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BUSH, GEORGE W.

INTERVIEW

#9382

22

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

BUSH, GEORGE W.

INTERVIEW

9388

Field Worker's name Linnaeus B. Banck

This report made on (date) November 21, 1937

1. Name George W. Bush

2. Post Office Address Shattuck, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month September Day 14 Year 1865

5. Place of birth Bremen, Germany

6. Name of Father _____ Place of birth _____

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother _____ Place of birth _____

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 7.

BUSH, GEORGE W.

INTERVIEW

9382

Linnaeus B. Ranck,
Investigator,
November 21, 1937.

An Interview with Mr. George B. Bush,
Shattuck, Oklahoma.

When Mr. Bush came to this section of the country in the summer of 1887 old Fort Supply was experiencing its most flourishing history. It was a most beautiful place. A detachment of infantry was stationed there then, also a strong detachment of the 9th United States Cavalry, which was a negro regiment, and in those days a formidable Indian scout or police force was stationed at Fort Supply with Amos Chapman as chief scout of the organization.

Captain Welsh, with the 9th Cavalry then at Fort Supply, used to visit Bush occasionally while the latter was in charge of the pump station on Willow Creek. The Captain and Mr. Bush became quite companionable. They used to go hunting together along Wolf Creek and fish in its waters. Bush declares it was thrilling to see Welsh shoot wild turkeys. He used a rifle always and was such an expert shot that his practice was to clip off the turkeys' heads when he shot them.

a man could leave home in those days and to lock a door

BUSH, GEORGE W.

INTERVIEW

9382

- 2 -

was an insult to anybody who ever might happen along during his absence. It was the universal custom at that time to lock up nothing and nobody except the Indians ever stole anything from a house. If a man happened by and was hungry or cold or wanted to stay through the night, he would go into the house with no more hesitation than if it were his own dwelling, prepare a meal for himself or sleep if he needed a lodging place and go on the following morning molesting nothing.

Until the Strip opened to settlement Bush never saw but two white women in this entire section of the country except occasionally he would observe one riding a Santa Fe train through the country after the railroad was completed and regular passenger service provided. At the K H Ranch headquarters, some three miles east of the present town of Cage, lived a Mrs. Belsford, the wife of Charles Belsford, foreman for the K H's. Up on Long Creek in the edge of the Texas Panhandle lived another white woman at the headquarters of the Box T Ranch; she was the wife of Frank Biggers, the Box T foreman.

BUSH, GEORGE W.

INTERVIEW

9382

- 3 -

From the time Mr. Bush came to this region in '87 till after the Strip opened, roving bands of Indians used to prowl over this section. Every year excursions of them traveled across this end of the Strip en route to visit the Utes in Colorado and New Mexico and vice versa. It is notable in this connection to observe that always they avoided Texas soil. How they happened to know the location of the boundary line Bush could not explain, but the Indians knew where the Texas territory began and seemed to know, too, that just as surely as any of them were caught trespassing, serious trouble would follow. The Texas ranchmen and cowpunchers tolerated no red-man trespassing upon their ranges. In the event that a band of Cheyennes, for example, came into this end of the Strip to hunt, or as was not uncommon during those late '80's and early '90's, to steal and plunder, or were on a trip to visit the Utes, they always avoided the Texas boundary and proceeded north along the west line of the Strip until they reached No Man's Land and thence went west instead of taking a short-cut route across the

BUSH, GEORGE W.

INTERVIEW

9382

- 4 -

corner of the Texas Panhandle.

It was the summer before the opening of this country that some three hundred Cheyennes were on their way up through this country to New Mexico. Mr. Bush contacted the excursion, the place where Shattuck was later founded. The chief riding at the head of the long, broken column stopped to beg some tobacco from Bush and he took advantage of this occasion to chide the Indian leader about avoiding Texas. He asked the chief pointedly why he and his people did not cut over the Panhandle and thus shorten their journey considerably. Gesturing in the direction of Texas with one hand the wily Indian raised a rusty Winchester which he carried with him on his pinto pony, and grunted and shook his head negatively as he tickled the gun's trigger and pointed to his left breast- which was his way of saying to Mr. Bush that he feared the Texans would shoot him through the heart if he invaded or trespassed upon their territory.

With fairly regular train service on the new railroad through this section, and on into Texas to the southwest,

BUSH, GEORGE W.

INTERVIEW

9382

- 5 -

soon came regular mail service, too. However, until after the Strip opened the only post office in this end of it, except at Fort Supply, was at Buzzard's Roost.

Since Bush was stationed on the railroad, and in contact daily with trains and train men, he rendered much service to the early-day people of this country in delivering mail to them and in handling outgoing mail for them, too. He served as sort of a mobile, utility postmaster, but without a commission of course, for he was an employe of the Santa Fe.

Before this country was opened for settlement, however, mail service over the Fort Supply- Mobeetie, Texas stage line through Buzzard's Roost was suspended. The nearest post office then for a few years for those in the west end of the Strip, such as the cowman and cowpunchers, was the new town of Higgins, established on the Santa Fe a few miles over the line in Texas just after the railroad was put through that part of the country. For a time then Bush handled lots of mail for the ranchmen and their cowboys in the surrounding territory. Many times he would

BUSH, GEORGE W.

INTERVIEW

9382

- 6 -

receive their mail directly from the train when it stopped at his pump-station for water; or he would take it from the office at Higgins, if he happened to be there. Those to whom the mail belonged would come to his place of work to receive it. He says he was the K H boys' postmaster for quite awhile as their postman at the ranch suspended operations incident to the Strip opening.

Bush continued with the Santa Fe. In the course of time the Willow Creek pump station was abandoned. He put in one on the site where the town of Fargo was later founded and likewise another where Shattuck was later built. Pump stations at other points along the railroad line as far southwest as Panhandle, Texas, Bush established for the Santa Fe. For a time Panhandle City -as it was called in the early-day -was the end of the railroad.

He was operating the Fargo and Shattuck water stations when the Strip opened for settlement. It was his desire to homestead so he went to the booth on the line near Higgins, Texas, and registered. Even though he was working within the area, he was required to vacate and make the run from

BUSH, GEORGE W.

INTERVIEW.

9382

-7-

the border line for a claim. According to him about two hundred people registered at the booth near Higgins.*

A number of soldiers from Fort Supply guarded the lines bounding the west end of the Strip. The Santa Fe pulled a train to the boundary line for the benefit of those who chose thus to make the runs for the claims. When the signal to advance was fired, this train pulled over the line into the Strip country carrying nearly two hundred people making the run for land. Bush rode the train to Shattuck, or where Shattuck later was built. At this point he says one other man got off too. It is the belief of Mr. Bush that no more left the train to stake claims till the train reached Woodward or beyond that point.

He staked a claim close to and on the north side of the right-of-way when he left the train. Thus his homestead was right by his place of employment, the Santa Fe

BUSH, GEORGE W.

INTERVIEW

9382

- 8 -

pump station. He held down this claim while continuing his steady employment with the railroad. In the course of time and since very few claims were taken in the section around him, he established a ranch of about four sections of land and operated it for several years. He found the arrangement unsatisfactory so he discontinued his ranch interests and continued with the railroad company. He lived on his homestead adjoining the Shattuck townsite and operated a hand car over the railroad to and from Fargo- then called Whitehead- and remained in charge of the water stations at the two points.

In the early winter of 1893 Tom Miller who had come into the Strip from Higgins, Texas, put up a store building of native cottonwood lumber on the north side of the track near where the Shattuck stockyards are at present. Very soon Tom's establishment became Shattuck's first post office and first saloon. Miller kept his whiskey in a barrel in an excavation beneath the floor of his store building and his customers, as well as Tom himself, gained access to the liquor through a trap door in the floor. It

BUSH, GEORGE W. INTERVIEW 9382

- 9 -

was the practice to draw the whiskey from the barrel in a tomato can in which it was also served.

As postmaster, Tom Miller would receive the mail and empty it out in a pile on the floor in the back end of his store. Anyone calling for mail at the Shattuck post office in those days usually was directed by Miller to the pile of mail on the floor in the rear end of the store and advised to hunt for and find their own mail, if they had any.

Mr. Bush claims that Miller's stock of merchandise consisted largely of Arbuckles' and Lions' coffee, flour, beans, dried prunes and dried apples and salt pork side meat. On one occasion, he says, Miller received a consignment of this meat coming in mammoth slabs. It did not sell readily and several pieces of it were on hand in the store so long that it became like slabs of wood. Eventually, says Bush, the cowpunchers who frequented Miller's establishment to drink and play poker came to using these slabs of meat for bench-like seats at the card table by placing the ends of these mammoth slabs of hard, dry, salt meat on two boxes and then sitting on the slabs.

BUSH, GEORGE W.

INTERVIEW

9382

- 10 -

It is notable on the part of Mr. Bush that he has lived in this section since the time when the means of travel and transportation were by the old time stage coaches and the ox team freight wagons.

In 1924 he retired from the Santa Fe's employment having rounded out forty continuous years of service. He still owns and now lives on the claim he staked September 16, 1893.

(*Note-This representation does not square with what E. C. Gray of Higgins told me. Gray was postmaster at Higgins at the time of the opening. He claimed that not over fifty registered at that booth. Investigator.)