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INTERVIEW WITH NAT DICKERSON

Vinita, Oklahoma, Rt. 3,

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FIELD WORKER, JAMES R. GARSELOWKY.

Indian Pioneer History, S-149

My name is Nat Dickerson. I was born four miles northwest of Fort Scott, Kansas, December 16, 1863.

My father's name was William Cal Dickerson, a white man.

My mother's name was Mary (Ellis) Dickerson, also a white woman.

I married Mary F. Tucker, a part breed Shawnee Indian, who was the daughter of Dudley H. and Ella M. Tucker. My wife was born March 2, 1881, and died November 23, 1911. To this union two boys, David and Calvin, and two girls, Willie Ellen and Lee Dickerson, were born.

Willie Ellen married Ray Jackson and they were the parents of four children living and one who died in infancy, Mary Ellen died in November, 1933.

My parents lived near Fort Scott all during the Civil War, but in 1868 they moved to seven miles northwest of Parsons, Kansas, in Neosho county, and they were living there when the H.K.&T. was racing with the Missouri Pacific to reach the Indian Territory.

They were building so fast that they did not take time to throw up a grade for their rails, but laid them right on top of the ground, until they came to a grade, when a cut or fill would be made. They succeeded in reaching the Territory first, and were promised every other alternate section of land by the U. S. government for the first railroad that would build through the Territory. They built right on through the Territory, but the Missouri Pacific, which later became the Frisco, tied up at Vinita and did not build on west for several years. Both roads reached Vinita in 1871, and the Frisco crossed the Katy where the present site of Vinita now stands, but the town had already been established three miles south, on Cabin creek, but was moved northward to what they called the junction. The town was going under the name of Downingsville at that time.

PACIFIC WAS FIRST HOTEL

Henry Eiffert, a Cherokee lawyer, built the first hotel in Vinita, at the junction of the two railroads, and called it the Pacific Hotel. The town went under

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the name of Downingsville for several years, after it was moved northward to the junction. Johnson Thompson owned the first Grocery Store in Vinita, and was the first mayor of Downingsville. He had been conducting a store on Grand river in Delaware district before the Civil War, and moved to the new town when it first started.

MOVES TO TERRITORY.

I came to the Indian Territory with my parents in 1878 and we first settled on the Bob Klaus place, across the river from where Bernice now stands, in Delaware district, Cherokee Nation. The following year we moved across the river to the Sut Beck place, one mile south of Bernice.

I had three brothers and two sisters who came to the Territory with us, and I left the farming at home for them, and went to work on Nat Skinner's cattle ranch, on Paw Paw creek, about seven miles west of Vinita. I worked several years for him and then went to Billie Miller's ranch, near the Skinner ranch.

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CH. ROKEE LAWS END

I think it was in 1898 that the Cherokee laws ended, and the United States courts took over the jurisdiction of all the laws that the Cherokee Nation had been keeping enforced, and this required a great many more deputies working under the United States Marshal. I was named as one of a posse to work under Heck Bruner, one of the regular deputy marshals.

TROUBLE IN HILLS

About the first trouble we encountered was cattle stealing in the hills. Farmers from Tahlequah on north to Spavinaw were complaining of losing their cattle and the charge was, that they were being taken by a bunch of young Indians and were being sold to a man by the name of John Morrison and to Sam Zeno, a Jew who had married a Cherokee girl and who had a big ranch on Lynch's Prairie about five miles north of the town of Spavinaw.

The officers got after Zeno and Morrison and they turned to the officers the names of several Indians,

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who had been selling them cattle, and agreed to help capture them.

POSSE SELECTED FOR RAID

Twelve men were selected to raid the hills and bring in the men who had been stealing cattle in the hills. It was composed of four regular deputy United States Marshals, Payton Tolbert, who was to act as captain of the bunch, Ples Thompson, T. Wyman Thompson and D. M. Webb.

The other eight men who were mustered as a posse were; John Tolbert, John Davis, John Parks, Henry Kerr, George Webb, Joe Knight, W. R. Thompson and Nat Dickerson. We met at the Island Ford, on Grand river, at dusk and at midnight we crossed the river to Sam Zeno's place, on Lynch's Prairie.

Sam told us that the boys were to bring a bunch of cattle in to sell in three days from that time and he took us to a big hollow, at the south end of Lynch's Prairie, where we camped and waited for three days.

FIRST OF WICKLIFF TROUBLE

John Morrison, who had been waiting for the boys to bring the cattle in, had Louis Zeno to come and tell

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us that some of the boys would be at the home of Louis Wickliff that night, and that he would stay all night there himself, and would come out on the back porch and light a cigar, when he wanted us to raid the house. Louis Wickliff was a fine old Indian and had never been accused of anything wrong, but Morrison had turned in two of his boys, Louis, Jr., and Charley Wickliff, as being in the bunch we were after.

We were waiting at the barn for a signal to raid the house, when young Louis Wickliff came to the barn and started to get his horse and leave. We arrested him without any trouble.

Morrison appeared on the porch a short time after that, and we surrounded the house. Payton Tolbert knocked on the front door, and Louis Wickliff came to the door. Tolbert told him what we wanted and he said there was only one of the boys in the house, and that was Charley. He told Charley what we wanted, and Charley sent us word that he had plenty of ammunition and would fight it out with us. Tolbert had the women and children sent out of the house, and while they were leaving Charley

came out at the back door and was covered by four Winchesters, and gave up without a fight. The two Wickliff boys were the only ones in the house, besides the family.

EXPECTED BOOTLEGGER

We learned from John Morrison that the Wickliff boys were expecting a bootlegger there that night, with some whiskey. It was a cold frosty night and we took our two prisoners in by the fire and some of the boys went down the road to way-lay the bootlegger. About 2 o'clock in the morning we heard his horse coming up the road, but just before he got to us he stopped and we never did see him.

Part of our posse went on down Saline creek and brought back five more Indians and we took them to Vinita, and from there to the Muskogee jail, where young Louis Wickliff took sick and died.

MORRISON LEAVES COUNTRY

After these boys were arrested and placed in jail, John Morrison got on a horse and left the country. His horse, bridle and saddle all came back home in a few days after he left, and it was given

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out that he had been killed, but we always thought it was a ruse to throw the Indians off his track, as he was afraid they would kill him for turning them in.

CHARGES DISMISSED

After John Morrison disappeared from the country, Sam Zeno refused to appear against the Indians and the charges were dismissed against them, but not until young Louis Wickliff had died in jail at Muskogee.

CAPTAIN WHITE RILES YOUNG WICKLIFFS

Captain G. S. White, United State Marshal, armed with a warrant for Charley Wickliff went to the home of Louis Wickliff, Sr., and when the old man refused, or did not tell him where Charley was, it is said he began to abuse the old man and went so far as to sear his feet with a hot iron. Wickliff insisted that Charley had gone away and he did not know where he was.

When Charley returned and learned what Captain White had done to his father, he went on the war path, and sent word that he would kill him, if he ever set foot across Grand river again.

GILSTRAP GOES AFTER WICKLIFFS

Ike Gilstrap, a big 250 pound man, who had just entered the U. S. Deputy Marshal's force, was sent over by Captain White to round Charley Wickliff up and bring him in. He went to the home of Charley Wickliff, on Spavinaw, but Charley was not at home. Charley said, that Gilstrap told his wife, if she would accede to his wishes, that he would not bother Charley, but she refused him, and he came back another day with a good sized posse and a blood hound. Charley had two of his younger brothers with him the day Gilstrap was on his trail with a blood hound. Tom Wickliff, who was big and fat, said he ran until his tongue lolled out and he could go no farther, and all at once they doubled back up on the side of a hill, and when Gilstrap and his posse passed down the hollow, on their trail, they let him have it. Gilstrap and the blood hound were killed, but the Wickliff boys said they let the rest of the posse out-run their bullets.

HENRY VIER NEXT VICTIM

After the death of Ike Gilstrap, who was killed by the Wickliffs, the whole United States deputy force was on the

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lookout for them, and they were continually on the scout and naturally thought that every deputy who came on their side of the river was looking for them. They were full-blood Cherokee Indians and didn't talk much English.

Henry Vier, another new deputy who had just been on the force a short time, was sent across the river, all alone, to arrest a whiskey peddler. He was an easy going fellow, and had no ill will toward any man, and naturally thought the Wickliff boys would not molest him, if he went alone.

Vier went to the house where the whiskey peddler lived, and was shown in the front room by the man's wife. He started to go right on into the kitchen through a door that was closed, when the lady of the house told him not to go in there. He just opened the door and started in anyway, and the Wickliff boys shot him just as he entered the door.

That put Charley, Tom and another younger brother in bed with the government and things begin to look bad

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for them. They were continually on the scout, and in some way, which may have been accidental, one of the brothers shot Charley and killed him.

OTHER TWO GIVE UP

After the death of Charley Wickliff some of their friends got in touch with the Mayes County officers, who in turn made arrangements with the U. S. Officers not to prosecute the other two, if they would come in and give up. They did and are today living a peaceful life, and are law abiding citizens.

HECK BRUNER DROWNS

Heck Bruner, one of the most competent officers I knew, as well as the most venturesome, moved to Pryor and his wife took charge of a hotel there. He begged me to go to Mayes County with him, as I had been with him two years, but I had just gone through one experience that took all the marshaling out of me, and refused him.

Heck Bruner went on without me, but was still in the government service when he met his death. He in company with Vet Thompson started across Grand river one day, and the river was just about bank full, and the ferry boat was

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on the other side, and the ferryman gone. He told Thompson he would just swim across and get the ferry boat and set them across. He got almost across, when he went under and drowned.

WHY I QUIT THE SERVICE

I had been given a warrant to serve on a fullblood by the name of Tyler Tilden. He couldn't talk a word of English, but made me understand that he wanted to send his boy somewhere before he went away. I waited until I began to get uneasy that he had sent the boy after help, when the boy came walking up with a saddle, which he wanted to use in making the long ride to Vinita.

When he went to leave, he picked up his baby and cried until I thought his heart would break. After that scene I told myself that if I ever got back to Vinita I would never be guilty of dragging another man away from his baby. That is why I did not go to Mayes County with Bruner, and continue on the marshal's force.

NED CHRISTIE KILLED

Ned Christie was another Cherokee Indian the Government could not get their hands on. They had held a warrant for him on some minor charge for several years, but he always evaded them.

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He lived in the hills, somewhere near Tahlequah. Finally they sent Heck Bruner, Charley Copeland, L. P. Isibol and a lot of others to make a drive for him. They went to his log cabin and surrounded it before day, but he refused to come out. They filled his cabin full of lead, and he likewise took a crack at every one who stuck his head or shoulder from behind a tree.

The fight had been going on for sometime, when it was decided to set fire to his cabin and force him to come out. They were afraid to venture up that close to the house, in the open, so they got behind his wagon and pushed it up to the house in front of them for a shield, and then set his house on fire. It had the desired effect. When it began to get too hot for him inside he made a dash out the back door in the dark, and succeeded ^{in escaping} to ~~escape~~ the bunch who surrounded the house and ran off down the trail to his spring.

A SHREWD OFFICER.

Only one officer in that crowd was shrewd enough to know just what would happen if Christie did make his escape from that bunch of officers. Heck Bruner, without saying a word to any body, went down near the spring, when the house

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was set on fire, and he told me he was sure he would run right down that path, and he did, and one shot from Bruner's gun sent Ned Christie to the happy hunting ground.

, L. P. Isibol, city marshal of Vinita, who was in that posse, was shot in the shoulder, as he attempted to fire from behind a tree, and remained a cripple in that arm for life. he was the only one struck by any of Ned Christie's bullets.