ready for the market. We usually began our shipping to market along the latter part of August.

The best markets were Chicago, St. Louis, and Kansas City. The market was dependent on the latest quotations.

When the time came to begin shipping out the cattle, the boys would round up a good sized herd. I, with the help of some of the boys, would ride in among the herd and cut out the best from the bunch. As we were able to get the animal we had selected outside of the herd, one of the boys would be ready to take the animal and drive it to an enclosure until our required number was filled.

It took ten or fifteen men for the regular duties on the Ranch; such as riding fence and gathering up all drifting cattle which might escape the vigilance of the fence riders. These boys were usually very

-3-

bright and intelligent, for it required plenty of common sense to do this work.

Shipping days were interesting though exceedingly tiresome. The men would get out early while the cattle were fresh, the dew still on the ground, and drive the cattle to the best place for a roundup; by the time they would get all the cattle they needed bunched, they as well as their horses would be tired out.

The ranch cook would be somewhere in sight, and when the boys found time they were ready to eat. The snack would perhaps be a rib of beef stuck on a sharp stick and broiled over an open fire; that not available, good rare steak would be fried in a huge skillet, added to this would be a pot of beans, and also a pot of black coffee. The horse "Rustler", too, would be there with fresh mounts for the boys. We always had a good number of trained "Cutting" horses, very similar to the polo ponies of today; in fact, I sold quite a number of my horses to polo players.

I remember, away back before our advent to the Indian Territory, Chief Rogers of the Cherokee Nation, father of the late Will Rogers, came to my father's ranch at Abilene, Texas, to buy a herd of cattle. After the deal was closed he asked my father about selling him a certain horse, which was extra good at cutting out the cattle, which he had been riding. We had it loaded on with the cattle and shipped home.

Muskogee was quite in its infancy, when I built my first home there in 1895, soon after my marriage. I married Frances Wainwright, the

-4-

daughter of Judge and Mrs. Thomas Wainwright of Fayetteville, Arkansas.

I had the honor of serving, as Councilman, with Major Byrnes, the first Mayor of Muskogee; the other members were Messrs. C. W. Turner, Nate Gibson, and W. T. Hutchings. Later on I served as Mayor, the first after the adoption of the Commission form of Government.

A colorful character in the early days of Muskogee was Judge Thomas, father of Mrs. Grant Foreman; he was Federal Judge there for a good many years. When Tans Bixby, another interesting character, with several other prominent citizens, established the Country Club, they selected me as treasurer, an office I held for several years.

I became interested with C. W. Turner, one of the early substantial merchants of Muskogee, in several business ventures. We bought the Commercial Bank, at that time located on the corner of Main and Broadway, from George Williams. By the way, George Williams is now, and has been for several years, Mayor of my neighbor town of Monrovia, here in California. He is hale, and happily disposed as of yore.

Mr. Turner and myself also organized the Muskogee Development Co. We leased from the Creek Indians, after allotment, several thousand acres of land, built houses and barns, fenced the land and put it in cultivation. Our agreement was to pay the allottees so much an acre, and deed to them the improvements; after allowing us to use the land for five years, they were to have possession. After spending about two hundred thousand dollars on these leases and improvements drastic changes in the laws were made. This was often the case about anything

-5-

pertaining to the Indians; so this venture proved more than worthless.

My family and myself have been in California since 1924, very happy in the change; but will always have a kindly feeling for all Muskogee people. There are a great number of the old timers located in California.