

SHINN, W. E.

INTERVIEW

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

448.

Field Worker's name Robert W. SmallThis report made on (date) April 29 1938

1. Name W. E. Shinn
2. Post Office Address Newkirk, Oklahoma
3. Residence address (or location) Same
4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month September Day 29 Year 1866
5. Place of birth Illinois

6. Name of Father Levi Shinn Place of birth Ohio7. Name of Mother Martha Cunningham Shinn Place of birth Virginia

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.

Robert W. Small  
Investigator  
April 29, 1938

Interview with W. E. Shinn  
Newkirk, Oklahoma

I was born September 29, 1866, in the state of Illinois. My father moved from Illinois to Sumner County, Kansas, in 1883 settling six miles from the Oklahoma line.

Some of my first experiences in Oklahoma Territory were in 1885, when I helped George Miller, a ranchman of the Cherokee Strip, to skin a lot of steers that had frozen to death during a very cold spell of weather.

I frequently went from my father's place down on the Chikaskia River in Oklahoma to hunt quail and prairie chicken which were plentiful.

About the year of 1885 or '86, I set out on a hunting trip with three others in a wagon; we left Caldwell, Kansas, going down the Chisholm Trail, headed for the Cimarron River country and before night a storm came up, the wind blew very hard and snow filled the air till we were almost blinded by it. We stopped our team and stayed till nearly daylight, when we drove on to a place where we found some timber from which we could make a fire and we got our breakfast and fed our team and drove on to the Salt Fork River which had much

floating ice in it. We then turned down the river until we ran on to a large tent where the soldiers were camped; we stopped and talked to some of them and learned that one of the soldiers who happened to be the commanding officer had shot and killed a couple of wild ducks out in a small lake near the tent and he could not get them out of the water. I had a very good bird dog with me and I called to him and sent him into the water after the ducks; he brought them both out, which act was very surprising to the soldier, and made a quick friend of him. This soldier said that the weather was too bad for anyone to be out and that they had room for twenty-two men in the tent and insisted on our staying over night, which we did. During our stay there the Major told us that they were about out of wood for fuel and that if we would haul them a load of wood they would go hunting with us and give us all they killed. We hauled a load of wood for them and proceeded on our hunt which netted a number of turkeys and prairie chicken.

While we were there a bunch of hunters returning from a hunt came up to the river on the opposite side and found it a difficult matter to get across. We helped them to get their wagon and team across the river and after doing so they gave the soldiers a saddle of venison and some turkeys and we all had a feast. We had wanted

to go to the Cimarron country to hunt deer but the soldiers were not supposed to let anyone go if they could prevent it as the reason they were camped on the north side of Salt Fork River, was to keep people out of the country south of the river. We decided not to try to make our way across the river since the soldiers had been so good to us and we returned home with plenty of turkeys and prairie chickens.

I have hauled a lot of wood from the Chikaskia River and its tributary streams into Kansas in the early days before the Cherokee trip was opened.

There used to be an island in the Chikaskia River called Round Island, which had much good timber and wood on it and I have gone there and hauled a half load from the island to the bank on the north side and unloaded it and then I would go back after more wood until I got a big load. There was no road or crossing to the island and I could only haul a small amount of wood out of there on account of the steep banks and rough lands over which I had to drive.

I used to help put up hay on the Foss Ranch which was cut and raked up and stacked in great quantities for feed for the cattle in winter time.

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Three or four mowing machines would cut the grass and two or three go-devil rakes would rake it up after it dried out, then it was stacked.

The hands working in the hay stayed at the ranch house which was a house dug out in the side of a hill with the sides walled up a little ways and a covering of brush and dirt made the roof.

We used coal oil or kerosene lamps and one night some of the new hands saw a big snake up over head in the brush and they got very excited about it, but the old hands said the snake belonged there, and to just let it alone.

I got \$3.00 per day for work in the hay with my team and my board and feed for my team and the ranchers always had plenty to eat. Everybody was welcome to come and stay over night or to eat their meals at any and all times. Occasionally a man or maybe two or more, would come to a ranch house and stop for their meals and would speak but few words to anyone while there. The cowboys and other old hands about the ranch knew it was not the custom to ask any stranger any leading questions, so if a stranger did not open up a conversation himself it was taken for granted that he did not wish to talk and no one would say much to him but the cowboys usually could tell by the actions of strangers whether they

were "on the scout" from law officers or not; though little was said of any man's visit to outsiders.

Law violators from all parts learned that they could escape law officers by hiding out in the cattle country and at times these law violators became rather numerous.

They felt a degree of security that they could not enjoy in many places and the generosity of all the ranchers enabled them to live without money.

At the opening of the Cherokee Strip I made the run from the Chilocco reservation; I made the race on two wheels of a wagon with a team hitched to it, having my feed and provisions in a box fastened to the two-wheeled contrivance. I failed to get a claim that day but a short time after I secured a relinquishment to the Northeast quarter of Section 23, Township 26 North, Range 3 East, which place I still own. I built a small house eight by twelve feet on the claim and put up a sod stable covered with poles and grass and it made a very warm stable for my horses. In the following February I built a house fourteen by twenty-six feet with a shed room on one side for a kitchen. I broke out the land and fenced it the first few years. I cut saw logs on a neighbors place and had lumber sawed to make a granary.

The first two years on the claim were almost complete failures in crops. Money was scarce and hard to get. I hauled wood to Ponca

City and sold it for \$1.00 a load.

In 1894 I was elected Trustee and I had to cut wood one day and do my assessment work the next as I had to make something to live on all the time.

When I got my warrant for work for the county it amounted to \$78.00 and I had to discount it to get any money on it; I sold it for \$55.00 which was a lot of money to me at that time. In 1897, I made a good wheat crop, getting thirty-one bushels per acre and thereafter the crops were usually good for many years.

I lived on the farm until 1907 when I was elected County Clerk in which office I served for five years. I was Deputy Sheriff and Jail-er from 1925 to '27 and elected to the office of Sheriff in 1932 and re-elected in 1934, serving through 1936. I also served as Secretary of the County Election Board for several years.