

WILCOX, R. L.

INTERVIEW

#8992

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

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#8992

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INTERVIEW.

Field Worker's name Virgil Coursey

This report made on (date) October 25, 1937

1. Name R. L. Wilcox

2. Post Office Address Altus, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 800 Block East Broadway.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month September Day 24 Year 1889

5. Place of birth Enid, Oklahoma

6. Name of Father Theodore S. Wilcox Place of birth Columbus, Ohio

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Hanna Lucinda Pritner Place of birth Hutchinson, Kan.

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 9.

An Interview with Mr. R. L. Wilcox, Altus, Oklahoma.
By - Virgil Coursey - Investigator.
October 25, 1937.

My father was Theodore S. Wilcox. He came to Kansas when he was a young man and there met and fell in love with Miss Hanna Lucinda Pritner. They were engaged to be married, but on hearing of the Opening of the Cherokee Strip for settlement, they decided to postpone their marriage so that each of them might claim some land. For this reason the day of the Run into the Cherokee Strip found both my father and mother on the line ready to make the dash for a homestead. Mother's brother, Henry, came along also.

People began to gather for the Run days before the time set for the event.

A narrow strip of land along the edge of the Cherokee Strip was used as a starting point and people lined up there in a long row just as one would in a foot race.

There was so much milling around by the crowd that the ground was whipped into a powder like dust that was

stifling. The weather was hot and sultry.

My father and mother, being an ingenious two, engaged all the output of bread baked in the nearest towns and put up booths where they sold bread and water. It proved to be a profitable scheme, for both food and water were scarce.

When the time for the Run approached Mother's brother, Henry, was on horseback, and Father and Mother were in a buggy drawn by two horses. The air was tense with excitement. Government officials kept the crowd pushed back on the starting line. Finally there was the crack of a pistol, the signal to start, and the crowd leaped forward, some in wagons and buggies, some on horseback, and some even on foot. Horses were driven at top speed until they dropped dead. One horse that my parents were driving died and Father stepped into the shafts and completed the race. It was understood however, Father said, that Mother was not to lash him with the whip.

Father and Mother tried to get adjoining claims

but unfortunately could not do so. Their claims were about a half mile apart, one of them being two and a half miles west of North Enid. North Enid was the original location before Enid was moved farther south to its present location.

The lovers were, of course, soon married after the completion of the dash for their homesteads.

My father was a graduate of Stockton University and taught school in the Enid community for nine years. For quite a while he had to go seventeen miles to school. He taught at Old Aaron.

A boy named Lewis Morrell attended my father's school. His mother died when he was quite young and his only living relative so far as any one knew was his father. One day Mr. Morrell disappeared and was never seen or heard from. He was probably killed by the Indians. My father took Lewis and reared him and he is now a successful business man.

During the early days corn and feed stuff were very scarce in the Cherokee Strip. Father and two other

men, Mr. Jackson and Mr. King, used to make trips into Kansas and haul back corn. People came for miles to buy it.

Al Jennings and his gangster brothers did not want the settlers in the Cherokee Strip and tried every means possible to run them out. One day when there was a strong wind from the south the gangsters set fire to the tall, dry grass. The fire raced with relentless fury across the prairie toward the settlements. I never heard my father relate the details, but someone must have made a Paul Revere ride to warn everyone of the approaching danger. Anyway the farmers worked night and day plowing out wide strips of grass around their homes and joining the strips on the south so that there would be a continuous unbroken fire break.

However, the homes would have been wiped out had not the wind changed to the north causing the fire to creep along.

In 1901 we moved to Granite. That was before the railroad came through, though there was quite some talk

that the railroad would be built. My father bought a half block of the original townsite. On one corner a large two-story frame hotel had just been completed. My father opened a real estate office next to the hotel. Then came a furniture store, followed by a restaurant.

While the railroad was being built, Granite became a thriving town. People flocked in by the hundreds. For quite some time my father fed as many as four hundred people daily at the hotel and restaurant. This is outstanding in my memory even though I was a little fellow, and this is why; there was a swinging door to the hotel and people were continually passing through, first from one side and then another. I got ~~knocked down several times before I learned how to slide~~ through quickly.

At one time there were thirteen saloons in Granite.

I remember the small pox epidemic of 1901, when ~~people died by the hundreds, many of the victims were~~ buried east of Granite. The old cemetery is still there.

I used to trap wild game in the vicinity where the Reformatory now stands.

My father owned one of the first automobiles in this part of the country. It was a one cylinder Cadillac, a buggy-like contrivance with the door in the back. One day he was "showing off" his new car on the streets of Granite. He passed a short, heavy set man weighing about three hundred pounds. The man was riding a horse. Just as they met the car began to backfire; the horse shot forward and ran at top speed for quite a distance. The other day I visited an old lady who in the course of our conversation recalled this incident. She said that the poor fellow got the horse under control near her house.

He came to the house and asked them to send for a doctor and stated that a man riding in a queer looking buggy had shot him in the leg. He probably got his leg injured slightly in the runaway. It took some little talking to convince the man that he had not been injured.

My father bought some acreage north of Granite and made an attempt to establish a large health resort at Sulphur Springs. Analysis of the water indicated fourteen kinds of minerals that were beneficial to health.

Father built a large hotel and bath house and organized a ball team to the members of which he paid a monthly salary. This ball team attracted quite a bit of publicity and people came by the thousands to see the games.

My brother and I delivered water in Granite for 10 cents a gallon. We also shipped it to other towns. However, the resort did not thrive and the enterprise was finally abandoned. The water is there, as good as any other health resort enjoys. Possibly, some day someone will really establish a health resort there.

Twenty-five miles west of Granite is what is known as Jester Cave. About twenty-five men at Granite decided to explore this cave. No one had ever penetrated

it for more than ten or fifteen feet. Everyone knew that the cave harbored bats and birds of several kinds, but there was some speculation as to what else might be found in the dark recesses of the cave. The men took candles and lanterns and entered the cave. In some places the opening was so narrow that the men had to crawl through; at other places it was as large as a room. No doubt the cave had been used at times as a place of refuge. The men penetrated to a distance of two hundred feet.

Here they got into a den of bob cats. The cats opened attack. The lanterns were soon knocked out and the men were left in total darkness, and when they finally emerged from the cave they were pitiful to behold. Their faces were lacerated and their clothing almost in strings.

An old man named "Pickle Simon" claimed Jester as his home, but where he came from no one knows. He claimed to be one hundred and fourteen years of age when he drifted into the community and he lived there

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for forty years before he died. He was a miner and explorer. He had a long mustache and hair that hung down his back. He wore a large white hat with a scalloped brim, and a red bandana handkerchief knotted around his neck. He had a walking stick, a dog and a donkey. He would ride awhile and then walk and lead the donkey. Almost any day he could be seen with the donkey browsing around on the mountain side.
