Form A-(S-149)

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

GILKESON, C. L. INTERVIEW 8688

Field Worker's name Robert W. Small

This report made on (date) September 10 1937

1. Name C. L. Gilkeson

2. Post Office Address Tonkawa, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 1 mile west ½ mile south

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month December Day 29 Year 1860

5. Place of birth Kansas

6. Name of Father John Gilkeson Place of birth Virginia

7. Name of Mother Mary Quistion Gilkeson Place of birth Indiana

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 8.

GILKESON,C.L. INTERVIEW 8688

Robert W. Small,
Interviewer,
September 10, 1937.

An Interview with Mr. C. L. Gilkeson,
1 mile west, ½ mile south, Tonkawa,
Oklahoma.

I was born of pioneering parents in the state of Kansas on December 29, 1860, and came to the Cherokee Strip in 1892. I leased lands of Indian allottees through their agent, D. J. M. Woods of the Ponca Indian Agency, located just west of the present site of Tonkawa, and embracing the ford or crossing on the Salt Fork River known as Yellow Bull Crossing.

On this land of a Tonkawa Indian allottee, a log cabin had been built by the Nez Perce tribe of Indians near a spring at the Yellow Bull Crossing. I lived in this log house which was about 16 X 20 ft. in dimensions.

Just east of this log cabin, on the bank of the Salt Fork River, three Indians had been buried, one of whom was Yellow Bull; two of the graves had markers of native red stones at the time I leased these lands, but since the settlement of the country the stones have been removed.

In the Fall of 1892 I planted forty acres of land to wheat and about forty acres were planted to corn in the Spring following; also some watermelons and potatoes were planted.

At harvest time in 1893, the wheat made a yield of twenty bushels per acre; the corn made about ten bushels per acre; the potatoes made a fair yield and the melons did very well, except that many were destroyed by coyotes or human prowlers.

The wheat raised was sold to the settlers who came into the country at the opening of the lands to settlement; the price obtained for same being 50¢ per bushel . The wheat crop was cut with a self-rake machine and threshed with a horse power threshing machine.

The rental paid on this land was grain rent, one third of the grain or other farm products was paid to the Indian Agent.

Prior to 1892 the Government had requested the removal of cattle from the Cherokee Strip but some cattlemen were very dilatory in removing their herds.

In 1892 several hundred head of cattle were started westward from the eastern part of the grass country, slowly grazing along over the country. Cowboys would herd them and keep them from scattering and when they reached the vicinity of my lease, upon which was a spring of good water that most all cowboys and cattlemen knew about and that had been their camping ground for years when passing through that section, a Mr. Harris, who was employed by the cattle company, came to me and got permission to share the cabin with me. At night we placed the cattle inside of an inclosure; Mr. Harris told me that they were removing their cattle from the eastern part for the reason that they could not obtain sufficient cars to ship them out in and that they were taking them to a railroad point several miles west where they hoped to be able to get cars to ship them in. During the night, when the cattle were at my place, they became stampeded and broke out and next morning the cattle were all gone. The cowboys set in to round them all up again, but eighteen head were never found; later, however, the Indian Police drove these

eighteen head of cattle out of the country into Kansas and gave them to the farmers near the Kansas line for beef.

After rounding up what cattle could be found the herd moved slowly on westward. Later in the season, the same cattle were returned from the western country, Mr. Harris stopping again at my cabin, and they told me that they could not obtain cars to ship the cattle in at the point they had driven them to out west and that they were returning them again to the eastern shipping point. This was a scheme of the cattlemen to avoid shipping them until they had gotten the benefit of another season of grazing.

Mr. Harris came to my place later the same year looking for the eighteen head that had been lost; I knew what had become of them and told him about their being driven out of the country into Kansas and given away for beef. Mr. Harris thanked me for the information, got on his horse and left.

During Mr. Harris' several stays at my cabin he related some of his experiences in the country at earlier periods.

Among other things, he told me that the Nez Perce Indians had a burial ground, or rather a burial place, at a point on Deer Creek near where it empties into the Salt Fork River, in which they buried their dead in the trees along the creek, by means of wrapping blankets about them and tieing them to the low-swinging branches. Mr. Harris related that at times he had ridden through the grounds on horseback when it presented a ghastly sight and the air was filled with offensive odor. In later years after the removal of the Nex Perce tribe from this section, the bones of the dead were washed up in piles by high waters from Deer Creek and were strewn along the stream of the Salt Fork River below the mouth of Deer Creek.

Yellow Bull was a chief of the Nez Perce tribe of Indians and is said to be buried on a high bank on the north side of the Salt Fork River, a short distance below the river crossing that bore his name in pioneer days.

I did not attempt to get a claim in the Run when the country was opened to settlement for the reason that I knew I would be termed a "Sooner" and would be contested,

regardless of anything I could do or say. I lived on the lease and in the vicinity till 1897, when I bought a claim that had been held down by a man named Scott for some time, his mother, ~~Mrs.~~ Scott, having filed on it as Scott was not eligible to file himself. Mrs. Scott relinquished her claim and I filed on the Southeast Quarter of Section 8, Township 25 North, Range 1 West, and am still living on the same farm.

I cut large cottonwood trees and had them sawed into lumber to use in buildings on the farm; some of the saw logs were cut in the coldest of weather and hauled in wagons on the ice of the Salt Fork River to a sawmill.

My dwelling house was filled with water to a depth of about eighteen inches during the flood of 1923 of the Salt Fork River and much of my farm lands were covered to a depth of eight and ten feet of water.

On September 16, 1893, the day of the Opening of the Cherokee Strip, and the following day, Sunday, the claimants over the country came to the spring near my cabin to get water and such a multitude assembled that they formed in

lines on either side of the spring and took turns in getting water from the spring. Hundreds of them stayed overnight and camped in tents and wagons or stayed out in the open until they could obtain a little water for themselves and their horses.

One man who had ridden his horse all day came in late in the afternoon and let his thirsty horse drink from the water of the Salt Fork River, and a little while later the animal became sick and in a few hours died from effects of the water. The spring near the Yellow Bull Crossing was noted far and near and it had long been a camping site of the early travelers through that section of country.

The old trail or road, after crossing the river at the Yellow Bull Crossing from the south, followed closely the high river banks on the north side for a distance of about one mile east, then turned across the prairies in a slightly northeasterly direction directly to Arkansas City, Kansas. South of the crossing, the road or trail took a southwesterly course to the Fort Sill country, passing through the country near the present site of Enid.

The Tonkawa Indians lived in cabins during the winter months and moved into tepees during the Spring and Summer months, in the early days in this part.

There were a few antelope, some deer and wild turkey in the country when I first came down here.

My cabin sheltered many unfortunates during the early years; standing on the bank of the river near the Yellow Bull Ford of the Salt Fork River. I have assisted many travelers from precarious situations in the ice and water of the river at different times. Strangers coming to my cabin for food or water or shelter from inclement weather were always taken in and given the best I had- all free of any charge whatever.