

HIGHTOWER, J. H.

*INTERVIEW

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BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

HIGHTOWER, J. H.

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Field Worker's name Don Moon, Jr.,

This report made on (date) May 2, 1938

1. Name J. H. Hightower,

2. Post Office Address Guthrie, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) Masonic Home for Aged.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month December Day 22, Year 1851.

5. Place of birth Kentucky.

6. Name of Father George Hightower, Place of birth Kentucky.

Other information about father Carpenter.

7. Name of Mother Fannie Robinson, Place of birth Kentucky.

Other information about mother _____

Notes or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and story of the person interviewed. Refer to Manual for suggested subjects and questions. Continue on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 6.

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Don Moon, Jr.,
Investigator,
May 2, 1938.

Interview with J. H. Hightower,
Masonic Home for Aged,
Guthrie, Oklahoma.

Mr. Hightower left Kentucky in 1867, and spent about two years in Kansas City, Missouri, where he had relatives. There he became acquainted with M. B. George and his three brothers, whose business was cattle. He went with these men to Texas in '69, and began working for them. They had no ranches of their own, but bought up cattle in Texas, and took them up the Chisholm Trail to market them in Abilene.

This trail had been marked by Jesse Chisholm of Wichita in hopes of getting the cattlemen to bring their herds to Wichita. He put up stakes about every mile, and made a map of the route, showing just where there was water and wood and good camp sites. This map was printed in pamphlets about 3 X 6 inches in size, and distributed free to every cow-hand. There were great stacks of them in the stores of Texas towns, and every cow-hand had one

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in his pocket. He thinks they were printed in Wichita. This trail was first used in '68, and Mr. Hightower began going up it in '69.

For four years he made trips up to Abilene. They would start about the first of May and reach Abilene about the last of July or first of August. In all that way from Red River to the Kansas line, there was only one settlement of any kind and that was Cook's store, right on the top of the divide, between the Little Washita and Big Washita about six miles south of the location of Chickasha.

It took eleven men to handle a herd of from 1,500 to 1,800 cattle if they were big steers. Part of the stock they took was young stock cattle that would be taken to stock ranches in Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho. The ranching business was just beginning in those states, and young stock cattle were in demand. Sometimes a herd of these would number from 2,200 to 2,300.

The George brothers handled about 25,000 head a year, divided into about twelve bunches. Of the outfit

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that Mr. Hightower worked with, he remembers the following:- George Wilcox, boss; John Mann; Jake Ellison; Herb Mitchell; Jim Carson; Dick Parsons; and Dick Perkins, negro cook.

It sometimes took a whole day to get the herd across a river. They would have to cut out a little bunch and take them across, then another little bunch, and so on, until the entire herd had crossed.

When a river was too high they would just have to wait until it went down.

Mr. Hightower says they had no trouble with Indians, or outlaws and never had any fatalities while he was on the trail, but they had a good deal of trouble with stampedes. It was usually caused by thunder and lightning. Two men shifts were on duty throughout the night. If a thunder storm were threatening, all the men were called out and kept busy keeping the herd quieted. They made from seven to ten miles a day on an average.

In the Summer of '72 a man called Caddo Bill Williams established a trading post later known as Silver

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City on the south side of the South Canadian, about eight miles east of the present site of Minco. He bought the cattle that had gone lame for from \$3.00 to \$5.00 a head, let them rest and fatten all Summer, then sent them up the trail to market in the Fall.

The hands received \$40.00 a month, while on these drives, the rest of the year they worked about on various ranches in Texas at \$25.00 or \$30.00 a month. For the return trip from Kansas, they usually drove a bunch of new wagons and mules, which were scarce and in demand in Texas. These would either be sold or traded for cattle down there.

Mr. Hightower took a bunch of the George brothers' cattle to Wyoming in '74 and ranched there six years. Then he spent ten years on a ranch in Montana. In July of 1890 he came to Oklahoma and bought a section of land in Canadian County, and has claimed El Reno as his home ever since, although he had a ranch in Beaver County from 1911 to 1920.

He was cattle inspector for the State

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under the Haskell, Cruce and Williams Administrations

for twelve years.

In 1897, Mr. Hightower served as Sergeant at Arms at the meeting of the Council (now called Senate) under the Renfrow regime here in Guthrie. Henry Johnston was a member in that Council. It met in a big frame hotel on the corner of Second and Harrison, upstairs. He says that the first appropriation for Langston University was made at that session.

Mr. Hightower and a partner, named Mitchell, had a contract to furnish beeves to the Indians at Darlington. The Indians, sometimes, would chase a cow a mile before killing it. Then the squaws would have to walk away out there and skin it and carry back the meat. Mr. Hightower has seen as many as three Indian children sitting on a cow hide scooping up the blood in their hands and drinking it.

He was out on Dead Woman Canyon the day that John H. Seger left Darlington with the bunch of Indians to

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start Seger's Colony. They passed him on the trail, and the procession was miles long. They had lots of wagons and horses.

Mr. Hightower is almost totally blind now, but can see enough to walk around.