

GILL, R. G.

INTERVIEW

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Nannie Lee Burns,  
Interviewer,  
September 28, 1937.

Interview with R. G. Gill,  
Afton, Oklahoma.

EARLY DAYS IN AFTON.

My parents, John and Grace Gill, lived in Central Arkansas when I was born, January 19, 1862. Mother died when I was quite small and I know little about my family history.

I managed to attend school when it was possible, but when quite young began rustling for myself. Before coming to Afton I clerked for John Scott and William Percival at Fort Gibson.

A section man by the name of Graham had started a store in what is now Afton and was doing business under the name of F. M. Crowell. Mr. Crowell was a farmer, and was living on a farm northwest of here and could give no time to the store. He wrote to me and asked if I would come and take charge of it. I reached Afton on August 4, 1886, and when I arrived I found only a few straggling buildings. There was a station house east, on the north side of the railroad tracks from the present passenger station; a large frame haybarn

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that faced the section house on the north side of the tracks; Crowell's store, a small one-story frame building that faced the railroad just east of the passenger station; and a three-room house, belonging to Mr. Stokes of Springfield, Missouri. He was the hay-man here then.

Mr. Stokes owned a steam hay press and came each summer to bale the wild prairie hay that covered these prairies. His son accompanied him and ran the press. Through the hay season they occupied the frame house.

The Frisco was running one passenger and one freight train a day, each way, through here. An old box car served for a station, and if you wanted the train to stop you flagged it down.

In 1887, F. M. Crowell built a larger store building where the pool hall now stands, southeast of the passenger station. Here we carried a mixed stock of goods, a little of everything that the farmer needed in those days. This was still a one-story frame building. He decided to move his family to this place, so he built a four-room frame house for them,

which was the first dwelling in Afton. In 1888, Dr. J. R. and Wig Dawson built the first drug store.

As more people came here, the need of a school was realized, so the people living in Afton and near here raised by voluntary contributions money to buy the lumber for a small one-room building. Mr. George W. Beck and others went over on the river with teams to the sawmill and bought and hauled the lumber to Afton for its first school building. It was built by the people of the town and afterwards, for some years, we had a subscription school each winter. The building stood southwest of the other buildings near where the park is now.

There were not many cattle here on the prairies and the most of those belonged to Henry Livingston, who lived southeast of Afton, on Horse Creek.

Life here was very quiet, a new person or family occasionally moved in, but there were no real rowdies or desperadoes. Of course the boys would come in occasionally on Saturday and stay around a little while, but they never did any damage.

We had to go to Vinita for our mail for several years. Then when Miami was laid out for a town in 1891, several who had come here went there, because they could own their homes; there were more people, and they had better advantages.

I have remained in Afton ever since, working for Mr. Crowell and later for myself. In 1910, I opened up my present insurance business and have given my time to that since then.