

DOBBS, J. C.

INTERVIEW

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FIELD WORKER JAMES R. CARSKLOWEY
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INTERVIEW WITH J. C. DOBBS
224 South 5th Street
Vinita, Oklahoma

My name is J. C. Dobbs. I live at 224 South Fifth Street, Vinita, Oklahoma. I was born June 2, 1851, near Nashville, Tennessee, and came to the Indian Territory in 1882. I stopped in Tahlequah and began working at the carpenter trade. When I had been there about one year a Cherokee Presbyterian preacher came to me and wanted me to go up to his cattle ranch, near Adair, in Cooweescoowee District and build him a set of ranch houses and barns.

He told me that some bankers back in Tennessee were going to finance him in the cattle business, and they were going to open up a cattle ranch up there. In those early days a white man could not hold cattle and graze them on the Indians' land in his own name. Thompson told me the bankers were furnishing him everything, including the buildings and fencing and giving him a half interest in the profits of all the cattle he handled.

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G. T. Thompson was a nephew of old Uncle Johnson Thompson, one of the early day merchants, who had grown rich before the war operating a store in Delaware District, on the old Military Trail, and after the war was one of the first merchants to establish a store in Vinita Indian Territory.

When I had completed a set of buildings and barns on the Thompson ranch, he hired me to fence 3000 acres of land, which was to be used for farming and hay meadow. In those days we did not fence a pasture for the cattle, but fenced the farm land so the cattle could not molest it, and the cattle ran on an open range. I fenced this 3000 acres with locust post and put 9 bar^{ed} wires on the post, making it hog tight, so that a hog could not crawl through the wire.

The farm or ranch was located at the south end of a big hill, with timber on it, just at the edge of the prairie, about eight miles southwest of the town of Adair, Indian Territory, and about ten miles northwest of Pryor.

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BROKE 1700 ACRES SOD

When I had completed fencing the three thousand acre farm, Thompson employed me to break out 1700 acres of sod, which would be used to raise feed for the stock. He had purchased a sawmill to saw most of the lumber for the buildings, and he told me I could use the steam engine to help do the breaking. I pulled six gang plows behind the steam engine, and also had all the mule teams on the place hitched to separate sod plows, and we soon had a farm opened up.

HAD ANOTHER RANCH AT CHOUTEAU

G. T. Thompson had another cattle ranch at Chouteau, about fifteen miles south of the one we had just opened up, where he bought and kept 7000 head of Texas beef cattle. He seemed to be a man who wanted to do everything just right, and when he brought the 7000 head of beef cattle up from Texas, he also brought with them an experienced foreman to look after them.

BOUGHT SKINNER RANCH

Thompson seemed to have no end to his backing, so he bought another ranch from Nat Skinner, located about

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five miles east of the one we had just built. He also bought 1000 head of cows from Skinner.

I think it was the year of 1886 when Thompson finally got stocked up and ready for his first winter. He got me to go over to the Skinner ranch and take charge of the 1000 head of cows. He had put up plenty of feed for his 8000 cattle and his work stock, and felt no uneasiness about getting the cattle through the winter. It was the first winter for all of his entire force, and we found out later that the Texas man he brought up for a foreman wasn't used to this northern climate, and didn't seem to like it.

5000 CATTLE FREEZE TO DEATH

The foreman Thompson hired to look after his cattle at Chouteau was named Hurd. He was from a warm climate, and could not stand the severe winter of 1886. It was bitter cold all winter, and Hurd let his cattle drift off to the east on Grand River, where they went to get out of the terrible north wind. He set right there waiting for the weather to moderate until he lost right at 5000 head of his beef cattle, which he let freeze to

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death. Enough of my cows on the other ranch froze to make out an even 5000 cattle frozen to death that winter, out of 8000 we started with.

SHIPS HIDES BY CAR LOAD

We hired men with teams to skin the cattle and we shipped hides by the car load. The men would just cut around the heads and split the hides down the center and hitch a team to the hide and pull it off. In that way they got along pretty fast. If they used the old system of taking off the hide with knives, they never could have made it.

SHERIFF CUTS 4 MILE OF FENCE

We put the rest of our cattle on the range when the grass was big enough, and along in the spring the sheriff of Cooweescoowee came along and said we were violating the Cherokee law by having too much land fenced, and he cut the staples loose on four miles of the nine wire fence I had built and let it down to the ground, so that anything could pass over it, but the custom was, after he had gone, to go along and tack it back, and that is what I did and nothing was ever done about it.

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BROKE EVEN ON CATTLE

When the cattle were fat Thompson shipped them to market, and he told me he made enough on them to break even for the money they had been out on them even after losing 5000 head by the freeze.

After that experience Reverend Thompson was ready to go back to the ministry.

JOHN F. WARREN TAKES RANCH

A white man, by the name of John F. Warren, who had just come here from Maine, and married a Cherokee girl by the name of Ida Burns, bought the ranch. He did not have any money, and the Tennessee bankers sold him the farm and everything else they had, including the teams and sawmill, on credit. He promised to pay them but I have been told that he never paid them a cent, although he operated the ranch until Statehood. He handled some stock, but used the place mainly for farming purposes. He raised six children, some of whom were ^{born} too late to get allotments, and for each one of these he bought eighty acres of land after Statehood and allotment.

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DR. F. B. FITE BUYS SKINNER RANCH

Dr. F. B. Fite, of Muskogee, who had just married a Cherokee girl by the name of Julia Patton, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. W. C. Patton of Vinita, bought the Nat Skinner ranch, located at Squaw Hollow, four miles south of Adair from G. T. Thompson.

W. C. Patton gave his daughter another 1000 acre ranch, located on Rock creek, four miles north of Adair, and I made a deal with Dr. Fite to go up there from the Squaw Hollow place and farm on his Rock Creek farm.

I paid him one dollar per acre for the farm land and he furnished me 500 head of cattle, 60 brood mares and a horse and Jack, and he gave me one half of the increase for the three years that I stayed on his farm.

MAKE ANOTHER NINE WIRE FENCE

The first thing Dr. Fite had me do when I located on his Rock Creek farm was to fence the 1000 acres W. C. Patton gave his wife with a nine wire fence, making another hog tight fence.

Dr. Fite put a man by the name of Charley Hawkins on his ranch, four miles south of Adair and he worked for Doctor Fite until Statehood came and they had to quit the cattle business.

THE CATTLE MAN AT STATEHOOD

When the Curtis Bill was passed by Congress it provided for the allotment of lands throughout the Five Civilized Tribes. It provided a certain acreage of average land for each member of the tribe enrolled by the Dawes Commission. Anyone having more than that amount of land in his possession was given a certain length of time to dispose of his improvements.

This caught the cattle men good and plenty. They had to get rid of their cattle, or get other range, as they had to give up thousands of acres of land they had been holding in the name of some Indian; or if a cattle man had an Indian wife and the acreage was held in his own name, such excess had to be turned back to the Nation.

Some of them hunted up negroes and made arrangements to buy their land after allotment, agreeing to pay them so much money as soon as they could make a deed. Ten dollars an acre was the top price paid for good prairie land, and great amounts of it were bought much cheaper. Thousands of acres were deeded back to white men as soon as the negro received his deed. Not all of the cattle men, however, bought lands.

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It hit John F. Warren, who had bought the G. T. Thompson ranch, pretty hard. He had an Indian family, but they were not sufficient to take up near all the land he had in his possession, and he had to give it up for allotment.

Dr. Fite sold his Rock Creek ranch to Sam Fraizer and Cal Gunter, who allotted their families on them, but he managed to hold most of his Squaw Hollow ranch, four miles south of Adair, and he continued in the cattle business there several years after Statehood, under the management of Charley Hawkins.

W. C. Patton, of Vinita quit the cattle business, when he gave his daughter, Mrs. F. B. Fite the thousand acre ranch on Rock Creek.

J. O. Hall of Vinita had another big cattle ranch just below the Patton ranch on Rock Creek which went into the hands of allottees at Statehood. In fact the cattle business on a large scale in the Cherokee Nation went out of business with Statehood.