

INTERVIEWER NORA LORRIN
INDIAN-PIONEER HISTORY 3-149
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INTERVIEW WITH VAN A. NILES
895 South Hadden,
El Reno, Oklahoma
Born Sept. 1, 1877.
Clay Center, Kansas

Father's name, William E. Niles
Born Conn.
Mother's name, Ida May (Grovenberry) Niles
Born Columbus, Okla.

Van A. Niles was born at Clay Center, Kansas, on September 1, 1877. There were four children, three boys and an adopted sister. They came to Oklahoma when he was 14 years old and like the majority of people who came here at that time, were looking for a home in a new location.

They came in a covered wagon, or wagons rather, as there were eight of the wagons in the caravan: all of the wagons belonging to the senior Niles, except two and one of the two belonged to a couple of old maid school teachers, Anna and Kate Davis.

Along with the wagon train the older Niles had some 30 head of cattle and some horses.

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They made camp on the river south of Caldwell, Kansas, to rest up a bit and there came a blustering, heavy, snow storm and they were snowbound at that place for ten days. They were camped close enough to the Oklahoma line, that their stock grazed across the line in Oklahoma while their camp was in Kansas.

The country from Caldwell, Kansas, to Hennessey, Oklahoma, at that time was just straight prairie, and it was known as the Cherokee Strip. They got along fine coming down. They were on the road six weeks, leaving their home in Kansas on the first of January, 1891, and arriving at their destination about the middle of February, having only one mis-hap on the way. One of the wagons got stuck in the Cimarron river and they worked with it an hour before getting it free and Mr. Van Niles and his father were in the icy water most of that time. Mr. Niles says that was one time when he took a bath in the winter time. He and his father were both good swimmers. Crossing the Cimarron, they would take just one wagon across

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at a time; then go back and get another. It was quite a job to ford a river with so many wagons and so much stock.

The girl and one of the youngest boys rode horseback and herded the cattle, and two of the boys drove wagons.

They landed at Old Frisco and from "Old man Dale" rented a place, which included a barn and lots for the stock. The family lived at this place awhile and then bought out a store, from Noah Stuart. It was a grocery and general merchandise store.

Some of the customers whom he remembers were the Coykendalls, Kales, Davises, Halberts, Smiths, and Mr. Tom Shacklett, our present Chief of Police. Old Frisco was a thriving little town at that time and had about 1500 inhabitants. There was a nice, big school house with four rooms downstairs and two above and one church building. It was the Methodist Church.

Their fuel was wood and they obtained it along the North Canadian river. Mr. Miles says that cutting wood

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was about all he did th: first four years he was in Oklahoma.

He used to hunt a lot, in the early 90's turkeys, prairie chickens and quail, and he hunted the game to sell. He got \$2 a dozen for the quail and 15¢ apiece for the prairie chickens. He sold most all of them to a man by the name of J. W. Dix.

Mr. Van Niles carried the mail from Old Frisco to Yukon for four years. Frisco lingered on for quite awhile after Yukon was founded. It did not have quite the sudden death that Reno City did after El Reno was started.

The old maid school teachers who came down with them taught school in Frisco for two years and then went to Oklahoma City and taught there for a number of years.

Mr. Niles' father tried his luck in the Cherokee Strip but was unsuccessful. Mr. Niles and his father made the run when the Kickapoo Reservation was opened to settlement. They were running for town lots and

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they made the run from the west side of the Kickapoo Reservation. The name of the townsite was Renfrow and the site was about eight miles from the west line. Mr. Niles rode a horse and his father drove a wagon. They got some lots, but the townsite had by some mistake been laid out on school land and the settlement just "blew up."

Mr. Niles' father at one time settled on a farm east of Perry. Here he dug a well found salt water and they got up and left it. His father ran the grocery at Old Frisco for about four years. He then bought a 40 acre farm five miles east of El Reno, near Banner. It is part of the J. I. Phelps place now.

Mr. and Mrs. Van A. Niles were married in 1898, and were living on this 40 acres in 1901. Mr. Niles' father owned and ran a little store and post office, located two miles north and two miles east of the present town of Niles, which was named after William E. Niles in 1902.

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In 1901 Mr. Van A. Niles went to Arkansas and Mrs. Niles lived in Banner until he returned and then they moved to the store and post office of his father's. It was across the river and there were no bridges except the toll bridge at Bridgeport. They had to ford the river, hauling freight across it. Mr. Niles states that he has crossed the South Canadian river many a time when it was so dark, you couldn't see your hand before your face. They were keeping a little granddaughter and the child became ill, and Mr. Niles went to bring his daughter Edith, home. When they came to the river it was so dark that they could not see and Mr. Niles unhooked one of the horses and rode across and built a fire on the opposite shore, so that they would have a beacon to drive by and could keep out of the quick sand.

His little store was over-run with Indians; it was so full of Indians at times that you could hardly turn around. They were mostly Cheyennes and Arapahos. Mr. Niles sometimes would sell them a beef, and the

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Indians would have it eaten almost before they could get it skinned. The names of some of the Indians that he remembers, were, "Cut Nose; Powder Face" "Shot-Im-Self" "Left Hand" "Flowing Water" "Running Up" "Big Woman" "Red Sage" "Tom White Shirt" "Kill-em-Stick" "Squeezy" "Big Nose."

The Indians used to dance at the home of Powder Face. His home was located about a quarter of a mile east and a quarter of a mile north of Powder Face Crossing; the crossing is about 19 miles west and three miles south of El Reno. The Niles family have forded the river at that point many times on their way to the Indian dances, which were held so often out there. They attended one Indian dance that lasted all week.

The Indians began their dancing on Sunday evening and did not stop until the same time the following Sunday. Mr. Niles said that if the Indians were tired you could not tell it by their appearance as they looked as fresh as they did when they started.

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Lots of white people attended the Indian Dances out of curiosity. Some of their other recreations were base ball games, horse racing and broncho busting.

Mr. Niles has a double barreled shot gun that he had when he came to Oklahoma. He borrowed it of a neighbor to kill a sick steer, that was down and could not get up. He shot the steer once and failed to kill it. He re-loaded his gun and put a lot of powder in the shell and it burst the gun barrel.

The Niles family have some dishes yet, that they brought to Oklahoma when they came down here, and they also have two cans of plums which they brought with them. Mr. and Mrs. Van A. Niles are the parents of 19 children, 12 of whom are living. Among them are three pair of twins; only one pair of twins is living however. The oldest girl is living in California and they have three of their children still at home, the youngest being 11 years of age. Mr. Niles says that they have had their ups and downs, but none of them has ever gone hungry or had to postpone a meal and they have always had something to wear.