

DIARY OF JOSEPH A. EDMONDS¹

Edited by

James W. Moffitt

This diary relates the experiences of a gentleman who travelled from Missouri into Texas through what was then known as Indian Territory, in 1870. The route of this interesting group of travellers paralleled closely that followed by the modern highway known as United States Highway Sixty-nine, and by the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad. Much of the journey lay along the historic old Texas Road.² Beginning as early as 1822, this great thoroughfare helped to populate Texas and served as the route of pioneering traffic north and south through eastern Oklahoma.³ Only a part of this graphic diary is presented in these pages—the section dealing with the Oklahoma of sixty-nine years ago. After describing an uneventful journey from Lexington, Missouri, to Baxter Springs, Kansas, the diarist tells of his arrival in the latter place:

Thursday, Nov. 3d, 1870. Noon finds us at Baxter Springs and a note from Mr. McDonald telling me he is ahead and waiting on Rock Creek for me. At Baxter Springs we got bread, bacon and some other articles. We started on and just before leaving town came across A. W. Rucker—had a talk with him and rolled on six miles which brought us up with Crockett McDonald who had waited for me three days. At Baxter Springs, two Missouri boys from Mexico, Audrain County, who had passed us and stayed all night with us the Sunday before, came to us and wanted to go through with us and pay half the expenses of the trip; they had their own horses. I agreed to haul their luggage and provisions. From McDonald's camp we drove on to the Neosho River in the Indian Territory and camped. Hall, McDonald's brother-in-law, gave us some fine music on the banjo. Several Texas men were at our camp tonight, some of them formerly from Missouri—all think it (Texas) a great country.

¹ The diary of Joseph A. Edmonds was lent to Judge Robert L. Williams, by his nephew, Albert S. Edmonds of Kansas City, Kansas, so that a copy could be made and placed in the archives of the Oklahoma Historical Society. The author of this interesting diary was born in 1837 in Saint Louis County, Missouri; he died in 1913 at Lexington in the same state.

² One branch of the Texas Road came from Baxter Springs, Kansas, and traversed the divide between the Grand and Verdigris rivers to Fort Gibson. Another branch came from Saint Louis through Springfield, Missouri, and Maysville, Arkansas on past Fort Wayne on upper Spavinaw Creek to Salina where it joined the other. This road proceeded southwest from Fort Gibson past Honey Springs and crossed the Canadian River just below the present day Eufaula. At Boggy Depot the Texas Road forked and one branch went on south to Warren's on Red River and the other reached this river at Preston by way of Fort Washita. Grant Foreman, "Early Trails Through Oklahoma," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, III (1925), 117.

³ Foreman, *Down the Texas Road: Historic Places Along Highway 69 Through Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1936), 8-9.

Friday morning, Nov. 4th, 1870. Up and breakfast over. All ready and we are off to the banks of the Neosho River.⁴ It is very high and we have to ferry. One wagon was ahead of us, McDonald was next, and I was third. We waited about one hour for the ferryman who is a half breed Indian, for we are now in their country. Well, the ferry is ready and one wagon goes over and brings the stage, then McDonald goes over and some of our boys, but before the ferry gets back the wind blows like a hurricane and when Mose, the ferryman, gets on this shore, and I go to drive on, he tells me he won't cross until the wind lays. So here we wait, part on our side and part on the other, for over two hours and whilst waiting to get over, I accidentally, or Providentially, found out that it was against the laws of the U. S. Government for anyone to take a drop of spirituous liquors in to the Indian nation and that there were two marshals on the same side of the river with me and that they paid the Indian ferryman so much to report on any one passing through the Nation. The ferryman came round my wagon and looked under the wagon sheet and looked as if he were hunting something, but a fire breaking out where the campers had camped, took the whole crew of the ferry off up the hill in a hurry. A Texas man asked me if I had any liquor, I told him I had a little for our own use. He told me they would confiscate my wagon and team for a half pint the same as if it were a barrel. I got a stranger to hold my team and I took out the demijohn and wrapped it up in Walter's old overcoat and slipped off and emptied it and threw the demijohn in to the bayou. Soon after I crossed and rolled on. Noon: We halted for lunch. Rolled on through a very pretty country. Halted at night on a rocky branch here. Will Hall and I went out to kill some birds but failed to find anything but a bluejay. Will killed it, dressed and ate it. Supper over and all around the camp fire to hear Will play the banjo. Saturday, Nov. 5th, 1870. Breakfast and off. Pass through a very pretty country and halted on a rocky branch for lunch. Here an old Indian had half a beef dressed and hung up on some saplings. The boys were afraid to buy any of his beef for fear it was a diseased Texas beef out of some of the droves passing. Up to this time we have passed over one hundred thousand head of cattle on their way to the states north. Many of them fat and fine. Passed over some very fine country this evening and across some fine streams, Cabin Creek and others. Stopped and had some shoes fixed on my big horse. Speaking of my big horse, he is very large and well made and in fine fix. Camped tonight on Small Prairie Creek.

Sunday morning, Nov. 6th, 1870. Up, breakfast and off to a better camp ground. Traveled about three hours and came to the very best camp ground we have ever had for wood and water. Took our teams out about eleven o'clock and fed some. I forgot to say that, yesterday, Will Hall and I killed 69 blackbirds to make a pot pie. Today Will Hall and Branch made the pot pie and it was very good. It was the first I ever ate. Wrote home today. This evening four of us went down to Price Creek to bathe. We camped on its banks; had a fine bath.

Monday, Nov. 7th, 1870. Left Price Creek before sunrise. Saw beautiful sunrise on the prairie. The scenery is beautiful and varied for a prairie country. Traveled fifteen miles to noon. Halted on beautiful Flat Rock Creek. Our stock travels well after resting Sabbath afternoon. My big black horse is quite lame this evening. Saw some beautiful scenery, mountains and valleys. Halted tonight on pretty Rock Creek on the edge of the timber and prairie. The bed of this creek is all rock, some of them twenty feet long by forty feet wide, in all. It is a good

⁴On government maps this river is called Neosho. Grand River is formed by the union of two streams, Neosho and Spring, which unite in Ottawa County. Below this junction the river is Grand. Charles N. Gould, *Oklahoma Place Names* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1933), 28.

camp ground. Tuesday, Nov. 5th, 1870. Breakfast and off by sunrise. My horse not so lame this morning. After three and a half miles' travel, we are at the ferry across the Arkansas River just two miles below Fort Gibson. The Grand River, Verdigris and main Arkansas River all come in close together. The ferry came a half mile up Grand River for us and took us down to the mouth and across the main Arkansas. The water of the Arkansas is of a clay color whilst those of the Verdigris and Grand rivers are muddy and where they join the line is as plain as if one were white and the other black. The land here looks very much like Missouri, also the timber. We are safe across the river and all right again. It commenced to rain whilst we were crossing the river and it came down in torrents until one o'clock p. m. from 9 a. m. We paid one dollar per bushel for corn this morning and fifty cents per dozen for little mouldy bundles of fodder. After crossing the Arkansas River and two miles beyond, we left the Cherokee Nation and came into the Creek Nation. This nation has large iron posts placed one mile distant from each other to mark their boundary line. Halted at noon for lunch on a small creek. It was raining very hard. Drove on until four o'clock. Halted to dry out. Just before stopping we, that is Hall and myself, killed a fine lot of blackbirds. Bob cooked the biscuit and they were very good. We have tolerable good grub. We are now three hundred and twenty miles from home and one hundred and seventy from Sherman. The Lord has been merciful and good to me. My horse is not at all lame today. I feel very thankful.

Wednesday, Nov. 9th, 1870. Up and breakfast over by daylight. Last night the boys nearly all drank half a gallon of coffee apiece. I drank 2½ pints. Early start again. Drove through a very pretty country. The creeks and branches are all rock and gravel bottom. Halted at noon for lunch. This afternoon passed some fine country. Saw three fine deer but did not get a shot at them. Afternoon we passed a village Fishertown in the Creek Nation. Crossed North Fork of Canadian River at four o'clock on a flat boat, full-blood Indian ferryman. Couldn't talk English at all. One mile farther on we came to a store kept by an old Negro, called Nero's store. He owns the ferry, store and blacksmith shop. We laid in our supplies of potatoes and corn to do us several days. Just a few hundred yards above Nero's store is the little town of Northfork Town,⁵ several stores and a postoffice. Here in this little town of log and poor frame buildings I saw, to me, a new feature in carpentering. Two men laying a floor with clapboards, the edge of one on the other. The population consists of whites, Indians and Negroes. Halted about one and a half miles beyond this town. Rather poor camp ground.

Thursday, Nov. 10th, 1870. Very cold this morning from heavy frost. I think the first frost in this section. Breakfast over and off again, five miles brings us to the Canadian River which we ford without any trouble. We are now in the Choctaw Nation, the Canadian River being the line between this and the Creek Nation. Just after crossing the Canadian River this morning we were greeted by some sweet music made by about fifty field larks. It was cheering, away out here. Their songs are as sweet as those made in the meadows at home, reminding us of the fact that God is the same everywhere and His creatures are the same to Him. The mistletoe is very much heavier and more luxuriant here than any I saw in Missouri. Lunch at noon and off again. After leaving the swamp we came to very beautiful scenery. We crossed the Soukey Mountain today. Have to pay toll over it for the natives have taken out all of the rock in the road down the mountain. This mountain

⁵North Fork Town was named for the north branch of the Canadian River on the east. It was situated about two miles northeast of the present town of Eufaula. Foreman, *Down the Texas Road*, 41.

is the highest elevation we have yet seen. It encircles one of the prettiest prairie valleys I have ever seen. Today we crossed some very pretty streams of water, all rock bottom. At 4 o'clock we came to an ugly stream called Coal Creek. Here some twenty-five teams were halted and all fearful to try the ford, but after the first wagon passed there was a general rush to get over as it was getting late. I got my team ahead of some of them and rolled through all safe. McDonald did likewise and all were safe across another stream. We drove about three miles and halted for the night on high, dry, rocky ground with plenty of wood and water to make us comfortable.

Friday, Nov. 11th, 1870. Up about 4 o'clock. Made a fire and got a bucket of water to make coffee. Breakfast over and off earlier this morning than any time yet. Last night the wolves howled all 'round us and this morning, whilst at breakfast, they set up their howling again. This morning we have passed some beautiful country, high elevations covered with timber, all green, entirely encircling beautiful prairie valleys covered with its brown grass. Sometimes we could see way beyond the green forest a fine prairie glade. It looked like fields of ripe grain. Today we have passed over some very rough rocky ground and roads. At 9 o'clock we came to a store sitting by itself way out on the prairie. The streams passed in the last day are not as good fording and the water not so clear as those passed before. At 11 o'clock we came to a pretty little village for this country, by the name of Perryville.⁶ Here I saw a doctor's sign. At the bottom was Perryville, C. N. Now the question was what was C. N. Some of the boys could not tell me, finally I cleared it up. Choctaw Nation. One mile farther on we halted for lunch. My black horse has been very lame all day. I think his lameness comes from the rocky roads. He is large and heavy, he continues lame. I believe my horse will be spared to me and that we will have a safe journey. I have not felt seriously alarmed about him. The scenery continues varied from mountains and prairie valleys. There is very much more timber on our road for the last two days than before, yet, this evening, it seems very difficult to find water and a good camping ground. We drove until dark and then found very poor water. My horse is very lame yet. There is a great deal more timber in the Choctaw Nation than in the Creek and Cherokee Nations. These people all make their own laws and they are very strict, especially with emigrants. They dare not use a stick of standing timber. A Texas man who had been to Kansas and Missouri and was returning—we passed him—and that night he burned a rail and it cost him \$7.50. This was in the Cherokee Nation. We overtook the same man again as he traveled on the Sabbath and got ahead of us. We overtook him at Northfork Town. The next morning one of his horses bit a pig and it cost him one dollar. There are 35 U. S. Marshals on the road from Baxter Springs to the Texas line and these marshals employ the natives to spy out and report travelers who trade with them. These marshals get, I am told, fifty dollars for every man they catch in this way. There are a great many white men who have married amongst the Indians and some have brought their families by getting permits to stay during good behavior. Halted late tonight. Supper over and bed ready. Good night.

Saturday, Nov. 12th, 1870. Breakfast over and we are off rather late on account of my black horse being very lame. I had to put one of the other boys horses in to day and drove my horse loose. We only drove 18 or 20 miles today. My horse is very lame. We halted a few moments only for lunch and went on. I went on to find a stopping

⁶ Perryville at this time was an important center. It was located about five miles south of the present day McAlester. J. Y. Bryce, "Perryville at One Time Regular Military Post." *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, IV (1926), 184.

place for tonight and Sunday both. Passed a little village called Stringtown.⁷ Paid \$1.50 a bushel for corn today. This morning we passed through Limestone Gap. It is a gap in a solid stone mountain. Have to pay toll over a small bridge in the gap. We followed this stone mountain for several miles up this mountain. We saw some lovely scenery. Beautiful evergreen trees and trees of green, yellow and brown surround beautiful open glades that look like fields of grain surrounded with Osage orange fence. Here we saw trees full of mistletoe and mountains were covered with green trees, some ranges of hills and some higher that reach to the calling of mountains all beautifully arranged. This is by far the most lovely scenery I have ever seen. Some of these valleys between these mountains are very rich and productive. I found a beautiful camping place on a clear running creek by name of North Boggy. Our camping ground is high and dry. The creek running by is within twenty steps of our wagons. We camped on the south side which just is across. This we do for fear of a raise in the water. We always cross over and camp on the Texas side when we can. There is, just opposite our wagon, a mountain some three hundred feet high. We went into camp about three o'clock. This gives us time to fix for Sunday. Will Hall and I went hunting and killed six squirrels and one rabbit. This is more game than we have had before in the Indian Nations. There are thousands of wolves, deer, wild cats and some panthers here in these mountains. This is the most picturesque camping place we ever had. My black horse is still very lame and we are seventy-two miles from Sherman. I fear he is foundered.

C. N. Sunday, Nov. 13th, 1870. Warm and looks like rain. Breakfast over, my horse still very lame, turned our stock out to graze. I took my Bible out in the timber and read and guarded our horses while they grazed. Took up our horses. With Will Hall and Young Bates we go on top of the mountain and well it paid us to go; the grandest view I have ever seen. It is impossible to picture it with pen and ink. Mountain scenery, woodland valley and prairie glade all in one view. It is glorious to behold. I don't know what it would be in the sunshine, trees of every hue, size and color. The beautiful clear stream far below glides sweetly past with a gentle murmur. These are some of the glories of our God. These are some of His designs and handiwork. Whilst laying over today, some forty wagons passed us to and fro. All has gone well enough except my horse is still very lame.

Monday morning, Nov. 14th, 1870. Left camp early. Just after leaving we passed a range of round mountains looking as if arranged by art and looking very much like hills of sweet potatoes, so regular and even. They are very pretty. Late in the morning we came to a village and toll bridge. Bridge over the Middle Boggy. The village is called Atoka. Lunch on the prairie. We passed some good country today. This evening we crossed the South Boggy on a bridge without toll, the only one in the Indian Territories. One mile farther on and we are at the Old Boggy Depot,⁸ an old government station, but now a tolerable village for the Nation. About five miles farther on we halted for the night on a beautiful stream of crystal water whose bed is solid stone, some of which covers acres of ground, unbroken except where beautiful steps and holes appear and again fine basins twenty feet across and four to

⁷ Stringtown seems to have taken its name from the fact that it was strung out along the foot of the hills. Bryce, "Some Notes of Interest Concerning Early Day Operations in Indian Territory by Methodist Church South," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, IV (1924), 239.

⁸ Old Boggy Depot was named after the Boggy River. It was situated about a mile west of the stream, on the dividing ridge between the river and Sandy Creek. Muriel H. Wright, "Old Boggy Depot," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, V (1927), 4.

six feet deep, with the Osage orange lying in the bottom and as plain to the view as if they were lying on the ground before you. There are beautiful falls and then you will see the waters all concentrated into very narrow flues from three inches to 18 inches in width. The flues are cut by wear and tear of ages and just below they again come together and form a stream some fifteen or twenty feet wide. I have seen beautiful mountains and hills with forests of variegated evergreens, with here and there magnificent prairie glades, rolling far away until they seem to merge into the blue heavens beyond, all beautiful and grand.

Tuesday, Nov. 15th, 1870. Off early this morning. My horse very lame. We crossed some fine lands, soil black. Another toll bridge today. Beyond any doubt the whites ought to possess this country. You will see one or two Indians with from three to four Negroes. Here in this country the Osage trees grow from two to four feet through. The wagon makers in Texas use this tree to make all the running gears of their wagons and carriages. The seasoned timber of the Osage tree is of a beautiful yellow color and looks as if it had been painted. We passed through two little villages today of no consequence. A few days ago we passed the graves of three Confederate soldiers. A small rough stone placed at the head of each with their names is all that is left to tell the passer-by their story. Today we passed an earthen fort with rifle pits. Whose it was and for what we did not learn. Good water very scarce today. We are now within thirty miles of Sherman. Camped early this evening. Rather poor place to camp.

Wednesday, Nov. 16th, 1870. C. N. McDonald and Bob E. went ahead, horseback, to Sherman. We followed rather slow on account of my lame horse. Two miles brought us to the northern line of the Chickasaw Nation and the southern line of the Choctaw Nation; twelve miles to Red River. We passed only one house in crossing the lower corner of the Chickasaw Nation—twelve miles—it was a one and a half story log residence overlooking the much talked of Red River. It is a pretty view. Down below us flows the reddish colored waters of the Red River and beyond and still farther on may be seen the prairies of Grayson County, Texas. Down the long winding hill into the ferry boat, which is a flat boat run with rope and pulley, and a few strokes or pulls and we land safely on the Texas shore. The ferryman here is one of Quantrell's soldiers. Up the hill squarely on Texas soil. The first tree almost we see, is a beautiful, large cedar. The river here at low water is only two or three hundred yards wide. A half mile beyond the river we halted and fed our stock. Off again and drove to Sherman. We saw some good cotton on the Red River bottoms. Passed one cotton gin and saw mill. Some tolerable farms along the road to Sherman.⁹

⁹ After some interesting experiences in Texas, the author of this vivid and picturesque diary returned to Missouri by way of the Red River and the Mississippi River.