

ERNCE, CHARLES H.

INTERVIEW

#8866

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

Field Worker's name Ethel B. Tackitt

This report made on (date) October 9, 1937

Lone Wolf, Kiowa County, Oklahoma

1. Name Charles H. Ernoe

2. Post Office Address Lone Wolf, Kiowa County, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) Lone Wolf, Oklahoma, Rte 3.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month December Day 5 Year 1878

5. Place of birth Benton County, Arkansas.

6. Name of Father George W. Ernoe Place of birth Pennsylvania

Other information about father Dispatch boy in Union Army-Civil War

7. Name of Mother Hencie L. Thompson Place of birth California

Other information about mother Made the trip from California

by ox wagon, crossing desert and Stake Plains, with parents in
childhood.

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 10.

Interview with Charles H. Ernce
Lone Wolf, Oklahoma

Field Worker - Ethel B. Tackitt
Indian-Pioneer History, S-149
October 9, 1937

I was born in Benton County, Arkansas, December 5, 1878, just across the line from the old Indian Territory.

My father, George Washington Ernce, was born in Pennsylvania and when his father was killed in an early battle of the Civil War, he followed the Union Army, a boy of only ten years and later became Messenger Boy. He served with the Union Army throughout the War.

My mother, Nancie L. Thompson Ernce, was born in California and she often told us children her memories of crossing the great desert and plains, with her parents when a child, as they came to Texas. The trip was made in an ox wagon and there were no roads and the family thought they were doomed to starve on the desert or be killed by the Indians who were very hostile in the western countries at that time.

An Indian squaw with her children took pity on them and piloted their wagon across the desert and protected them from the other Indians.

My grandfather, Peter Thompson, went from Texas to Arkansas, then in 1881, moved over into the Indian Territory and settled in the Old Cherokee Nation.

Two years later, in 1883, my parents moved our family across the line into the Cherokee Nation and Father rented land from a Cherokee woman who was a widow, I do not remember her name. He cleared the land and built a log one room house with puncheon floor, clapboard roof, stick and mud chimney.

All the timber was cut from the land and the fences were built by cutting the brush, piling it and lapping the smaller brush together, making a brush fence that would keep out most anything. Where the brush fences could not be easily made, the rail fences, with stake and riders were used.

We raised mostly cotton, and some corn to feed the work stock. There was no need to feed the hogs, as there was plenty of free range and the hogs ran out and were killed by anybody who wanted them. There was much wild game, turkey and deer, with many "varmints," such as panthers, bob cats, and wolves.

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We had lived in the Territory two years, about six or seven miles from Grandfather Thompson's home.

There were bands of renegades in the Territory in those days who would wait until a farmer had about laid by his crop then they would hatch up some excuse and go in a band and order the farmer and his family to leave the country, then take the crop. There was no way to stop them for they would kill if they wanted to get rid of a person.

One evening my father and mother and my brother, John, who was a baby, and myself, were out in the yard which surrounded our cabin when we heard a great noise of yelling and shooting coming through the woods. Father told us that something was wrong and we were going to have trouble. The noise continued and a group of six or eight men dashed up to the yard on horseback. There were some Indians among them but the leader was a white man. They ordered Father to get off the place at once. Father told them that he would not leave his crop and going to the cabin door, took his gun down from above, where he always kept it.

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The men had gotten off their horses by this time and they took the gun from Father. He had a pistol under the head of his bed and he stepped over and got it. The men then over-powered him and the leader ordered the renegades to throw our things all out of the house. They threw out everything we had, which was bedding, cooking utensils, chairs, table and food. When everything was out of the house they then released Father and told him not to put anything back in the house or go back. Then they got on their horses and rode away.

It was then late in the evening and there was no neighbor to call and no way to go anywhere except walk. It was six or seven miles to Grandfather Thompson's home and my brother, George, who was next to me was there. I was seven years old. Mother and Father decided that he should stay and watch our things and try to keep anybody from taking them away while she took my brother, John, and me and walked through the woods to Grandfather's home and got help. I shall never forget that walk. We did not know but

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what the renegades would return and kill Father and take everything we had, or who or what we would meet in the woods. It soon grew dark and we were more frightened, as there was only an occasional footpath crossing the branches and Mother followed the direction as only a woman of those days could make her way across those rough wooded miles, in the dark, with nothing to guide her but her own good judgment and strong determination.

It was far into the night when we came near where she knew that Grandfather's home should be. When we got within about a mile of the place, she began to give the call which was used among our people to bring help.

The call was heard at Grandfather's and a young girl cousin of Mother's who was called Sis McGuire, was the first one of the family to get to us. She ran as fast as she could. Nobody knows how glad we were to see her. The family helped us on to the house and Mother told them what had happened.

As soon as it was light, Grandfather took the wagon and his sons and went to get Father and our things.

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They found him unmolested but loaded everything we had into the wagon and brought it away from the place, for they knew that all would be destroyed by these men if it remained until they returned.

Father, Mother and we children lived at Grandfather's home and assisted him in laying by his crop until it was finished. Then Grandfather, with his two sons, my mother's brothers, Bill and Lincoln, age ten and twelve years, took our family to Texas.

We traveled in a covered wagon through what was then the Cherokee and Choctaw Nation. There were no roads, only an occasional wagon track or a trail leading in the general direction of the Texas line. These were followed as much as possible and when there was no trail they drove straight across the country. They forded the creeks and gullies as best they could and the only bridge I remember was on a deep, narrow canyon. This bridge had been made of logs and poles and was partly washed away, so we had to stop while Father, Grandfather and the boys cut logs and poles and rebuilt the bridge so we could get across. Then

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they had the family to walk across and eased the team and wagon across with great caution for fear the bridge would fall through before they could get them off.

The grass was so high, it was in many places above the wagon top and at night when we camped they would clear the grass away so that a camp fire could be built and not get away from them. Then Father and one of the boys would stand guard, while Grandfather and the other one slept, then they in turn would stand guard, and in this way some one was on guard at all times. This was necessary in those days to protect us from horse thieves, as well as wild animals that roamed the country. We crossed the Arkansas River and Red River on a ferry boat and felt much safer when we got into Texas, but there was little more settlement in North Texas at that time than there was in the Indian Territory.

Grandfather took us to Lewisville, Denton County, Texas, then he and the boys went back to their home in the Cherokee Nation.

We lived in Texas until I was fifteen years old, then we moved back to the Indian Territory and settled in the Cherokee Strip.

Mother's older brother, Jerry Thompson, ran away from home when he was thirteen years old and his people knew nothing of him for thirty-five years. In that time he had grown up and had married an Indian woman of the Fox Tribe, by the name of Josephine James. She had some education, about as much as usual for women of that day. They had a large family, in fact they reared ten children of their own and adopted two nieces and reared them.

When the Indian lands were allotted, my uncle, Jerry Thompson, secured allotments for himself and his family. In the meantime he had located his brothers and sisters, whom he had not seen in thirty-five years, and asked them to move on this land and improve it by living on it and putting it in a state of cultivation. In that way his kin-folk settled all around him and built houses, cutting the timber from the land and improving it in value as well as

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making a living for themselves.

The two nieces whom he and his wife adopted were Dovie and Lela Thompson, children of his brother who had died. These girls were educated in the Indian School and Dovie married a full-blood Indian, who was her teacher.

In 1901, I came across the country from the east side of the Indian Territory in a wagon to Mangum, in Greer County, and lived there until the Kiowa Territory was opened. Then I came to the Lone Wolf vicinity and have farmed here until the present time.

I have witnessed the many changes in government, farming and living conditions.

I never attended school after we moved back to the Territory from Texas, as the white children were not allowed in the Indian schools unless they had an Indian right and there were no schools provided where I lived.