

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

MORRILL, P. K.

INTERVIEW

8233

Field Worker's name Zaidee B. Bland,

This report made on (date) August 17, 1937

1. Name P. K. Morrill,

2. Post Office Address Altus, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 621 East Pecan

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month June Day 3 Year 1862

5. Place of birth Nauvoo, Illinois.

6. Name of Father Milton Morrill Place of birth Maine

7. Name of Mother Amanda Morrill Place of birth Illinois.

Other information about mother _____

Other information about father Radical Democrat.

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 7.

MORRILL, P. K.

INTERVIEW

8233

Zaidee B. Bland,
Investigator,
August 17, 1937.

Interview with P. K. Morrill,
Altus, Oklahoma.

The Experience of Bringing the White Man's
Law into Oklahoma.

I was born in Illinois, my mother being the first recorded white birth in that State. From there I moved to Alabama.

I was the first County Judge of Kiowa County. I had a background of politics in my family for they had lived for a generation solely to expound Democratic principles, so I thought from the arguments that went on in my father's and grandfather's home continually. There were lawyers in every generation clear back to the old country and not one thing was ever discussed before me but the law.

When the advertisement of the opening of land to settlement by drawing in Oklahoma appeared I came over to El Reno and registered for land.

I came on down to Kiowa County to look around and opened up an office to practice law. Every judge, policeman and everyone else that represented law and order were appointed by the President. It was a hard combination to fight for justice.

-2-

The first case I had of any prominence was for Lone Wolf's young men. An Indian loves races more than almost anything and a horse that can win about every race is almost deified by the Indians. These braves of Lone Wolf had an old paint horse that was pretty well known among all the Indians for he could outrun about anything on four legs.

Sometime in the fall before the Fair of 1900 this horse disappeared. Search as they would no trace of the horse could be found. As the Indians gathered for the Fair in Hobart the horse was found on the streets of Hobart hitched to a delivery wagon. The Indians recognized him at once and laid claim to him but as he was claimed to be owned by a white man there was nothing doing. Old Lone Wolf got an interpreter and came and laid the case before me. He gave a perfect description of the horse all right but there seemed no mark or brand on the horse that he could prove identification by.

I said how come no brand. The Indian explained, "Horse jump when hot iron touch and brand slight - only show when grass short in the spring. H in an C on right hip. Horse cut one time on wire. Little long scar where neck joins body -

MORRILL, P. K. INTERVIEW.

8233

-3-

slight worm scar on left leg." I made out papers and summoned them all to appear in court on a certain day. The white men and Indians were all there. The white men swore there was not a mark or brand of any name or nature on the horse, that he was a white man horse-raised by white man. The horse was more white than any other color and "White Man" happened to be what the Indians called the horse so when the white men called the horse "White Man" I could not make the Indians understand. I asked that the horse be brought to the court for evidence and the judge and jurors all came down onto the court house steps to look at the horse. The white men claimed no marks or brands at all and the Indians claimed a brand and two scars that showed in short grass time. When the horse was brought I sent for a barber and told the Indian to put his finger where the brand should be. Without hesitating, the Indian stepped out and placed his finger on three separate places on the horse.

I ordered the barber to take the clippers and clip the hair but nothing showed so I told the barber to shave the places the Indian had indicated. When the spots were

MORRILL, P. M. INTERVIEW.

8233

-4-

shaved there were the brand and scars as plain as could be, just as the Indian said. We gave the horse to the Indians and they cleaned up every race during the fair.

That placed me in good with Lone Wolf and he invited me to come out and hunt or fish on his place at any time. The first time I went out to hunt Lone Wolf came out and stood and looked at me a little and, crossing his right arm across his chest, swept it out from his body with a sweeping gesture and said, "White man shoot birds no shoot cow. White man catch fish with line no dip up with cloth."

I went out fishing at Komalty once and the Indians came to me with a tale that two Indians, Humming Bird and Coyote Bill, had traded wives and that I should do something about it. I went to see them and asked about it. They acknowledged it and asked, "It against white man law to swap wives?" I explained that it was. They said, "All right, we trade back," and did.

As the first election was approaching we decided that we might as well begin to line the voters up, never doubting but what the whole county would go Republican for all the

MORRILL, P. M. INTERVIEW.

8233

-5-

excursions had been run in on the trains from the north and such had drawn the land as we supposed. Great was our surprise to find it Democratic. Many had just come over the line from Texas and registered so we Democrats were jubilant.

The Republicans pulled a big barbecue and made a speech to the Indians and told them they were American citizens now and must be sure and come to the polls and vote, but we Democrats went to them and told them if they voted they would have to work the roads. Both the Democrats and the Republicans got an interpreter and made speeches continually to the Indians and there was more than one fight - I barely escaped several.

I am a small man compared with the most of the big western men who settled this country. I wore a brown derby and before the campaign was over my enemies had ceased to use my name at all, merely referring to me as the brown derby.

There was only one box where the Indians were likely to vote very strong. The Republicans had gone among the Indians and taught them the one word Republican and told them to be sure and say the one word only when asked how they wanted to vote. When election day came the Democrats advertised a

MORRILL, P. M. INTERVIEW.

8233

-6-

barbecue so far away from the box where the Indians would have to vote that they could not possibly attend the barbecue and vote, too. We also sent a few cowboys out to the Indian box to act a little crazy and shoot off a few pistols into the air. I think there were three Indian votes polled.

Fire was the thing we feared most in those early days. None of these western towns had a sufficient water supply for years and I have seen a fire start and burn a strip from one end of the town to the other before it would burn itself out.

Claim jumpers gave us a lot of bad deals. A man would come in from away off toward the mountain with another's team perhaps and his papers and claim he had bought the fellow out and that the missing man had gone back home where he came from. It took us some time to tumble to the fact that the missing man had been murdered and longer still to get a sufficient law force to hunt for clues until we found that the guilty parties might be punished.

I remember once a man came in to have his transaction recorded who never aroused the least bit of suspicion for he said his landlord had gone back East to spend the holidays

-7-

and simply decided to remain and had the letters to show. More than two years later a bumper crop was made and the so-called owner had to hire some men to go out and help gather the crop. One of the hired men loved to hunt and while away over in the mountains he came across a skeleton that some wild animal had dug out of a shallow grave. He came to town and reported it before he told anyone else. By proper investigation we found who the man was and forced a confession. Justice is sometimes very tardy in a new country and lots of crimes were committed that perhaps were never brought to light.