

CHISUM, JOHN C.

INTERVIEW

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Interviewer, Virgil Coursey,
July 22, 1937.

Interview with Mr. John C. Chisum,
214 West Cypress,
Altus, Oklahoma.

Born December 15, 1870, Texas.

Parents John C. Chisum, Texas.
Elizabeth Buchanan, Louisiana.

I was born in Central Texas and came to Greer County in September, 1888. At that time this part of the country was under the jurisdiction of Texas and remained such until March 16, 1896, when it was declared by the Supreme Court that it was part of the United States, and Oklahoma Territory. Territorial government was set up soon after-- in about sixty days. Up to that time all remained here as squatters on undetermined territory. Soon afterwards, in 1897, we were permitted by a special Act of Congress to home stead one hundred sixty acres of land free except for filing fees, and also we were allowed to purchase one hundred sixty acres additional at one dollar an acre.

In 1898 the country was opened to general settlement.

When I came here this was virgin territory, very sparsely settled. Only the choicest land and locations were settled—along streams and watering places. In two or three years the country was reasonably well settled and a great deal of the land put into cultivation. The first crops were wheat, oats, corn and maize; no cotton until about 1895. After some wind storms and slight drouths, people began to plant cotton. The nearest gins were at Wichita Falls.

In about 1896 there were gins at Vernon and Altus, and at Navajo and Mangum in 1897. The first gins were run by thrasher engines. Later on, modern gins were built and this eventually became a cotton center.

The nearest railroad was at Vernon. Later, in 1900-1901, the Rock Island was built into Mangum. The first railroad into Altus was the Frisco, built in 1903. The Orient made a survey in 1902 but did not complete the road until 1906. The Katy built in 1909.

Having come here as a boy of seventeen, I have seen this country in its virgin state with turkey, prairie dogs and open ranch land. I have seen people living in dugouts with crude implements, but the early settlers were happy and prosperous. In many instances those who came with the least,

came out with the most. They rustled work when they could get it. Many of them are prosperous home owners, still possessing their original property. Those who stayed and hung on made the best of it.

I lived with my grandfather until my father moved here in 1887. I married in 1891 and reared seven children. I started as a farmer but soon became a carpenter and contractor. Have been county surveyor for twenty-four years. I have had a good deal to do with establishing of roads and building of schools.

I am a grandson of John Chisum, who was a first cousin of John Chisum, cow man of Texas. Often spoken of as "Cow John" of Texas. He came to Texas from Tennessee in 1830-1835 and established a ranch about 1860. He probably drove herds from Texas to Kansas in the early 1868-1870.

About that time he moved his ranch to New Mexico near Roswell. I do not claim that he established any particular trail but only as other men he drove cattle north across the Indian Territory to railroads in Kansas. Like other cattlemen he was gradually pushed west on account of grass

and free range. John Chisum was an old bachelor and never married. He died in a hospital in St. Louis, Missouri, at the age of seventy-five or seventy-six.

My father, by the same name as Cow-John Chisum, was a Texas Independence veteran in the war of 1836. He died and was buried in this county.