

NANCE, JOHN

INTERVIEW

13627

88

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INTERVIEW

13627

L.W. Wilson,
Investigator,
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An Interview with Mr. John Nance,
Haskell, Oklahoma.

Mr. Nance was born near Southwest City, Missouri, November 25, 1862 and is of white descent. His parents never lived in the Indian Territory but he himself first entered the Territory in 1879.

Pilgrimage through the Indian Territory.

A wagon train consisting of four covered wagons drawn by mules left Missouri by the way of Arkansas, and Indian Territory enroute to Texas. The route traveled was the old military road which led out of Missouri to Cane Hill, Arkansas, thence in a westerly direction over another old military road that led to the capital of the Cherokee Nation, Tahlequah, thence over an old road running west and bearing south through the town of Maynard, (now out of existence) and at last arrived at Fort Gibson. There were soldiers in the barracks at Fort Gibson; Mr. Nance was seventeen years old at that time. This party of four covered wagons replenished their food supply at Fort Gibson and were

NANCE, JOHN

INTERVIEW

13627

- 2 -

directed to the Texas Road as the most direct route to Texas, and crossed the Arkansas River at the mouth of Grand River by ferry which was the first ferry crossed thus far on their journey as all streams crossed previously had been forded. Texas was entered about twenty miles west of the present town of Denison.

All meals on the trip were prepared on open campfires. They slept in the wagons during inclement weather and usually on the ground during nights when the weather would permit. At no place on their journey were they ever molested by outlaws, or Indians or hindered in their travels in anyway by the United States Marshals.

Many emigrants camped together at a spring or stream at night and many tales were told around those campfires about how the United States Marshals would plant whiskey in the wagons of travelers and then arrest them and threaten to take them to the Federal jail at Fort Smith if they did not pay as much as \$50.00 to \$100.00. If the emigrants had the money it was paid to prevent leaving the women and children behind. Others told stories of being raided by horse thieves, of having their horses stolen and in some instances their provisions taken, leaving the travelers in a pitiable condition.

NANCE, JOHN

INTERVIEW

13627

- 3 -

Towns along the Texas Road were few and far between; the present town of Muskogee was a small village as was Fishertown which no longer exists but was at that time near the South Canadian River a few miles east of the present town of Mufaula.

Below what is now South McAlester, there was a tavern or inn operated by an Indian. At this point there was a road called the California Trail that crossed the Texas Road. This party camped there for two days and emigrants were going east and west on this road as well as north and south on the Texas Road.

The Indians and whites, too, usually lived in log houses, cultivated five or ten acres of ground, and lived on the "masse". The wild fruit, berries and game throughout the length of their travels added materially to the provisions of the emigrants.

After a few years in Texas, Mr. Nance returned to Missouri by train, settled down, married and started life anew, but the roaming fever struck him again, and again he returned with his family to the Indian Territory in 1900 coming by the covered wagon route by Arkansas and

NANCE, JOHN

INTERVIEW

-13627

- 4 -

located near the site of the present town of Stigler, and started farming.

Settlement in the Choctaw Nation

Mr. Nance was comfortably located in a log cabin, with a large fireplace about six miles from the mouth of the Canadian River between Tamaha and Skullyville, Indian Territory on New Year's day, of 1900; and his life for thirty years in this vicinity was pleasant and farming which was the occupation he pursued was profitable.

The Kansas City and Southern Railroad was built through the Choctaw Nation in 1894 and Mr. Nance's closest trading center was the town of Spiro, as Skullyville was about to pass out of existence and did pass away with the building of the Midland Valley Railroad in 1904 when the town of Stigler sprang up.

Early Day Merchants at Stigler, Okla.

The first bank to open was in 1904. It was started in a tent by Mr. C. C. Sloan; the money was kept in a steel vault inside the tent and it was necessary to guard this rag bank day and night for about four months. A building was constructed after four months service in the

NANCE, JOHN

INTERVIEW

13627

- 5 -

tent and the bank moved in the building and became the First National Bank of Stigler.

The first hardware store was also operated in a tent and was owned by a Mr. Furbrash. Doctors of the saddle bag type were Drs. Mitchell, Calloway and Fanin. The first General Merchandise Store was opened by George Simms and William Fears. The first real coal mine began to operate in 1904 and was known as the Acme Mining Company.

Ford and Ferries

The Polk- Parker Ferry crossed the Arkansas River at Tamaha. The Vann Ferry crossed the Canadian River about six miles upstream from its mouth near Mr. Nance's home. The Payne Ferry crossed the Arkansas River at Fort Smith. The Pages Ferry crossed the Poteau River a short way out of Fort Smith near the present town of Bonanza, Arkansas. This was a pole ferry.

The San Bois Ford was on San Bois Creek between Spiro and Stigler.

Statehood

Before statehood the tribal laws of the Choctaws

NANCE, JOHN

INTERVIEW

13627

- 6 -

ruled the Choctaw Nation and Judge Garland held court at Poteau. All white people arrested by the United States Marshals in the vicinity of Stigler, by Marshals, Dan Folsom and Don Gilstrap were jailed and tried at Fort Smith, Arkansas. After the coming of Statehood Stigler was located in Haskell County and the first County Commissioners elected in Haskell County, of whom there were three, were Mr. Patterson, Mr. McGuire and Mr. Nance.

Milo Starr, a cousin of Henry Starr, one day stole a mule from a one-armed man named John Harrell who lived near Vann's Ferry, rode the mule to Stigler, traded it for another mule and left for Spiro. Milo Starr was captured at Spiro after he and the mule had been identified and later he received a term of two years in the penitentiary.

Mr. Nance is proud of the fact that there has never been a bank robbery at Stigler though the bank at one time was operated in a tent.