

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

8070 253

ESTES, V. G. INTERVIEW.

Field Worker's name Virgil Coursey

This report made on (date) July 26, 1937

1. Name Mr. V. G. Estes

2. Post Office Address Altus, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 505 East Pecan

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month February Day 20 Year 1889

5. Place of birth Alabama

6. Name of Father J. W. Estes Place of birth Alabama

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Mary Ricks Place of birth Georgia.

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 _____.

An Interview with Mr. V. G. Estes, Altus, Oklahoma.
By - Virgil R. Coursey - Field Worker
July 26, 1937.

I saw my first real sunset on that day in November, 1897, when we landed by train at Vernon, Texas. Back in Alabama one never saw a sunset such as this because there was too much timber. Two days' trip in a wagon brought our family to their new home at Navajoe.

Ours was a pioneering family. My father homesteaded in Alabama. Uncle Wes Ricks came to Oklahoma in 1889, and Grandfather W. H. Ricks in 1894. All settled near Navajoe, the old Indian trading post.

It is very probable that the Yeckley family was the first family to settle in this county. It is said that Mr. Yeckley and his wife went to California in 1849, from thence to Utah and Colorado, and landed in Oklahoma with some six thousand sheep in about 1873. They had two sons, Willie and John.

So rare were visitors in those days that it is said that one of Mrs. Yeckley's boys came rushing into the house one day and announced that he could see a wagon coming and there was a woman in it. The visitors proved to be the

Sweet family from Mangum.

Although the Yeckles came so early, they homesteaded only eighty acres. Later the Rock Island officials assisted them to buy one hundred sixty acres. My father acquired this land in 1901. In 1899 the Yeckles moved West into Arizona with their sheep.

In 1897 this was a vast prairie and one could go almost anywhere without going around any fences. We bought supplies from Vernon. This was a fifty-five mile trip by way of Dunbar Flats and Humphreys.

Navajoe was an Indian trading post and I have seen as many as eight hundred Indians there at one time. The Indians drew money quarterly from the Government. They spent it quite freely. The men played poker and monte, a game which I never understood. It was played with cards having pictures of trees, etc, on them.

One day in 1899 a big crowd of Indians and white men were gambling. The Indian Chief was called "Chicken". A cowboy who said his camp was at Lone Wolf joined them in the game. "Chicken" and the cowboy began winning all

the money. "Chicken" became suddenly ill about midnight and died. It was apparent that the whiskey he was drinking had been poisoned. The Indians left wailing and crying, and every one in town was afraid there would be trouble, for no doubt the Indians knew there had been foul play, but no further trouble developed.

In 1900 horse thieves became a menace to the country. There was a regular gang, an organization with headquarters at Navajoe and Rush Springs. Horses were stolen and driven East and sold. In 1898, Mr. Blalock, Sheriff of Greer County, appointed my uncle, H. C. Ricks, as Deputy. Mr. Ricks worked with the marshals to break up horse stealing. Three marshals who have been referred to as the "Three Musketeers" were Bill Tighlman, Cris Madson, and Heck Thomas.

One day two men drove into Navajoe in a hack and as quietly as possible drove around to the back of my father's blacksmith shop and came in. After a long, confidential talk my father told me to run over to the hotel and see if I could find Mr. Roberts. I was to say nothing to Mr. Roberts but come back and report where he was. I went over to the hotel but failed to find the man. Later I saw him

standing in front of the pool hall with a group of men.

When I reported this, the two men asked my father to accompany them to the pool hall and point out this Mr. Roberts. My father explained that his accompanying them would probably defeat their purpose and suggested that I show them the man. The officers were afraid there might be some gun play and I would get hurt, but I went with them. The officers kept telling me to point out the man before we got too close. Finally Roberts lighted a cigarette and I exclaimed, "The man lighting the cigarette, the man with three fingers on his hand". Roberts was known as "Three-Finger Roberts".

The officers pitched me 50 cents and told me to clear out with all possible speed. But curiosity prompted me to get some place where I could see what went on. Almost before I knew it the officers whipped out guns and commanded the crowd to put up their hands. Not a hand went up. Then some one in the crowd said, "It's Heck Thomas", and every hand shot up. The magic of a name! Roberts was commanded to step forward and surrender, which he did quietly, and thus ended the horse stealing.

In 1900 a small school house was built at Navajoe. I climbed up on the frame work, and from that position counted fifty-six new houses.

The mountains were to the east so that I got only three quarters of a circle view. Three years previous I could not have counted over five houses. This shows how quickly the country settled up.

In 1902 the Frisco Railroad was built and contrary to previous plans, missed Navajoe by several miles so the town of Navajoe soon died.