

McCURRY, W. A.

INTERVIEW

#4518

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

McCURRY, W. A.

INTERVIEW

4518

Field Worker's name Ida A. Merwin

This report made on (date) June 22 1937

1. Name W. A. McCurry

2. Post Office Address Morrison, Okla.

3. Residence address (or location) North part of Morrison, Okla.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month January Day 20 Year 1859

5. Place of birth Clinton County, Kentucky

6. Name of Father John F. McCurry Place of birth Green Co. Tennessee

Other information about father Pioneer of Illinois.

7. Name of Mother Sally (Abston) McCurry Place of birth Clinton Co. Kentucky.

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 _____.

Ida A. Merwin
Interviewer
June, 22, 1938

Interview with
W. A. McCurry
Morrison, Oklahoma.

I was born in Clinton County, Kentucky, January 20, 1859. I came to Illinois in 1866 and later came to Kansas.

In the winter of 1881 - 82, I joined the Payne Colony called "Boomers." Captain David Payne was the President, a man named Couch was Secretary and Treasurer and Mr. Stafford was the Surveyor. To become a member of the colony one had to pay a membership fee of \$5.00 and if any surveying was needed one had to pay \$3.00 for a certificate.

In February, 1882, the colony established camp on the Arkansas River, east of Arkansas City, Kansas, to await the gathering of all the members.

There were approximately five hundred members of the colony from Arkansas City and we started South to the Indian Territory. Wagons in which three or four could ride were loaded with provisions, feed for the

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teams, implements, camping equipment and one wagon, which was called the saloon, was loaded with liquor. The men who did not ride in wagons rode on horseback.

We came by Red Rock, and the Otoe Agency, crossing Red Rock Creek on a toll bridge near Red Rock, which cost 50 cents a wagon. Later we learned that there were two fords about one-half mile each way from this bridge, but on other trips made in this locality we found that the Indians had thrown trees across the ford to the south but the other one was at a ripple and unless there were high waters we would use this ford.

We crossed the Black Bear Creek near where the town of Sumner is now located; then going in a southwestern direction we passed on the east side of where the town of Perry is now located, went on past where the towns of Orlando and Mulhall are now. The trail which we followed in 1880 ran over practically the same route which the highway follows today.

At a point southeast of Guthrie, on what was known then as Dinner Creek, a branch of the Deep Fork, we were

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arrested by Lieutenant Stevens who had with him ten regulars and one wagon with one six mule team.

Our colony was so much in excess in numbers of the soldiers that we did not heed their orders, and moved on to the North Canadian River. By this time Lieutenant Stevens had sent a scout for reinforcements and Captain Carroll with eighty regulars, six wagons with six mules to each team had arrived and joined with Lieutenant Stevens in an attempt to force us to obey orders.

They gave us orders to leave the colony and return to a place outside of the Territorial lands or submit to their orders. Many who were "tenderfooted" left the colony, leaving about thirty of us who were placed under guard.

A few days later we were taken to the Kansas line near Caldwell and turned loose.

In 1883 about fifty of the colony re-organized and started South again. This time we got to the Cimarron

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River and camped at a place known as Camp Russell, just south of the place where Skeleton Creek empties into the Cimarron River, when we were arrested and taken to Fort Reno and held there for three days.

On Friday morning after our camp was established we demanded our rations, but were not given any until Monday morning. These consisted of a small piece of bacon, possibly a pound, a small cup of beans, about one quart of flour, a little salt and coffee and we were told that these things were eight day rations. Shortly after these provisions were issued, we were ordered to "fall in" which meant to start and we were taken back to the Kansas line and turned loose again.

During this trip, near the Utoe Agency, in what is now Noble County, one of our party was driving a small brown pony in his team and the Indians halted us and began to unhitch this little brown pony. The Government officials investigated and through the interpreter learned that the Indians had lost a pony similar

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to this one, but they were informed that this man was under arrest and they could not take his pony. That night while we were in camp this pony disappeared and the wagon had to be trailed by another horse for the rest of the trip.

On our way South during this trip in 1883, while I was in a store at the Otoe Agency, I noticed a commotion or struggle among the Indians not far from the store. Upon inquiry I learned that an Otoe Chief had died and they were killing his favorite pony so that they might bury it with him. This was the custom in those days. The Indians would place the body of the dead man's favorite horse on the filled grave and cover the carcass of the horse with a light covering of sod, thus forming the mound of the grave.

The method used to kill the pony was to tie a rope around its neck and some Indians would pull on the rope while others would beat the pony over the head to make it pull back so that it would choke to death. This look-

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ed so terrible that I wanted to take my sixshooter and go in on those Indians but I knew I did not dare.

In 1884 we again started on another trip South and upon reaching the Cimarron River we found that the waters were "up" and there was no bridge nor ferry so that we could cross. We set camp and had been there about two weeks when Lieutenant Day with twenty regulars and McDonald with five scouts, of whom three were Cheyennes and two were Arapahoes, arrived. They forded the Cimarron River which was still at a dangerous height and in doing so lost some of their sixshooters and carbines and came near losing some of the men and horses.

After we had set camp, Secretary Couch gave orders for our colony to cut logs and build a house which would be donated to and used for the benefit of the public. I thought this was a very foolish idea and told Couch that I did not want to shirk any work but I did not want to help with building this house. He assigned me and an old man

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man
who was with us to take care of the camp.

Shortly after the work of cutting the logs and rolling them together for the house was begun, Lieutenant Day ordered the work stopped, which caused a fight. This fight began with axes, but all weapons were ordered down and then it became a "fist and choke" fight, which lasted quite a while but no one was seriously hurt. After this our colony was placed under arrest with guards watching over us while waiting for reinforcements.

That evening I, with three other men, decided to try to escape. We slipped our saddles out when we caught the guards not watching and hid them in the brush a short distance away and later one of us, while the other two guarded the saddles, took two horses each past the guard line under the pretense of securing better grass for the horses. After we got over the guard line we met the two men with the saddles and soon saddled the horses and were on our way, leaving the rest of the colony behind.

After a few days they were moved to Fort Reno and

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from there were escorted to the state line and turned loose again.

After this I was not with the colony any longer. At the age of thirty, in April, 1889, I came into Oklahoma, making the Run and locating on Beaver Creek in Logan County which was "old Oklahoma Proper." However, I would not file, but located another man on the land. I returned to Kansas and the next spring I moved to Payne County, near Stillwater, and in 1893 I made the Run into the Cherokee Strip, staking a claim in the southwest quarter of Section 30, Township 21, Range 3, East, which I still own.

We lived in a tent the first winter and during the next summer I built our first house which was 16 feet square with the frame made from native lumber and the sides of pine weatherboards.

I broke the soil and raised corn and kaffir for my first crop and afterwards wheat and oats were raised too. I worked hard to improve this farm and have never had to have a cent against it.

I raised a family of six children and made my home

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on the farm until about sixteen years ago, when I
moved to Morrison where I now reside.

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