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Merrill A. Nelson
Field Worker
Indian-Pioneer History
May 17, 1937

Interview with Jim (James L.)
Nelson, Breckinridge, Oklahoma.
Born July 15, 1862, father was
Jonas Nelson, mother, Ellen
Amanda Hilyer, both of Ohio.

JIM NELSON'S STORY

On the hottest day of the hottest month,
July 15, 1862, there was born a baby, myself, who was
to travel far from his native state as his parents
and ancestors had done before him.

The families of both my parents were from Ohio
but they had both migrated to Indiana and married in
1861. My father's ancestors were from England and
Germany and so when this new family was formed it was
natural that they should continue to travel. In these
days people believed in large families. My grandmother
on mother's side had had 14 children, and my grandmother
on my father's side had 12. My own mother had six chil-
dren of her own and three by a previous marriage of her
husband's to care for.

So in 1866, they moved to Iowa where they wintered
near Mt. Ayr. And in 1867, they continued on into Mis-
souri. Pushing on in 1875, they came to Caldwell, Kansas-

rather virgin country in those days, where they homesteaded.

In 1880, in the spring, the Santa Fe was building a line on south from Wichita, and I decided to work for them. I worked as a section hand for the Lawrence, Leavenworth and Gulf, now the Santa Fe. Also, for the Wellington to Kiowa; then the South branch of the L. L. & G., now the Santa Fe. In the fall, I went back to school, securing about eight years of education altogether.

From here it was only a short step to Oklahoma and 1881, found me working on the ranch of Bill Mallaley near Pond Creek--the Running W. Ranch; I worked for him early in 1881, through the roundup. At that time, he was in control of a large herd numbering 12 or 15,000 head. Bill was a good scout. He had previously worked for the Government about 1870. His place was on Pond Creek, near Jefferson. I was employed as a cook. We went on the trail for the first round-up.

We crossed the Cimarron, next Indian Creek, then came to Crawford Spring and camped, finally reaching the junction where we expected the other herd. We had

gone almost to Sugar Loaf in western Oklahoma, so here east of Sugar Loaf, finding that the round-up outfit from the south was coming, we turned south to Cantonment. Here we met the other outfit. We started first on the south side of Quinlan's ranch and came around to the east side of Bill Mallaley's ranch, and came into camp.

Then I worked for Blair and Batten. These men had a 'beef' herd. That is, a herd grazing here and there with no fixed headquarters, or ranch to return to.

On the second round-up, I worked with Lee and Thompson and the Bar-B-Cue ~~EQ~~. These ranches adjoined so I worked for both. Lee was an old Salvation army captain. I went as a cook and came back as a rider. After the two round-ups, we went through the country around Enid, Breckinridge and Fond Creek and back to the ranch. I suppose there are few now living who were there then. My pal was a man by the name of Jim Murray who worked with me.

On one of these round-ups there was one horse which was hard to ride. When Bill Wites, one of the outfit, wanted to ride it, Jim Brown would hold its head

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until Wites was mounted. Once Jim let loose of the rope which he was supposed to hand to Wites and it dragged on the horse's heels. The result was that the horse became excited. It bobbed its rider up and down on the saddle horn, hurting his shoulder. This was just east of the Barbecue ranch. The horse was a beauty—a Bay. One day Mallaley came along and noticed the horse. "Do you mind if I ride him?" he asked. For it was the law of the range, that no one should ride someone else's horse without permission. And Mallaley observed the unwritten law even though he was the owner.

"You have as much right to ride it as anybody," declared the cowboys. The horse had been stepping around among the messexes and causing trouble before, but he got the rope loosened as Mallaley went into the saddle. Although Bill Mallaley was one of the most expert horsemen on the range, under these conditions he found it difficult to retain his seat on the mount. It is possible that the horse imagined that instead of a rope, a snake was trying to wind itself around his legs. So having held his place in the saddle a while, he dismounted and ordered the horse sent back

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to the main ranch. And it is not likely that that horse was ridden for sometime again.

I started to ride the line one morning. Jim Murray, whose folks were from Indiana, was with me. I got breakfast and Murray got up and brought the horses in. "Where you goin'?" Murray asked, after I started to drive off. "I'm goin' to drive the cows in". "You would not know which way to driv' em if you found'em," he declared. It turned out just as he said that foggy morning.

My route was about 1½ to 3 miles north, up the branch of Turkey creek from bar-b-q ranch, then I was to take the ridge and go northeast six miles and then back to camp. My horse kept bearing to the left. He should have borne to the right. When he came to a draw, not going the right way, he wanted to take down the draw. When the fog lifted I spied a wagon and a post first. I tried to make for that. But he kept winding to the left. Soon I could see the place from which I had started. By continually bearing to the left we had gone in a circle.

As I said, I worked for B. H. Campbell about two .

years, 1881-2, on the Bar-B-Q, BQ, Ranch. This ranch was located 20 miles west of Enid at the headwaters of Turkey creek.

One day I went for wild horses to Avara. I left our ranch early one day and went clear to Avara and back a distance of about 100 miles after wild horses. In about a day, the man who was with me, John Greer, had to come back on foot. Possibly the going was too fast for him following those wild horses. Among the cowboys I knew were Geo. Collins, a foreman, and Bill Miller.

My last job in this business was after I went back to Caldwell. Here I agreed with a group to take 2,500 cattle from Bar B-Q Ranch on the north Canadian through Cantonment to El Reno, turning them over to the Bent Brothers.

Then I took up freighting. I would deliver different articles, corn and provisions, to the forts from Kansas points. There were two kinds of wagons: the straight type still in use by many farmers and the slanting type. I drove the straight side board type. The slanting type was used mostly in hauling by the

government. The wagon at Miller Brothers ranch was bought in an order of government goods after the Spanish War and is of this latter type.

One time I went with another man from Caldwell. We hauled to Dickey's cow camp above Cantonment, on the north side. The trail was originally on the south side, and crossed over the north side at or near Barrel Springs or Sheridan Roost near the camp. The man who was with me and myself conceived the idea of angling across on the north side and not crossing the river at all.

The Indian Chief, Roman Nose (for whom the new state park is named) came to the camp this side of Dickey Brothers ranch at our first camp, about 5 or 6 days before we reached it. He and another Indian came into our camp. They wanted chuck. They got sassy. They pretended to shoot guns off in an effort to scare us but we were used to Indians and when he said he would go back for a bunch of warriors, we told him to fetch all of them if he wanted to, as we knew he was merely trying to get our chuck. He did not come back. I did not learn much of the Indian language but I did learn their ways.

In September, 1893 (the 16th) I made the "run" with nine men. The group soon scattered but three of us on horseback stuck together. "Here is where I stake," I said. I had made the "run" from near Marshall and was now near the road that goes straight east from Enid. About 15 miles from that city.

As bad luck would have it, I staked school land-- the Northeast 1/4 of Sec. 16, Twp. 22, Range 4. Oscar Riggs staked school land also the northwest 1/4 of Sec. 16, Twp. 22, Range 4. The other man who was with us crossed the section line on 17-22-4. So he received a good claim, though perhaps he did not realize he had missed school land by not staking first. Finally I settled and again I learned I was on school land, in Sec. 11, Twp. 22, Range 4. I contested with a schoolteacher, Anna B. Jarr, and finally I bought off her claim and lived there till 1905. (the old house this lady built is still standing.) Then I moved 6 miles west and $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles north, straight south of Cropper, an almost dead town with only an elevator now, 2 miles east of Breckinridge.

In 1917, I moved to Breckinridge and have been there ever since.

Pat Hennessey's Grave
and Death.

I worked, as I said, with Bill Mallaley, who was the first man at Pat Hennessey's grave. I never talked particularly about this point but I supposed that Pat Hennessey was burned to death because he put up such a fight with the Indians. That was in 1874, I reached Kansas in 1875. It was a custom (which I followed when I went by later) for freighters to drop a stone at Pat's grave. Some said there was a monument there. But that was a mistake. I saw his grave in the early eighties. There was in the early days, an iron fence around his grave. This still is placed about his grave.

I was with Parson Barnard, John Miller and Ed Stinnet at the grave of Pat Hennessey about two years ago. It is difficult to locate it on plains that have been cut up into town lots but I would say that the location is a little further to the north of the present site, perhaps about 80 rods. It is a shame but some ladies' society decided to move the grave to the south side of town, from its position by Cashion's

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grave. I would estimate its actual location as about 80 rods not more from its present location where it has recently moved, back to the north side of the highway. Cashion was one of the first to die in the Spanish American war. I do not claim, however, to be an authority on Pat Hennessey's grave. He died before I reached this country. It was unfortunate that the body was moved from one side of town to the other.

LOCATIONS

There was an old town or stage stop named Skeleton Ranch just north of Skeleton Creek. It is about one mile east and about one-half mile south of where the section road to Breckinridge from North Enid crosses the Rock Island, at North Enid.

The old highway may be seen from two points. One is about one mile east and 1/4 mile north from where the section road from North Enid to Breckinridge crosses the Rock Island. You can see the wagon ruts here still. It is a little to the west (or right though I used to think) of a slight depression in the horizon looking North from the highway to Breckinridge from North Enid. You can also see the highway by the broken ground a little to the West of the remains of Skeleton Ranch. Skeleton ranch can be located on the State hospital grounds by pieces of bone, dishes and other remains.

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It is possible that just where a small draw to the south of this point of the old Skeleton Ranch enters the creek going through the State Hospital grounds, that on both sides of this draw the road ran. Some say you can see the wagon marks where the trail crosses the creek.

I have one sister and three brothers still living. The sister is northwest of Billings, the other brothers are scattered.

Note: Mr. Jim Nelson still keeps up the traditions of the trail. He is a member of the Cherokee Strip Cowpuncher's Ass'n. And with his long white beard and his old fashioned hat he is a striking character who every year for sometime has driven an old Prairie wagon in the Cherokee Strip celebration, held annually in Enid.

TRAILS

The confusion about the trails is caused by the following considerations: The cattle were usually driven to the western most railhead, but as this was constantly moving westward, the roads along which cattle were driven moved westward also. But not the

trail names. A trail and a railroad point to which the railroad is heading do not always coincide in point of time. In some cases as in the case of McCoy of Abilene who had Chisholm mark his famous trail, it is said that the railroad terminal was foreseen and the cattle were driven to a point where the railroad was to come. Others were laid out sometime after the railroad reached a point. The names of the trails did not move when the bulk of cattle, because of settlement along the railroads and in Oklahoma moved westward.

There was an association formed to mark the Chisholm trail. But because the cattle trails were less used as the railroads moved west, the money was diverted to mark trails farther west. The cattle and freight trail of Chisholm split at Dover, formerly Red Fork, adding to the confusion. It rejoined at Chickasha or went to Ft. Sill. Also old men going over the trails in their minds will disagree where it crossed a certain stream. The Arkansas City trail hit the Chisholm trail at Buffalo Springs near Bison. Chisholm, who laid the trail, drove no cattle. Jesse Chisum, a western cowman, drove cattle but laid no

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trails. As I recall the Chisholm trail, it went between Gensman's store and the Monument on the P.O. lawn.

Few people on the three national highways at this point realize they are following an old cattle trail. In early days four-horse stage coaches went down the Chisholm trail as early as 1870. They used six-horse coaches in the mountains. I was near here in 1875 and know.