

GOFF, BEN.

INTERVIEW

10538

327

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

GOFF, BEN

INTERVIEW

#10538

Field Worker's name Amelia F. Harris

This report made on (date) April 27 1938

1. Name Ben Goff

2. Post Office Address Chickasha, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 627-206 Street,

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month December Day 9 Year 1888

5. Place of birth Throckmorton, Texas

6. Name of Father James W. Goff Place of birth Atlanta, Georgia

Other information about father Pioneer of West Texas, Oklahoma

7. Name of Mother Susan C. Goff Place of birth Pickensville

South Carolina.

Other information about mother Pioneer of Western Texas and Oklahoma

Born 1843 - died 1925.

Notes or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and history 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 10

GOFF, BEN

INTERVIEW

#10538

Amelia F. Harris
Journalist
April 27, 1938.

Interview with Ben Goff
Chickasha, Oklahoma.

My father, James Meadows Goff, was born at Atlanta, Georgia. His parents moved to Texas when he was a small boy where they engaged in farming and the family lived there until my father was grown.

In the Spring of 1861 he enlisted in the Army of the Southern Confederacy, his headquarters being at Shreveport, Louisiana, down the river seventy-five miles and on the west side from Vicksburg during the big siege. He was released from the army in the spring of 1865, and then returned to the farm in Texas and was soon married to Mary McDaniels who was the war widow of his former mess-mate.

Five children were born to this marriage. About this time his father died and in addition to his family of wife and five children he had to support his mother and small brother and sister. When his wife died his mother kept house for him and he moved to Throckmorton County, Texas, and established a cattle ranch. His cattle range was from Throckmorton to

GOFF, BEN

INTERVIEW

#10538

-2-

Jones County, a distance of 150 miles. This was in 1871 and there was not a white man west of him in Western Texas. The Comanche Indians had a trail though from the Indian country to southwestern Texas, and every full moon was the time they chose for raiding, and from his cow camp he rode every full moon to the Indian trail where he watched the Indians as they either went down or came back from the settlements where they had made their raids. They would generally have a bunch of horses that they had stolen. They didn't steal cattle only to eat but Dad always watched when he knew it was time for their raids. He occupied this ranch camp (a double log house) for three years.

He was elected cattle inspector for the Throckmorton County district in 1878 and that same year he married a second wife, Susan Howard, and to them five children were born. In the year of 1879, while District Cattle Inspector, he inspected thousands of cattle at 25¢ per head. These cattle were on the move from the Indian country to west Texas and from southern Texas to west Texas and thence to New Mexico. In inspecting he always took cattle for pay and in this way he built up a substantial business.

GOFF, BEN

INTERVIEW

#10538

-3-

Father decided ~~he~~ would move into Oklahoma Territory with his cattle because of better grazing and closer market. In 1894 my parents and three of the children (I was one of them) made a tour into Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory in a covered wagon drawn by a big pair of mules, taking along a camping outfit and sufficient provisions for the trip. We entered the Indian country via Henryetta, Texas, crossing big Red River at Deans Crossing (ferry) paying 25¢ for wagon and team. We went from there to Comanche and visited relatives there; thence through Rush Springs camping at the famous springs from which the Town was named. Rush Springs was a trading point for the cattlemen as it had a post office and two or three general merchandise stores, also a blacksmith shop. I remember it so well for father had one of the mules shod there. We went through Chickasha which was only a Burg of about three business houses and a post office. It was smaller than Rush Springs at that time. Thence through Anadarko, thence through the prairie country up the Washita River, over to the Cheyenne. I will

GOFF, BEN

INTERVIEW

#10538

-4-

never forget the trip. Father killed all kinds of game. We had two big dutch ovens, one Mother cooked the wild game in and the other she cooked biscuits in, and good gravy around a camp fire with two lanterns for lights with such good food is not easily forgotten. We were looking for open land for a ranch and a home too. We camped one night on the banks of the Washita and near a farm with a one room shanty and such a fine garden of beets, onions, peas, cabbage and beans that were over a foot long. They invited ^{us} to help ourselves to their garden and great big watermelons, the finest I ever saw.

The virgin soil was very rich. The Washita bottoms were planted in corn which grew so tall that a man on a horse could hide in the corn field. There were great big ears of corn, no "nubbins". Everybody had two or three ricks of corn left from the year before. We bought it to feed our mules for 10¢ and 15¢ per bushel. We were all carried away with the country and Father located a fine place for us.

And then we wended our way back home to prepare our things for moving. When we got home Father drew a map of

GOFF, BEN

INTERVIEW

#10538

-5-

the country and the trail we went over and gave it to my two oldest half-brothers, and fitted them with camping supplies and sent them back to the Territory to prepare a dugout for us.

The boys had no trouble in finding the location and they proceeded to dig the dugout which was 14 feet square and just above a fine spring of water. They dug into the hill and covered it over with a plate log around the top of the wall, ridge pole rafters, willow branches, hay, mud topped off the common ordinary dirt. The front was picketed up, with a door made of raw hide lumber with an old wooden latch and string. Everything was ready for us.

We left Throckmorton County, Texas, in December, 1894, with 110 head of mules and horses, 100 head of cattle, also three covered wagons loaded with furniture, bedding, some feed, a lantern on each wagon with old Shep (our dog) trailing along behind. Oklahoma bound we came through a different route this time and a little bit shorter. We entered Oklahoma crossing Red River immediately north of Vernon, Texas, drove through Altus and Mangum, on to the North fork of Red River,

GOFF, BEN

INTERVIEW

#10538

-6-

two miles above the mouth of Boggy Creek at a spring, to our new dugout home. The trip was made in eight days and without any trouble.

At that time the Cheyenne and Arapaho country in which we located was sparsely settled, some settlement along the creek bottoms of Elk Creek and Indian Creek and another creek west of Indian which was called Timber Creek, but there was a prairie extending from the North Fork of Red River approximately one hundred miles north and south, by twenty miles east and west, which was open range and unsettled at that time. The home seekers passed the prairie land up. Our nearest neighbors were six miles from us. We grazed our cattle and horses on free grass and farmed the fertile prairies.

One year our horses ate the loco weed, and we lost heavily. We lost a fine Percheron stallion for which Father paid \$1000.

At that time the prairie chickens were as thick as blackbirds are today and antelope and deer were plentiful. The prairies were alive with coyotes which did much damage

GOFF, BEN

INTERVIEW

#10538

-7-

to our calves and colts. At one time only, we fell upon the trail of a bear in the snow but we were never able to run him down. Also at that time remains of Buffalo could be found on the prairie - heads, bones, horns and some few pieces of hide, but only a very few pieces.

In about 1900 the home seekers began pouring in filling our grazing land and we were compelled to dispose of our stock. Land was settled down to 160 acres per family and our area became a fairly good agricultural community.

The young people in that country would ride horse back to Port fifteen miles east, to Timber Creek eighteen miles northwest, and to Mangum twenty-three miles south to dances, dance all night, and come home after daylight; and often eat their breakfast, change clothes and spend the day at hard work in the field. That was practically all of the social life in that country at that time. There were no churches or schools nor any kind of amusements other than the dances.

The head of a family regardless of his age could file on 160 acres of land, also persons twenty-one years of age could file on 160 acres, by going through the land office at Chey-

GOFF, BEN

INTERVIEW

#10538

-8-

enne City and paying \$14.25.

In 1908 the family consisting of Father, Mother and myself (the other members of the family had married and established homes of their own) left the farm, sold out lock, stock and barrel - 400 acres of land, thirty-five or forty head of cattle, twenty-five or thirty head of mules and horses - and moved to Hobart where my parents purchased a block of land, built a home and lived until Father's death in 1912.

During our residence at Hobart I went to school until I finished. Prior to that time I had attended schools three months at a time at Spring Creek, then I rode eight miles to what is known as Indian Creek school, then we established a school in our community in a dugout, taught by O. A. Simpson, who now resides in Oklahoma City and is head of the law school there. We didn't have benches to sit on. Some brought along boxes, others the wooden spool that barb wire is wound around, until Mr. Simpson got his first pay, \$40.00, then he bought some lumber and every day at noon he made a long bench or a long desk until he built sufficient for twenty pupils. He was paid by taxation. In a year or two the community built a frame

GOFF, BEN

INTERVIEW

#10538

-9-

school house, one mile south of Carter and we advanced from the dugout to a real school from which I went to Hobart. I then studied law in the law office of Joe Griner at Fred, for three years; then law school at Lebanon, Tennessee, and was admitted to the bar June 15, 1914.

I moved to Chickasha and engaged in the practice of law from 1915 to 1917, when I enlisted in the World War, served for two years and was discharged as Sergeant. I returned to Chickasha and resumed my law practice.

In 1920 I was elected Prosecuting Attorney of Grady County for a two year term and was re-elected for a second term. I resumed private practice in 1925. I was appointed United States Commissioner of the Eastern District of Oklahoma and served for four years and was re-appointed in 1929 for another four years under Governor R. L. Williams. I then resigned and resumed private practice. In 1935 I was appointed Conservation Commissioner for the Eastern District. I resigned and in July 1935, was appointed City Attorney of Chickasha where I served two years.

GOFF, BEN

INTERVIEW

#10538

-10-

My mother came to live with me in 1915 and remained in my home until her death.

I still own the original one hundred and sixty acre farm that my parents filed on. It is now a liability but the pleasant associations are worth the price.