

BANDITS FROM THE BASIN

By J.W. Firey

Joseph William Firey came to Rock Creek area, southeast of Keystone, in the year of 1913, from Edinburg, Illinois. He first moved to Tulsa for a short time, then came to Keystone to live with his sister, Lilie and her husband Steve Stone on their ranch, but he ended up marrying and settling down on the banks of Rock Creek for the rest of his days. Most of his descendents still reside in the same area near Rock Creek (or close-by) over 100 years later. He loved to journal his experiences and this is one of his entries about his life in Oklahoma.



J.W. Firey

On a blustery winter day, Brother Earl and I got off the train at Keystone with all of the baggage that consisted of my worldly possessions. I was moving from Tulsa to the Stone Ranch to make my new home there.

Since it was more than ten miles to the ranch and no one was there to meet us we went to a livery barn run by a man named Cy Woodward, who rented horses and buggies. But it so happened he had added a Model T passenger car; a two seated job with side curtains and luggage carriers on the running boards to carry our things on. So we hired him to haul us and our possessions to the ranch. The driver and Woodward's son occupied the front seat: Earl and myself crowded into the back seat with boxes and suitcases stacked around us and the luggage carrier stacked high and roped down. He looked like a moving truck.



Steve & Lilie Stone

We were driving along the bumpy road about four miles south of Keystone when we started down a grade toward a little draw when we saw a man down there in the middle of the road waving a burlap sack for us to stop. The driver began to apply his brakes but the road was covered with snow and the wheels would not hold. We were nearly upon the man. As he held a big 45 - 6 shooter pointing it straight in our faces I could see he meant business.

He pulled the hammer of his gun back to the last notch and said in a rough voice, "Stop!" The driver barely got the car stopped before running into him. He said, "When I say stop, I mean stop! Get your hands up every one of you!" Just then two other gunmen stepped out, covering us with their six shooters. They all had handkerchiefs over their faces. They ordered us to unload our cargo of whiskey, telling us this was a stickup. But we told them we had no whiskey and offered to let them search our baggage and offered to give them keys to inspect for themselves. The tall bandit being the spokesman could see his mistake and said he would take our word for it. They put up their guns and offered us a drink out of their bottle and said they were sorry that they had detained us and bade us to go on. They waved to us as we drove away. He were all quite stunned and no one said a word for sometime.

We found out later that the tall bandit who stopped us was a notorious outlaw from the basin. It was my first experience of looking into the muzzle end of a 45 revolver.