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BATTLE CREEK, MICH.

# WITH THE EARLY SURVEYORS OF INDIAN TERRITORY.

O. H. TODD.

On the twenty-eighth day of June, 1871, a party of ten or twelve men boarded the train of the L. L. & G. R. R. at Lawrence, Kan., bound for Fort Arbuckle, I. T. They were to assist in the general survey and subdivision into quarter sections of the Chickasaw Nation. At the head of the party was Captain R., a man of perhaps thirty-five years of age. He was dressed well, had a long, full beard, and a pronounced military air. He was not hampered by any unusual degree of modesty. He reminded me of the historic "Captain Jinks." Another of the party was Jimmie Brownell, a tall, broad-shouldered young man of twenty-two or twenty-three years of age, of whom I shall have more to say hereafter. Then there was a high-strung, tony young fellow from Hillsdale, Mich. He was well versed in Greek, Latin, and ancient history, and had a saving knowledge of ball-room etiquette. He informed us that he was exceedingly well bred, that he never wore anything but tailor-made clothes, that his father was rich, that he was a graduate of Hillsdale College, had never worked for a living, and expected rapid promotion. Another was a deserter from the regular army, an Irishman, Mike by name. He particularly excelled in jig dancing, profanity, and punishment of poor whisky. "California George" was one of us also. He was a specimen of the better element of that unfortunate class, that legitimate child of our social system, the American tramp; had been in most of the States and Territories, and from unceasingly battling with adversity had lost all interest in life, except the needs of the present hour. Another was Briley. Now Briley was a most remarkable man. He was a native of South Carolina, and claimed direct descent from the chivalry who were the first settlers of the Palmetto State. He had been on board the "Alabama" during her whole career, and having been dumped into the sea at the time of her destruction, was picked up by one of the "Kearsarge's" boats. He afterward served two

years under Custer on the plains. He had a great fund of anecdote, and, taken altogether, was the worst liar I ever met. Ben McLeod was also there. He was born in the highlands of Scotland, came to this country when a child, and had spent most of his life on the frontier. A man of medium height, full and powerful physique, he was fearless, kind, and generous. I never knew him to do an unkind act, or to utter a profane or unkind word. He was one of nature's own noblemen. One more was a boy scarcely sixteen years old; Frank Barnes was his name. He was green, awkward, and slab-sided, was the butt of all our jokes, and a veritable tenderfoot; but long before our job was over, we came to know him as a man utterly devoid of fear, and the embodiment of truth and honor. In fact, he was finally acknowledged to be the whitest man in the gang. Others there were, and among them the writer.

But let us pursue our journey. At New Chicago, now called Chanute, we transferred to the M. K. & T. R. R., which landed us, on the afternoon of the next day, at Pryor Creek station, about twenty miles south of the north boundary of Indian Territory, and the southern terminus of the railroad.

The town of Pryor Creek consisted of three box cars loaded with bacon, about five or six thousand railroad ties in piles, two hotels built of poles stuck in the ground, and covered with boughs and branches, a grocery store of the same convenient material, half a dozen bull and mule teams for freight hauling, one hundred and fifty revolvers and bowie knives, one hundred gamblers, thieves, and all-round scoundrels, a motley crowd of half-witted, half-clad, half-baked half-breeds, a few negroes, and perhaps fifteen or twenty white men besides our crowd.

One of the hotels was run by a half-blood Cherokee woman and her temporary husband, a freckle-faced Irishman. For some unexplainable reason the old lady took a fancy to Jimmie and me. She graciously informed us that she had two grown daughters, children of her first husband, a full-blooded Indian. Further, they were very handsome and accomplished, having attended a term of school at the Armstrong Academy in the Chickasaw Nation, and could ride the buckingest broncho in the Territory. She wished her girls to have white husbands, and further averred that she would be willing to set up



her sons-in-law with a hundred head of cattle and fifty bronchos each.

This offer seemed to be a square deal on the face, and flattering in prospect. I said to Jimmie, "Say, would n't it be a red-hot plan to take the young squaws off the old lady's hands, and get hold of that bunch of cattle and horses?"

To my great surprise and consternation, our interesting mother-in-law in prospect flew into a sudden rage, and fairly screamed, "You —— fool, I want you to understand that my gals are not squaws; they are Cherokee ladies. They would n't marry such coyotes as you and your pardner, no quicker than they would drown theirselves. Youens git outen this shanty." We got.

As we went back to the tie-pile where we had fixed our sleeping apartments, Jimmie said, "Oll, you are a first-class chump. Just think of what a good thing we missed by you calling those sweet maidens 'squaws.' I advise you to pare down your mouth, and cultivate virtuous discretion." I was forced to admit the propriety of his observations.

On July 2 we started on foot for Fort Arbuckle, two hundred and ten miles to the southwest. We hired our baggage, consisting of grub, blankets, and a few cooking utensils, carried in a freighter's wagon that was going through to Texas. He was to carry our baggage, and any of our number who might give out on the road, for the sum of thirty dollars. Our grub consisted of coffee, flour, crackers, bacon, baking-powder, and dried, or "jerked," venison. We did not cook any dinner the first noon, merely taking a lunch of crackers and jerked meat. About four o'clock a rain storm commenced, and continued most of the time till dark. Near sundown we stopped on a wooded creek for the night. Some one had to cook the supper, and it at once developed that there was not a man of our crowd who felt competent to undertake the job. Finally Briley, the ex-pirate of the "Alabama," agreed to do the best he could as cook. But the rain continued, and it seemed as if we could never start a fire. At last we succeeded. It was more than two hours after sundown, when supper, consisting of coffee, bacon, and "sinkers," was announced. Just at this stage of the game an old sow and litter of half-grown

pigs, that had been biding in the brush near by, made a rush for our grub pile, tipped over and spilled the coffee, grabbed the "sinkers," or biscuit, actually yanked the "sow-belly," or bacon, out of the skillet, and skinned out in less time than it takes to tell it. Our supper had vanished, and evidently we had lost the trick.

"Then methought the air grew denser," and had a sulphurous odor. Groans almost unutterable, freely mixed with axiomatic expressions of unusual force but questionable grammar. The only German with us broke forth in one of the grandest poems (blank verse) of the Fatherland, consisting entirely of first-class Dutch cuss-words. His kind thoughtfulness quite won our hearts, and was a grateful relief to those who could not command words adequate to the occasion. Then the rain came down in drenching sheets, and as it was impossible to kindle more fire that night, we made the best supper we could out of crackers and venison.

The wagon was loaded for the most part with flour in cloth sacks, and had, of course, a canvas wagon-cover. I lay down on the flour sacks and tried to sleep. but this was impossible; and when the sun, glorious and beautiful, arose over the eastern prairies, I crawled out of that wagon with a desperate determination to have a square meal or perish. To my delight, every man of the company was possessed of the same idea. We hustled up some dry wood. placed a guard around the fire to keep the hogs away, cooked a large quantity of coffee, meat, and sinkers, and then proceeded to satisfy our hunger. It is needless to remark that we did not eat any dinner that day, and in fact were not very hungry when supper time came.

The weather was pleasant during most of the remainder of our journey. On July 4 we crossed the Arkansas River at the mouth of the Grand, about four miles west of Fort Gibson. We were now in the Creek Nation. and on July 6, passed through its capital, Okmulgee. A big pow-wow had been held here a day or two before our arrival. and a thousand or more braves from the Comanche, Kiowa. Cheyenne, and Arapahoe tribes were camped near the town. They were in full dress, consisting of an abundance of grease, paint, and dirt, plenty of brass jewelry, and very little clothing. In fact some of them



seemed clad only in modesty, and that of a poor quality. They were, however, proud, dignified, and reserved, with the exception that they were eternally begging for "chemuck" (tobacco) and whisky.

The Creek country was alive with game, bear, deer, panther, and wildcat being abundant; as were also the rattlesnake, blacksnake, and moccasin, the centipede, scorpion, and tarantula, much to our annoyance and danger. Along the trail we followed grew the largest and sweetest blackberries I ever tasted. being much superior to any raised in California or the Northern States.

There was then considerable fine timber in the Creek Nation and the eastern part of the Chickasaw Nation, but doubtless much of this has disappeared since the advent of the railroad.

We arrived at Fort Arbuckle July 12, having been ten days on the trail since leaving the railroad at Pryor Creek. During this trip of over two hundred miles, each member of our company had demonstrated by his conduct about what kind of a man he was. The glorious captain, he of the military air, had been called down by one of the boys for his overbearing insolence, and. looking into the muzzle of a navy revolver, exhibited by the aforesaid boy, beheld the force of the argument, and without further ado made humble apology. He returned to Kansas without delay, and for aught I know sunk into oblivion.

Jimmie was always the life of the camp. He was a first-class athlete, a splendid singer, jolly and hopeful, a red-hot Methodist of the revival type, never neglected the Bible or prayer, and would unhesitatingly lick any man that dared poke fun at his devotions.

The fine-haired young man from Hillsdale College had completely "petered" on the third day out from Pryor Creek, declared his feet were too lame to walk, and rode in the wagon the rest of the way to Fort Arbuckle. After two days' work on the survey, he broke down entirely, bawled like a calf, was discharged, and sent back to Baxter Springs, Kan., on a bull train. I never heard of him afterward.

Pale, puny Frank Barnes had won our regard by his uncomplaining patience and honesty of character.

Mike, the deserter, had on several occasions demonstrated his capacity to punish the vile whisky that was imported from Texas. On these occasions, Mike, like Tom O'Shanter, was glorious, "o'er all the ills of life victorious." Within a year from the time I first met him he was hung at Fort Smith for a murder committed in one of his drunken sprees.

Briley had entertained us many an hour, as we sat around the evening camp-fire, with weird tales of life aboard the "Alabama," as she sailed o'er the seas, the terror of our merchant marine, till the fatal day when she met the "Kearsarge" and was sent below. One trouble with Briley was that he would always mix in his best yarns some impossible incident that caused all his listeners to have a feeling of being sold. In vain we protested and pleaded with him to leave out the impossible parts of his yarns. He promised to try to accommodate us, but it was of no use; he was a natural liar, and could not control the ruling element of his nature.

The Chickasaw Nation is about a hundred miles square, being bounded on the north by the South Canadian River, on the east by the Choctaw Nation, on the south by the Red River, and on the west by the Apache, Comanche, and Kiowa reservations. Before the war this tribe, or nation, as they style themselves, enjoyed a good degree of prosperity. They had a number of mills for grinding the corn which they successfully raised, had books printed in their own language, several schools, and a form of government somewhat like our State organization. Their chief, or governor, was elected for a term of years by the heads of families, and so also were the members of the tribal council, or legislature. A sheriff and his deputies were supposed to keep order. Many of the Chickasaws owned large herds of horses and cattle, and some of them lived in ease and comparative luxury.

In an evil hour they cast their lot with the Confederacy, and raised a regiment known as the Chickasaw regiment. At the battle of Pea Ridge this force was badly cut up, and in subsequent engagements was nearly annihilated. The various campaigns desolated their fair country, their houses were burned, their cattle fed both friend and foe, and their horses, escaping to the almost impenetrable swamps of the Red and



Wichita Rivers, returned to a wild state, and at that time (1871) roamed in large herds over most of Indian Territory. Cattle and hogs ran wild also, and found rich feed in the dense cane-brakes and forests of the bottom lands.

At Fort Arbuckle, our party, being but recruits, was divided and assigned to the several camps in the field. The survey had been commenced in September of 1870, with headquarters at Fort Arbuckle. Jimmie Brownell and I were detailed to separate camps, he to Richards's camp near the southeast corner of the Nation, and I to Pratt's camp near the Chickasaw capital, Tishamingo. The first day our route lay over the same trail, and that night we camped in a beautiful grove on the banks of the Wichita, about twenty-five miles southeast of Fort Arbuckle. Long into the night, as we lay on the ground beneath the glorious Southern sky, we talked of the past and present, and built grand castles for the future. At last we fell asleep, to be awakened by the mellow notes of the mocking-bird saluting the coming morn. After our breakfast the men joined with Jimmie in devotional exercise. He read from Acts 20:36: "And he kneeled down, and prayed with them all." This incident is indelibly impressed on my memory.

About two hours after sunrise, we came to the forks in the trail, one branch leading to Tishamingo, and the other to Richards's camp on the Red River. Jimmie and I must part. We had been intimate friends for years, he having worked several seasons for me on my father's farm. Never had an unpleasant word passed between us. With best wishes and bright hopes we bade each other adieu. He died in camp of malarial fever on Aug. 3, 1871. "No useless coffin enclosed his breast," but, wrapped in his blankets, he was laid to rest in an Indian burial-ground on the banks of the Red River. In the strength of early manhood, when life was a song, and the future full of promise, he fell a sacrifice on the altar of civilization.

After leaving the wagon and all the men at the forks of the road, I put my bundle of blankets and grub on my back, and started afoot and alone for Harris's ranch on Mill Creek, about twenty miles to the eastward. That day's journey was one of the pleasantest I ever made. Although the sun shone with wonderful brilliancy and power, a cool, western breeze pre-

vented the heat from oppressing. The trail was good, my load was not burdensome, and I jogged along at a fair rate. Herds of sleek deer were almost constantly in sight. Wild turkeys were as plentiful as blackbirds in Michigan. Coyotes crossed my path a number of times, then striking behind me, followed mile after mile, snarling and whining. I stopped for my noon lunch at a clear spring that flowed from the side of a rocky hill. I was provided with a tin coffee-cup and a small skillet. Kindling a fire, I fried a piece of bacon, soaked a biscuit in the bacon grease, stuck the biscuit on a stick, and toasted it before the fire. Noticing some fine wild plums growing near by, I gathered a few, put them in the skillet, and fried them to a nice brown. I think I enjoyed that dinner as well as any I ever tasted. The sauce was excellent: it was hunger. Soon after starting in the afternoon, as I was passing through a narrow belt of timber that skirted a small stream, I saw a large panther crouched on the limb of a tree about two hundred feet from my path. Purely as a matter of discretion, I "left him alone in his glory." A pair of black buffalo wolves followed me an hour or more. They kept thirty or forty rods away and did not seem to care to come nearer. Concealing myself behind a rock at a sharp turn in the trail, they soon came along. I gave the head one a shot from my navy revolver which caused him to jump about four feet high, utter a fearful howl and clear out at full speed. About four o'clock in the afternoon, I arrived at Harris's ranch, where I met a man with a mule team, bound for Pratt's camp at Tishamingo, where we arrived the next day.

The camp was situated on a small island in the swamps bordering the Wichita River. It had formerly been a camp-meeting site, and was shaded by beautiful trees and cleared of underbrush. Logs had been placed on the ground as seats for worshipers, but now were often occupied by the diamond rattler and huge blacksnakes from the swamps. Care and caution were necessary, especially after nightfall, to avoid collision with these reptiles.

I shall never forget the next day after my arrival in camp. I had confidently expected to take a transit or solar compass, but to my great surprise, by a written order from Arbuckle, of which



I was the bearer, I found myself promoted to the position of chainman. I felt that it was a rank injustice that I, who claimed to have a fair education, having not unsuccessfully taught several terms of school and having a letter of recommendation from the county superintendent of schools; I, who was a member of a very aristocratic and exclusive Presbyterian church, was assigned to the chain gang! The action of those in authority seemed to me wickedly absurd, and I was reminded of the anathema in Burns's "Holy Willie's Prayer:" —

> "Lord, curse them in basket and their store,
> Kail and potatoes."

I could only conclude that it beat the devil.

That day we worked in the bottom lands of the Wichita. We were obliged to wade hip deep in some places through stagnant water, and make our way as best we could through the almost impassable tangles of greenbriar. Each man carried a couple of biscuit and a slice of bacon wrapped up in a canvas cloth and tied to his belt, for his dinner. One man carried a two-quart canteen of water. There were five men in the party: a compassman, two chainmen, a cornerman, and an axman. The sun shone with intense light and heat, and the moist, miasmic air of the swamps was almost suffocating. At noon we stopped for lunch on a sandy bank of the Wichita. We were all very thirsty, our drinking-water having been exhausted. The water of the Wichita is about the color of yellow ocher, caused by the banks of yellow clay through which it for the most part takes its course. At that time of the year, it was blood warm, and had a very disagreeable taste. Although we drank freely of the vile stuff, it did not seem to allay our thirst. The mosquitoes were in evidence, and seemed determined to eat us up. Lazy alligators, with upper jaw thrown back, floated down the river, occasionally bringing their jaws together with a snap to imprison and swallow the accumulated flies and mosquitos. The banks of the river were fairly alive with diamond rattlesnakes, the most poisonous of their kind. After eating our lunch, and taking a smoke, we started to work again; but the mosquitoes were so numerous and persistent that about two o'clock we started for camp, about five miles distant. The heat

was intense, and we could find no water fit to drink till about four o'clock. Almost crazed from thirst, we reached the great Tishamingo Spring on Pennington Creek, about a mile from our camp. Only those who have experienced terrible thirst can understand what may have been implied by the revelator when he declares, "He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal."

The Tishamingo Spring is one of a number of great natural fountains that exist between the Arkansas and Red Rivers. It pours forth at the rate of three or four barrels per minute, clear, cool, and sweet, from a fissure in the rocky hills. Tumbling down its rocky path a hundred feet or more, it crosses a great conglomerate rock, and, plunging into Pennington Creek, forms a beautiful pool a chain's length across and eight or ten feet deep, the water so clear that the sand and small pebbles of the bottom are easily seen, and so cool as to be good to drink even in the hottest summer weather.

I found Mr. Pratt, the chief of camp, to be a very agreeable gentleman. He was the son of a clergyman of Green Bay City, Wis., and a graduate of a college. He had served five years in the regular army, and had his right eye shot out by Quantrell's guerrillas at the battle of Baxter Springs. He informed me that it was an invariable rule on the survey that all recruits must take a subordinate position till they had proved by their skill and industry a right to advancement. I felt the justice of this rule, and could perceive that I had no just cause for complaint. Borrowing a book of instructions from Mr. Pratt, I carefully studied the rectangular system of land surveying, the laws and practice relating thereto, and the use and adjustments of the instruments. Applying for examination, I was in a short time appointed compassman.

As the summer heat became more intense, the mercury often indicating 120° in the shade, most of the camps were obliged to suspend work. The hospital at Fort Arbuckle was soon full to overflowing, and strong men withered and fell before the deadly malaria of the swamps. Very little surveying was done during August and September. A haying camp was established on the bottoms of Wichita River and Wild Horse Creek, two or three miles from Fort Arbuckle, and there



all convalescents were sent, after graduating from the hospital. Near the last of September our camp was re-established in the field on the headwaters of Pennington Creek, about fifteen or twenty miles north of Tishamingo. The country in which we located was mostly high, rocky prairie broken by deep wooded ravines, through which flowed small streams of clear, pure water. Many fine springs poured from the hillsides or trickled from rocky crevices. In deep gullies grew fine persimmons, delicious plums, and great fat haws. These fruits were a welcome addition to our somewhat limited bill of fare. Our work was over broken country, and consequently somewhat tedious. Continuing northward, in November we crossed the Arbuckle and Blue River Hills, and camped on the tributaries of the South Canadian. This country was well watered, well timbered, and plentifully supplied with game, deer, bears, and panthers being numerous, with an occasional herd of buffalo. We could generally buy fresh meat of the Indians, but these same Indians would plunder and rob our provision wagons whenever opportunity offered. No Indian seemed to have the courage to neglect to steal or beg all the tobacco, coffee, sugar, or bacon that he could lay his hands on. Right here I wish to say that the average Indian has little in his make-up to commend him to his paleface brother.

The spoken language of the Chickasaws of to-day is an admixture of their original language with considerable Spanish and a little English. It consists of a few root-words with a variety of prefixes and suffixes. For instance, *si*, an affirmative, may mean "yes," or any other form of affirmation; *shō* may mean "no," or any other form of negation, according to circumstances. The root *suba* means "horse," the suffix *shā* stands for "young," or "little." *Sūga* is "hog;" *waka*, "cattle." Then a colt is *subasha;* a pig, *sugasha;* a calf, *wakasha.* Flesh is *nippa;* therefore horse-flesh is *subanippa;* pork, *suganippa;* beef, *wakanippa*. A chimney is *chimborazo;* a briar patch, or thicket, is *bissaloa;* spreading horns, or antlers, *ippish collappa;* a pretty girl, *icta naha*. Their language is soft, musical, and quite expressive. The universal language of signs is, however, used by them in preference to spoken words.

About a week before Christmas we bade adieu to the Chickasaws, and crossing the country of the Creek Nation to the north bank of the North Canadian near Shawneetown, were in what was then known as the Creek and Seminoles ceded lands, now called Oklahoma. This is a very beautiful country. The rich prairie bottom lands were bordered with gently rolling hills covered with a fine growth of oak, pecan, and hickory. These timbered hills gradually became more rugged, the timber scarcer, and at twenty or thirty miles north of the river, were rough and rocky, and the timber thin and stunted. The weather was sometimes rainy and cool, so that for days together we would be wet through, and of course not very happy. The Indians were quite troublesome, stealing our provisions while they were en route from the base of supplies, and on several occasions our rations were very short. At one time we subsisted about a week on roasted acorns, wild artichokes, fried grasshoppers, and delicious beefsteak cut from the ham of an Indian pony that got stuck in the mud. Four men were killed by the Indians, and one, Paul Richards, was lost from camp and nothing was ever seen or heard of him afterward, though we searched more than a week. Our clothing was worn out, and about every man was bareheaded. We adopted the buckskin costume partly from fancy, but mostly from the fact that it was the only available material. After we had worn out our shoes, we made moccasins or went barefooted, as was more convenient.

With us at that time, there were few who could appreciate good grammar; and dogmatic theology was at a discount. But all was not hardship. There was often something to laugh at, and to cheer us. Between Christmas and New Year's we invited the boys of the ranges to the east and west of us to attend a dance given at our camp. They brought their wagons with them and taking apart their wagon boxes and ours, we placed them on the ground for a floor to dance on. A violin, flute, and clarinet supplied the music. A big fire burned convenient to the dancing floor, and with the exception of an hour's recess for supper about midnight, services lasted from dark to daylight.



But all things end, and so did our survey. On Feb. 14, 1872, we reached our northern headquarters, twelve miles south of Arkansas City, Kan., where we were paid off and discharged.

The years roll on into the silent past My hair is turning gray, but still I love to think of other days, when I was with the early surveyors of Indian Territory.