

NICHOLAS, JOHN M.

INTERVIEW

8729

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

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NICHOLAS, JOHN M.

INTERVIEW

#3729

Field Worker's name Ida A. Merwin

This report made on (date) September 29 1937

1. Name John M. Nicholas

2. Post Office Address Morrison, R#1

3. Residence address (or location) 12 E 3S 3/4 E 1/2 N. of Perry

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month March Day 22 Year 1856

5. Place of birth Stark County, Illinois

6. Name of Father Joseph Nicholas Place of birth Rayville, Ohio

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Frances (Dixon) Nicholas Place of birth Near Rayville, Ohio

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 5.

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Ida A. Merwin
Interviewer
September 29, 1937.

Interview with John M. Nicholas,
Morrison, Oklahoma.
Route 1

I am the son of Joseph and Frances (Dixon) Nicholas and was born in Stark County, Illinois, March 22, 1856. In 1891 I went to Missouri and from Missouri to Oklahoma, locating at Stillwater, where I opened a restaurant on South Main Street, which I operated for two years.

I made the trip from Missouri on the train, bringing with me just the necessary furnishings for a home, three head of horses, a wagon and a cow. The unloading point was a flag station, called Wharton, on the Santa Fe Railroad. This station was located a mile or so south of where Perry is now and after unloading I used the team and wagon to haul the other things across country to Stillwater.

Our home in Stillwater was a tent with boards around the base to make it higher. After I sold the restaurant I did freighting from the flag station of Wharton to Stillwater. I took up this work while waiting for the opening of the Cherokee Strip.

On September 16, 1893, I entered the race at a point northwest of Stillwater, near a country store called Ireton;

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this store only operated a short time after the opening.

I made the run on horseback on a race horse that I brought with me from Missouri. I rode to the Red Rock Creek country and made the run in one hour and twenty minutes. I hoped to secure bottom land, but failed to get any. There were so many "Sooners", that when I set a stake some one would appear and claim the land, and when I did get to set one I found it was on land reserved for school land. I returned to Stillwater and learned that there was land in the vicinity of Pawnee that had not been taken yet so another man and I started there but night overtook us and we camped under a tree for the night, The next morning there were two others camped near us, and upon investigation we found that the land on which we had stayed for the night had never been claimed, but one of the others beat us in setting a stake, and as I was not feeling good I decided to go back home and before reaching home I became so sick that I had to get off my horse and lie on the ground until I felt able to make the rest of the trip, I was sick for several weeks, due to exposure and exertion.

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In 1894 the school lands were opened to bids. In the spring of 1895 I was the successful bidder on the S.W. $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 36-21-2E in Noble County. My son is still caring for the place and farming there. Soon after securing this land I made a dugout and moved the family from Stillwater to this land.

We lived in this dugout for several years, and then I built the main part of the house that is there now, later I added porches, and several years later I enclosed one of them to make more rooms.

During the first year I hauled water for house use, then I had a well drilled by Webster Smith who now lives in Perry. During the first years we experienced some terribly hard times. I often saw times when I did not know how I would get food for the family, and my wife took the tent that we had lived in while in Stillwater and made shirts and trousers out of it. I finally secured work on a farm nearer Stillwater and got 50 cents per day and my wife and children did the work on the farm, and in this way I managed to get food until we could raise a crop. Our supplies were mostly bought at Stillwater

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but occasionally I went to the town of Morrison; there was a store there run by a Mr. Morrison where I could get some things. My first crop was kaffir corn, the next year I planted corn and castor beans also, but the beans proved the most profitable. I hauled corn to Red Rock when I had any to market and would get 12 and 15 cents per bushel for it. After the third year I sowed wheat and dealt in high grade stock.

My hogs were thoroughbreds and the cattle were of high quality, and while I did not handle them extensively, what I had to sell brought good prices.

The fall of 1893 was very dry and hot and there was not much water in the creeks; this was an advantage during the run as this made creeks more convenient for crossing. There were raging fires in some places and one often had to dodge them.

In my first years of farming the seasons were good, and I raised good crops. The first two years we used spades to chop the upturned sod and put the seed in by hand.

A school district was organized shortly after the opening and Mrs. P. A. Jones now deceased solicited the people for subscriptions to build the school house. Most all

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of the lumber and work was donated and this school house was built on about the same spot where the school is now. This building was used until 1910 when the present building was built. Lon Combs was the first teacher and was paid by subscription.

There was a small building on the land across from our place and a little to the north that was used for social gatherings and church services, and debates were also held there.

I never had any dealing with the Indians except that they often came to my restaurant for food. On one occasion Tom Emmons, a Pawnee Indian, told me he would help me get good land in the opening of the Cherokee Strip. He wanted me to stay at his place until the day of the opening and then I would be where I could get on the land ahead of the race, but I did not feel this the right thing to do and did not consider his proposition.

I have a double barreled muzzle loading shot gun that I brought here with me and it still is in good condition. I never killed any deer but have killed wild turkey, prairie chicken and lots of quail.