

TROSPER, THOMAS

T. PLAVIL

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

#10261

TROSPER, THOMAS. INTERVIEW.

Field Worker's name Anna R. Barry

This report made on (date) March 15, 1938.

1. Name Thomas Trospers.

2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 719 East Rogers Street.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month January Day 26 Year 1870

5. Place of birth Bartsville, Kentucky. Knox County.

6. Name of Father M. A. Trospers Place of birth Kentucky.

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Lucy Mathis Trospers Place of birth Kentucky
Grant County,

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 _____

TROSPEL, THOMAS.

INTERVIEW.

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An Interview with Thomas Trospcr, El Reno, Oklahoma.

By - Anna R. Barry - Journalist. S-149.

March 15, 1938.

Thomas Trospcr was born near Bartsville, Knox County, Kentucky, on January 26, 1870, a son of M. A. Trospcr and Lucy (Mathis) Trospcr, both of whom were born in the state of Kentucky. His first school was a little log school located about two and one-half miles from his home. Thomas received very little schooling because when small he had very poor health and was unable to attend school very long at a time. When just a small lad Thomas spent much of his time with his father on the farm and at their sawmill. He loved the outdoors and spent many hours in the woods watching birds, insects, and gathering wild flowers for his mother and often he became so interested at his play that he forgot to appear at home for lunch.

When eighteen years of age Thomas left home, first going to Arizona, but he soon left here and went to Texas. Soon after the Opening of Oklahoma in 1889, he decided that he wanted to see the new country he had heard so much about and it was in the Spring of 1890 that he landed in Oklahoma City. He stayed here several weeks, later coming

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to Canadian County and in the Fall of 1890 he rented two Indian leases from the Government near Calumet. He soon built a small half-dugout, eight by ten feet. As this was all prairie land, his first task was to purchase a team and he soon set to work breaking the tough sod. He found it difficult to break the sod with one team, especially a team as small as his. He found it necessary to join forces with a neighbor and they broke a patch on each farm. His first crop was mostly a few patches of corn planted on the newly broken sod; first he took an axe and drove it through the sod, dropping several grains of corn in each hole and with the axe closed the cut; later he hired a boy to drop the corn while he covered it with a hoe.

This country at that time was a hunter's paradise; along the South Canadian River there was big game and near at home ducks, quail, wild turkey, prairie chickens and other small game abounded. Large groups of men, some Indians, gathered in rabbit and wolf drives; these men sought companionship as well as sport. Spearing fish was also a pleasant amusement. Torches were made of corn cobs soaked in kerosene and placed on long sticks. Spears were often

made of pitchforks. After dark the men entered the shallows of the river, and, while the torches were held high to light up the stream, they were able to gig some fish.

Newcomers into this country were often called "tender feet", often tricks were played on these people. One such trick Mr. Trooper recalls was to get the tenderfeet to catch a gopher. They were told that all a person needed to do was to pour water in the hole, hold a sack over it and catch the little animal when he jumped out. Many times tenderfeet stood there for hours waiting for the half-drowned rat to jump into the sack. There were other nicknames which were applied to the rural folks and to people who were traveling. Often in bad weather people traveling stopped at a hay stack or pile of straw to spend the night, of course, when they came from the hay next morning it was only natural that a few straws stuck to their clothing or hair. These people were usually called "hayseeds". Another nickname originated from the fact that the farmers had to follow the walking plow and avoid the clods as best he could and so became known as "clod hoppers". Each year great quantities of sorghum were made and used by the homesteaders. As with many people, corn

bread and molasses was the principal food, this gave rise to the term which was applied to the settlers, "sorghum lappers".

Farmers had many pleasant hours in haying time as this was before much wheat had been planted in this country. Haying time was a time when farmers exchanged work as they do in threshing time now, but it was not accompanied with the same rush and nervous tension. Neighbors came from their lonely homes to exchange help and enjoy one another's company while stacking hay. The wives usually come to help with the cooking which relieved the loneliness of prairie life. Generally a watermelon feast and a dance would be held at night and all the folks in the surrounding country would come.

During the first three or four years sixteen inch, single walking plows were used, but later the double gang plow, drawn by four horses, replaced the single plows. After

this country was settled for a few years, one could look at the railway station platform and the prairie around it and find them covered with bright new machinery. There was a tendency, as soon as the homesteader received his patent to mortgage the farm in order to buy machinery. Many farm papers advised their readers not to borrow money to buy

machinery which would be worn out before it was paid for and many homesteaders finally lost their claims as a result of their lack of forethought in this matter. Many Indians bought a large amount of this new machinery only to take it home, use it a few times and during the winter months an Indian traded it to some white man for a beef to butcher.

Generally the first schools organized in Oklahoma were subscription schools. The tuition charge was from \$1.00 to \$1.50 a month for each child. In the smaller towns where there were the beginnings of the modern grade system, the rate was usually \$1.00 per month. Teachers were hired for one term, which lasted from three to five months. With progress in the town school blackboards were introduced. These were made of plaster or boards painted black. A package of chalk and a rag or sheepskin eraser accompanied each blackboard. It must be admitted that teachers in this new country were only fair. There was an attempt to induce normal-trained teachers to come to the Oklahoma Territory but the prosperous, successful teacher could hardly be expected to leave a good position for a new country where terms were short and pay none too certain. As a rule the

earlier teachers in most communities were homesteaders who had better educations than their neighbors. In most every community there could be found people with considerable education who had come to Oklahoma to secure farms of their own. These, either through the requests of their neighbors or through their own desire to make a little money with, which to improve their claims, taught school during the winter months.

Mr. Trospen has spent most of his time since coming to Oklahoma in 1890, at farming, with the exception of two years and seven months he spent in the Spanish-American War. On December 5, 1928, he married Nancy Ann Fuller. Last year they sold their farm nine miles northeast of El Reno, bought a nice little home at 719 East Rogers Street in El Reno, where they reside today.