OKLAHOMA'S MILLION ACRE RANCH

By Melvin Harrel*

Every part of our State of Oklahoma is rich with the marks and the trails of men who have made history. If it should seem in this article that the part of Oklahoma which includes Roger Mills County is richer than other places, the writer wishes to acknowledge that he is a novice in the field of writing, and that this part of the state is his home, the home of his parents, grandparents, and great grandparents before him. The dry sandy bed of the Canadian River was his summer playground. The swift, swirling, muddy waters of this ancient river were his fear.

Hidden among faded reports and letters penned more than seventy years ago, is the story of the largest ranch that ever existed in the Territory of Oklahoma. This ranch should be placed in the listings with the largest in the west. The following story is taken from facts that have been discovered in the preparation of a book to be titled, "River Country."

A brief review of the events of history that were enacted within the very boundaries of Oklahoma's largest ranch point out the importance of these lands. The first white men who looked upon the peculiar hills near the Canadian River in the northwest part of Roger Mills County was a band of Spanish soldiers escorting a Catholic Priest, Father Juan De Salas. The hills are now known as the Antelope Hills. Tradition has it that this devout party was enroute to the Sierra Jumanos (Wichita Mountains) to establish a mission in what is now Oklahoma, in the year 1629. The year 1650, Don Diego Cortilla left Mexico City to journey to the Sierra Jumanos, then north to cross the Rio Negra (Washita River) in search of lost gold taken by the Comanches near the Antelope Hills. In the year 1717 a battle was fought by the Spanish with the Comanche Indians

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1 Joseph B. Thoburn, A Standard History of Oklahoma, Vols. I and II (Chicago, 1916); Quotations from the Prairie Traveler, Published in 1859. Personal interviews with Fred Churchill, Sept. 1950, concerning an old battle ground, and the location of same.
near the Antelope Hills. Seven hundred prisoners were taken and sent to the Queen of Spain viz the Spanish Trail, to Vera Cruze. Don Pedro Penot took these captives across the area now called Roger Mills County. Captain Randolph Marcy opened the famous California Road in the year 1849. His surveys mark clearly the Antelope Hills, and the Quartermaster Creek. In the year 1853, Lieutenant A. W. Whipple conducted a survey for a transcontinental railroad following closely Captain Marcy’s California Road through our country. April 28, 1858, Colonel John S. Ford, known as “Old Rip” raised a command in Texas to fight the murderous Comanches, in an effort to stop their raids on Texas settlements. Colonel Ford, with Captain, S. P. Ross, allied with Chief Placido, famed chief of the Tonkawas, Jim Pock Mark, captain of the Anadarcos and Caddos, attacked and won a battle against the notorious Chief Pohebita Quasho, and his ally, Nacona, husband of the captive girl, Cynthia Ann Parker. The battle was fought around the Antelope Hills and at the mouth of Little Robe Creek. 1868 was the year of Custer’s battle with the Cheyennes on the Washita. It seems only fitting that the largest ranch in Oklahoma should occupy this romantic part of the state.

Early cattle industry is divided clearly into two eras: the years of the large cattle syndicates and cattle companies of the late 1870’s an! early 1880’s; and the smaller cattle ranches of the late 1880’s and early 1890’s. Cleveland’s Proclamation of 1885 was the cleavage point.

THE CHEYENNE AND ARAPAHO CATTLE COMPANY

Sometime in the spring of 1876 the first trail herd passed over the western part of the Indian Territory, bound for the new cattle market in Dodge City, Kansas. Two years later enterprising cattle men were trying to lease the lands they were crossing. These lands were tempting, rich with grass so necessary in fattening weary trail herds.

The Cheyenne and Arapaho Cattle Company, popularly called the C. and A. Cattle Company, was organized by stock holders in Texas during the year 1878 with one idea in mind: to lease the idle grass lands in the western part of the Indian Territory, known as the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Reservation. Negotiations could be made with the Indians, but under no circumstances would the Indian Agency back any agreement made by the Indians, and those making any agreements must do so at their own risks. With this insecure agreement the Cheyenne and Arapaho Cattle Company leased one million acres for the price of twenty thousand dollars.

There is no actual record of the boundaries of this lease, but from other reports and known neighboring ranch boundaries we can

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be fairly accurate in determining its limits. Beginning with the west, the Texas line is the boundary there. Two headquarters ranch houses were located north of the main Canadian River: one on Commission Creek across from the Antelope Hills, and one on Turkey Creek, eight or ten miles west of the Texas Cattle Trail. Without a question, because of the location of the corrals and houses, the south line of the Cherokee strip was the northern boundary. The southern boundary was the winding Washita River. The lands on the south side of this river were occupied by the Taurus Cattle Company with located headquarters on the east fork of Croton Creek. Farther to the south was the location of the Standard Cattle Company, on Sweetwater Creek. This eliminates any chances of the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Cattle Company, also known as the C. and A. Cattle Company, owning any lease south of the Washita. With these three boundaries established, it leaves only one other landmark to become the east boundary, the Dodge City Cattle Trail. The boundaries of the Mallay and Forbes Cattle Company were eight or ten miles east of the trail. Thus, the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Cattle Company’s leased area totaled over a million acres.

The main ranch headquarters was located at the mouth of Quartermaster Creek, where it empties into the Washita River (see map). All business was transacted from there. The two ranch headquarters in the north were supply depots for line riders. Each of these places was equipped with stock pens and a house for a foreman. Edward Fenlon managed the activities in this vicinity. A Mr. Little resided at the main ranch and seems to have been the general manager over all the holdings.

There is no clear record given just how many were employed, with the exception of the time of the evacuation in 1885. During this time some forty riders were employed. This might seem to be a very small number for such a large lease yet this number was sufficient considering all neighboring ranches worked together during roundup seasons. All leases were systematically worked being divided into districts. Riders were sent to join this roundup and would work for weeks branding, cutting out, and moving herds of cattle. Only men with endless endurance could stand this work, working before sun was up, till after sunset, with only two meals a day, sleeping on hard ground, enduring the heat and endless strain of night herding. The following is an example of notices that were published during roundup time. This was done that all ranches

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4 The Cheyenne Transporter in the files of the newspapers in the Oklahoma Historical Society.
5 Sources used in compiling the map accompanying this article: Indian Territory Map of the Department of Interior, General Land Office, Published in Park- place, New York, 1876, (Writer owns photostat); Johnson’s Indian Territory Map, Published by Alvin J. Johnson and Co., New York City, New York, 1888 (Writer owns photostat); Map of the Cherokee Strip—Printed in 1883, by Burgess and Walton, Cleveland, Ohio; Texas Cattle Trail Map, Published by the Highway Commission of Oklahoma in 1933.
might be represented, in order to brand his share of mavericks, and
gather his strays.

"THE CHEYENNE TRANSPORTER, APRIL 11, 1881.

"The Stockmen convention at Cardwell have given notice that
Roundup would begin on Monfort and Johnsons Ranch on the
Canadian, May the first. The entire range in this area has been
divided into six districts."

When roundup was over cowboys were limited to riding line.
Dugouts and various kinds of shelter were built on the boundaries;
then each rider would patrol his line turning back strays that had
drifted into another range. Some of the line camps of the C. and A.
Cattle Company were located at the Antelope Hills, at the springs
now known as the Bar X headquarters north and west of Leedey,
and one on the Washita near Spring Creek, near the present site of
Reydon. Cowboys would begin their own cattle herds during roundup
time, branding mavericks, sometimes by rustling on a small scale.
Many herds started like this grew into ranches that are known to
this day. One of the herds to be established on the million acre lease
was that of John Shaw, who branded with a Bar S. L. His camp
was on Barnitz Creek. The first record made of this brand was
in the year 1882. Pete Marlexe owned the Rafter Rocking Chair,
located on the Washita River near the Old Red Moon Indian School,
in the year 1880. Bill Skaggs owned the Flying B connected and
located on Sargent Major Creek near the Washita River.

Cattle stealing was always a menace to a lease so large. Often
some of the men hired as line riders were mixed up in gangs of
rustlers. Their operations were helped by the Western Cattle Trail.
It was an easy proposition to move any number of cattle into a trail
herd bound for the northern markets.

The Western Cattle Trail that first was a blessing for its con-
venience became a menace. It was a hard task to watch every trail
herd when millions were pouring up the trail to ranges in the North.
Much loss was suffered by range cattle mixing with the trail herds.
To add to this difficulty the trail herds carried the feared Texas
fever to the range cattle. The situation came to a crisis when the
neutral cattlemen called a blockade refusing to let cattle cross the
strip into Kansas. The following are actual news articles taken
from the Cheyenne Transporter for June 30th, 1885: "A herd of
North Texas Cattle bound for Wyoming was stopped on the 26th
near Camp Supply. About ten thousand head are now held, unless
some arrangements are made, the Texas drovers will suffer great
losses. The Texans claim there must be an outlet some way. An
armed conflict is expected. The neutral cattlemen are the cause of
the trouble."

Another report for July 15, 1885, stated:

"The cattle blockade continues. Forty thousand head of Texas cattle
are on the trail below the Washita on Wolf Creek, Indian Territory.
Texas fever infected districts are given as reasons for stoppage. Texas men claim no legal authority exists for the action taken by parties of the neutral strip.

"The neutral strip men, however, claim that under the industry bill passed by the United States Senate last year, which prohibited the driving of diseased cattle from one state to the other."

No further statements are made concerning the cattle blockade, and it is supposed that the difficulty was solved by the government.

The most serious trouble that ever confronted the C. and A. Cattle Company, also other neighboring ranches, was the slow but surely rising Indian crisis. The real cause of the trouble was that not all Indians were agreeable to the leasing of their lands. During the period of seven years the trouble finally came to a head. There became a constant state of war between the riders and the Indians. Wire fences were cut and riders shot at. In one case a line rider was found dead with a bullet in the back of his head. Prairie fires were started burning thousands of acres, destroying winter grass and many cattle. Hay that was tediously gathered from the prairie, stacked for winter use was set fire.

President Cleveland found only one answer: evacuate all cattle from the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Reservation immediately. The dead line was July 25, 1885. This was a disastrous blow to the big cattlemen, as well as the stock markets and stock companies with large sums of money invested in this territory. The full extent of the order was that every livable habitation was to be moved or burned, and under no circumstances were the cattlemen to return. The leases were null and void and there would be no refund of monies invested. Many ranches could not begin to move their cattle or find market for them in such a short time. Roundup alone would take weeks. The dead line was broken; the government sent representatives to investigate. The following is a report made by Lieut. M. C. Wiserlls, August 28th, 1885, a month after the dead line:

Cheyenne and Arapahoe Cattle Company.
Aug. 28, 1885
Report of M. C. Wiserlls
1st Lieut. of U. S. Cavalry

Mr. Little is the manager of the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Cattle Company. This pasture contains a million acres and the range is very inaccessible to handle cattle and therefore much delay. The home ranch near the mouth of quartermaster is dismantled, but the building still remains. The Ranch on Commission Creek has been moved, Ranch on Turkey Creek is still standing.

On September 7, 1885, E. R. Andrus was sent from Camp Supply to investigate the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Cattle Company, and the Mallay and Forbes and the Taurus Cattle Company. The following is his entire report:

Ft. Supply I. T.
Sept. 7, 1885

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*6 Taken from the original reports of Lieut. Andrus, and Wiserlls as found in the files of the Indian Archives of the Oklahoma Historical Society.*
Post Adjutant
Ft. Supply Indian Territory.

Sir:

I have the honor to report that in obedience to Orders 172 Ft. Supply I. T., I left this post at ktn. [sic] Aug. 28th, and camped that night at Buzzards Roost Creek. The next day I visited the ranch of the Cheyenne and Arrapaho Cattle Co. Located on Commission Creek. I found at the ranches Mr. Edward Fenlon, the manager of the company and asked him the questions contained in the memorandum furnished me by the comdg Officer, his replies are appended marked A. From him I learned that the ranches on Quartermaster Creek have been abandoned and destroyed and that one on Commission Creek was the headquarter camp. Having accomplished the object for which I was ordered to Quartermaster's creek, I determined not to go to that point. The following day I camped on the Canadian, as that river was too high to cross by wagon. On the following day, the 3rd, finding very little difference in height of the water, I gave orders to my Sergeant to cross the river if possible within the next two days and go to the mouth of Croton Creek on the Washita River, where I would rejoin him. I then took one enlisted man, Troop 1-5th Cavalry and two Indian Scouts, and struck across the country. I reached the round up camp of the Taurus Cattle Co., Malally and Mr. Forbes and asked them the questions contained in the Memo. I left their camp the next morning for the Hdgns Ranch of the Standard Cattle Co. Which place was on Sweetwater Creek, I reached in the afternoon. I then found Mr. R. M. Allen, resident manager and part owner of the Company and asked him the questions to which reference has been made. The answers of Mr. Forbes and Mr. Allen, are Appended marked B. C. respectively. Returning from Mr. Allen's, I visited the Hdgns Ranch of the Taurus Co. on East fork of Croton Creek. At this ranch I found the buildings all in good conditions and undisturbed. At the Standard Ranch nearly all of the buildings have been moved over into Texas, a distance of about one mile. Everywhere I found evidence of hard and steady work in gathering cattle. The ponies being in very low flesh having been ridden very hard. I saw but few stray banches of cattle and they had in all possibility strayed from some herd which had been rounded up. In making my trip I rode over a great deal of country comprised in the ranches of companies mentioned. Returning from the Washita I traveled a very little east of North, coming directly across the country. Had I moved to the east before reaching Wolf Creek, I should have gotten among sand hills. I found the country perfectly practicable for wagons, excellent grass, and water and plenty of wood at each camp. Accompanying this report is a map of the country traversed, showing the localities of the ranches named.

Very Respectfully
Your Obedient Servant
E. R. Andrus
1st Lieut. 5th Cavalry
Comdg. Detachment

The full report of the ranches and the memorandum Mr. Andrus mentioned are printed in detail as follows:

Memorandum of Information to be obtained in making visitation of the Ranches Mentioned;

1st. Name of persons in Charge.
whither owner, manager, or foreman.

2nd. How many cattle have been moved from the ranch since the issuance of the Proclamation in obedience there to, with the date of such removals.

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3rd. To what extent was the herding and driving force increased since the proclamation to comply with the same, and when.

4th. How many cattle still remain on lease, when are they to be moved in what number to drives.

5th. The vigorous efforts being made to fully comply the requirements of the Proclamation.

6th. Have any of the ranches houses, out houses cabins, stables or other building been burned, torn down, or destroyed since July 23rd.

7th. Do owners or managers desire to remove the wire fences and when do they wish to begin and how long will it take.

8th. Will the proclamation be fully complied with when time expires Sept. 4th, approx. If not in what respect and why.

9th. Opinion of the officer as to whether proper energetic efforts have been made, or being made to comply with the Proclamation.

The following report of Lieut. Andrus concerns the C. and A. Cattle Company. The questions answered are numbered with the corresponding numbers in the above memorandum:

A

Cheyenne and Arrapahoe Cattle Company
Hagans Ranch Commission Creek Ind. Ty.
Aug. 29th, 1886

Answers to questions asked as per memo. submitted by Capt. M. Lee 9th Infty. Act. G. Indian Agent, Cheyenne and Arrapahoe Indians.

1st. Edward Fenlon manager of the Cheyenne and Arrapahoe Cattle Company.

2nd. About 2700 stock of cattle started from here on 23rd, have turned over to Rhodes and Aldrich nearly 400 head and to Montgomery and Quinton about 700 head, these cattle 5000 all told were on pasture on this lease the former firm turned in 4000 head the latter 1000 head, these owners are holding their herds, have been waiting till their full numbers have been rounded up, they intend to divide them out, they are now responsible for those turned over to them, a herd of 1500 of our own cattle leave tomorrow.

6th. Mr. Fenlon informs me that only one old log house remains on Quartermaster Creek, and that he intends to take that building down also that he intends to take down the buildings at Commission Creek ranch at once, they consist of two houses of logs, and one correll.

B

Malley and Forbes
Headquarters, Croton Creek
Aug. 31, 1885

1st. H. L. Forbes Manager, and part owner.

2nd. 1500 head removed, about 4500 remain.

C

Word and Bugbee Cattle Company
1st. F. M. Tate Foreman
2nd. 3900 Cattle moved.
3rd. Twenty men and forty horses working
4th. 8000 cattle remain

The following seems to be a postscript to Mr. Andrus Report, made by Colonel J. A. Proctor, in forwarding the above reports to Indian Agency, Captain J. M. Lee being the receiver.?

7 Ibid. See Appendix A for related news items from The Cheyenne Transporter.
Trouble between the cowboys and Kiowas.

Agent Capt. Null.

1st Lt. Ord. Cavalry Geo. A. Dodd (his report)


Agent, Arrapahoe and Cheyenne
Darlington I. T.

Sir,

In compliance with your request contained in telegram dated Aug. 23rd and letter date Aug. 25th 1885, I sent Lt. Andrus, Fifth Cav. to the cattle ranches referred to them the necessary instruction in the case. I enclose herewith copy of report of Lieut. Andrus, detailing his actions. Lieut. Andrus delivered the notices or communicates sent by you to the managers of the different cattle Co's.

Very Respectfully,
Your Obedient Servant
J. A. Proctor
Colonel 24th, Infantry
Commanding Post.

APPENDIX A

THE CHEYENNE TRANSPORTER
Cheyenne and Arapahoe Agency, Darlington, Ind. Ter.
July 30, 1885

(Page 7, cols. 1 and 2.)

IMPORTANT CHANGES
Col. D. B. Dyer Resigns—Capt. Jesse M. Lee
Takes Charge.

Since the last issue of this paper, matters of national importance have transpired with this Agency as a center, which are now under discussion by the press from the Atlantic to the Pacific. We have put the space for a brief note of what transpired: Gen. Sheridan arrived and made a hasty survey of the situation. The Washington press dispatches state that he then notified the President that the cattlemen were at the bottom of the Indian trouble here, that there could be no permanent settlement of the difficulty until the cattlemen were expelled from the reservation and recommended that they be notified to leave the reservation within 40 days. Gen. Sheridan also recommended that this Agency be turned over temporarily to the war department, that Col. Dyer, who was making commendable progress, be transferred to some other Agency or position, and that Capt. Jesse M. Lee, an army officer of ability and experience with Indians be placed in charge. These recommendations were adopted by President Cleveland, who issued the following proclamation:

On the 23rd the President issued the following proclamation directing cattlemen in the Cheyenne and Arapahoe reservation in the Indian territory to remove their cattle within forty days: By the President of the United States of America a proclamation:

WHEREAS, Certain portions of the Cheyenne and Arapahoe reservation in the Indian Territory is occupied by persons other than Indians who claim the right to keep and graze cattle thereon by agreement made with
the Indians for whose special possession and occupancy said lands have been reserved by the government of the United States, or under other pretexts and licenses.

WHEREAS, All such agreements and licenses, are deemed void and of no effect, and persons so occupying said lands with cattle are considered unlawfully upon the domain of the United States, so reserved as aforesaid, and

WHEREAS, The claim of such persons under said leases and licenses and their unauthorized presence on the reservation has caused complaint and discontent on the part of the Indians located thereon, and is likely to cause outbreak, therefore I, Grover Cleveland, president of the United States, do hereby order and direct that all persons other than Indians who are now upon any part of said reservation do within forty days from the date of this proclamation depart and entirely remain therefrom with their cattle and other property. In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed. Done at the city of Washington on the 23rd day of July, 1885.

GROVER CLEVELAND
President.

This proclamation fell like a thunderbolt upon the grass lease men of this reservation, who have three or four hundred thousand head of cattle worth millions of dollars in the pastures and they are now busy trying to obtain a hearing at Washington and an extension of time. The matter is considered of so much importance to the cattle industry of the United States that the boards of trade of several of our largest western cities have united in the protest against forcible removal.

Col. Dyer, immediately after the arrival of Gen. Sheridan, and finding that he was not to be sustained, resigned. Of course this was the only step open to an honorable man, who had been working like be has ever since his arrival to secure the complete control of the Indians placed in his charge. It is a surprise as well as gratification to Col. Dyer’s friends at the progress made at this Agency by his unsupported energy. The fenced fields, with their splendid stand of corn, the stacks of wheat, oats and millet, the pastures, orchards, wind-mills, wells, in fact improvements everywhere are noticeable among both the Indian camps and the Agency buildings. It seems hard after all this earnest work, that Agent Dyer should fall from want of support just at the moment that his hard work and struggle to obtain discipline was a success. The troops for which he had been calling so long were here, the Indians, in full knowledge of an overwhelming force in near reserve, were quiet and tractable and it needed but a strong determined will to divide the Indians into peaceable workers and unruly criminals, the latter to be punished, the former to return to their work and their crops free from molestation from the idle ones. But this was not to be—at least under Agent Dyer’s administration. But the future progress and advancement of the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Indians rest at present with their new Agent, Capt. Jesse M. Lee, a gentleman in every way qualified to take the helm. His progress cannot help but be rapid and thorough, insured as it is by the complete military control of his Indian wards. To our old chief we join with all in an affectionate farewell and best wishes for the future, while to our new chief we extend a warm greeting with the knowledge that he can depend on the moral support and hearty co-operation of all in the experiment which the Government has seen fit to inaugurate at this Agency.