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The Wagon Yard

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PHOTOGRAPH BY: CHARLOTTE RAMOS

The Wagon Yard

— by Dick Chapman

In the year 1908 in the month of July, I was riding to the west under a blue cloudless sky. We were making good time--just old Indian and I. We had an errand to do and no time to stop, so I kept old Indian at a mile-eating trot.

With home far behind us, hills and canyons ahead, the sun beaming down like fire on our hands. Water being scarce and our throats being dry, perhaps we didn't appreciate the blue cloudless sky.

Far to the north over prairies so raw, I could sometimes discern the old Washita made known from that distance in July's warm breeze by a line

of straggling cottonwood trees.

In the bank of a canyon not far to our left but almost out of sight was a dirt-covered dugout where Red Buck and Miller put up their last fight. I figured we'd make it just about night. To a hotel? Oh no--no hotel for me--too fancy fittin', beds too hard. I will just go with old Indian to the old wagon yard. Many a long day has come by and passed, but that wagon yard in Elk City for me was the last.

As darkness came on and freight wagons rolled in, freighters from the north and some from Berlin--two days they had come, two long days to go home.

Don't care if the Canadian is dry as a bone. As night closes down and stars show in the sky, horses munch at their grain and kick at the flies.

There's the scent of strong coffee made in a tin pail, sounds and voices in the night that never will pale.

Voices around the fire tell of miles on the trail from across the sage flats to the Antelope Hills. But where did I sleep after a long hot day?

Where else but on a mound of fresh prairie hay? To remember that night is easy; to forget would be hard--the last night I slept in an old wagon yard.