

PLUMB, A. B.

INTERVIEW

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

Field Worker's name Robert W. Small

This report made on (date) July 7, 1937

1. Name A. B. Plumb

2. Post Office Address Tonkawa, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 508 East Grand Ave.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month August Day 6 Year 1865

5. Place of birth Howard County, Iowa.

6. Name of Father John B. Plumb Place of birth Maine

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Martha Yates Plumb Place of birth Iowa

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. A. B. Plumb, Tonkawa.

By - Robert W. Small, Field Worker.

July 7, 1937.

When I was a small child my father moved from Iowa and settled in Cowley County, Kansas, in 1871. Soon afterward my father built a large, three room, log house on a farm west of Arkansas City, Kansas, not far from the south line of the state. This house, because of its strongly built walls of large logs and its roomy dimensions, soon became a neighborhood "Fort" or place of refuge when the neighborhood experienced what was called an "Indian Scare". On such occasions our house would be almost filled with women and children of the neighborhood, and the men, coming sooner or later, usually brought their trusty old musket rifles or such fire arms as they possessed, and occasionally someone would bring to our home the favorite milch cow or some household treasure or personal belonging of interest or value. Because of the close proximity of our community to the Indian Territory and the constant fear that rested upon most of the people, and especially upon the women, because of the tales of depredation and of raids committed by the Indians, the least alarm that might be felt in the community

was often fanned into frenzied excitement which invariably resulted in our "Fort" being suddenly filled with women and children shivering with fear. Many of these tales of horror were merely current gossip and were apt to be much exaggerated.

My father accompanied Captain Payne on some of his trips into the country that is now Oklahoma.

In the summer of 1883 I helped cut and stack one hundred tons of prairie hay on and near Red Rock Creek in Indian Territory; at the same time, and adjacent to us two other crews of workers were engaged in this same work, each crew putting up the same amount of hay.

About 1885, I was one of a caravan of freighters engaged in hauling commissary provisions from Arkansas City to Purcell, Indian Territory, and to other points. Loading our wagons with as heavy a load as our teams could pull over ordinary roads we set out upon one occasion for Purcell. The road, often meandering here and there to keep upon high ground or to avoid rough, broken or hilly sections of country, would hardly be called a road today,

but it served the purpose of leading us to our destination if no misfortune overtook us. Leaving Arkansas City on the north we moved across the Arkansas River and out upon the high level prairie of what is now Kay County, crossing the Salt Fork River just west of the present site of Tonkawa, at what was known as "Yellow Bull" crossing. Then out upon the prairies again, but farther along this mostly southern course, we drove through rough, sandy and hilly country, sometimes covered with a dense growth of black-jack trees. We passed through the section that is now Oklahoma City, and on our southerly course we passed the place where now stands our University of Oklahoma at Norman. We went farther on until we approached the east bank of the South Canadian River where now stands a magnificent state bridge at the eastern limits of Purcell. In those days it was merely a ford or a crossing on one of the most dangerous and treacherous streams known in the western country.

Halting our weary teams on the eastern banks of this dreaded river crossing, we approached its low, sandy banks, cautiously stepped down upon its quicksand bed, with buckets

in our hands to get water for our thirsty teams. There was not much water in the river, but the shining expanse of sand that lay between its banks brought a tremor of fear and dread and yet we knew we had to cross this quicksand with our teams and wagons, so we walked out upon the dry parts of the river bed to examine the "quickness" of its sandy bed, for we had often heard of teams and wagons that had become stalled in this river and had been swallowed up by its treacherous quicksand. Finally we started across, the nerves of every driver keyed to high tension, a strong firm grip on the lines that guided our teams, and a watchful eye for the least indication of quicksand beneath our horses feet, and we all crossed safely and took a deep breath of relief on the western bank, for here upon a hill overlooking the dreaded "river of rivers" was the village of Purcell, our destination.

Since we did not want to repeat the same experience of crossing the river again that evening we decided to pitch camp for the night in Purcell, and start on our return journey the next morning. The night was bright with moon and stars, not a cloud in sight; the next morning we arose from our slumber

and after our breakfast of bacon and black coffee, hitched our teams to the wagons and started out; upon reaching a point where we had a commanding view of the river, we observed to our horror and astonishment that the river bed was completely covered with a rolling, muddy, sandy water. A rise on the head waters of the river had come down in the night and caught us on the other side. We drove down to the bank of the river and gazed at the broad expanse of muddy water that stretched from one bank to the other; we thought we should have to remain for days, possibly, before we should be able to cross it, but we had not loitered on the river bank a great while until some man drove up to the bank of the river in a wagon and only halting momentarily, he drove down into the water and across and out upon the opposite bank, and on he went; this gave us the courage we needed, and we decided to follow as near the course he had gone as we possibly could, so, into the water we drove, one at a time, and across the murky expanse and safely we reached the eastern side; again we breathed with relief for we had twice crossed the most dreaded river of the West.

On a trip to the Pawnee Agency with a caravan of wagons

loaded with shelled corn, one of our wagons happened to get an axle broken; we went to the Agency and borrowed an axe and a brace and bit, cut down a big ash tree and hewed out an axle for the wagon, replaced the broken one and proceeded on our way; this was soon after the trip to Purcell. On our freighting trips across the country, no houses dotted the trailway we pursued. If rain, snow, or storm came upon us we had to seek the best shelter we could in our wagons. If rain put out our fire and we had nothing cooked to eat, we had to do without until the rain stopped. We usually went as well prepared for all kinds of weather conditions as we could afford, and we learned to maintain that pioneer spirit and courage which were essential to the early inhabitants of this country.

A few days prior to the opening of the "Cherokee Strip" we prepared ourselves with blankets and provisions and went to the "booths" to register for the opening; thousands were everywhere lined up. In my case I stood in line for two days and nights; when night came we would spread our blankets where we stood and remain for the night. If a man

left his place at any time the man next to him in the line would hold his place until he returned. A very reliable report was current soon after this registration that a farmer living near this host of humanity had sold enough drinking water to the crowd to pay the mortgage off on his farm.

On September 16, 1893, at "high noon" the gun was fired that signaled our departure. The crowd rode every kind of conveyance then known.

Off with a mad rush we started and pell mell over the broad freshly burned prairies we scattered in desperate efforts to beat the other fellow. Two other men and I driving a spring wagon left the "line" just south of Arkansas City, Kansas, and headed south; over the country we drove at break-neck speed until we reached a place which we staked for our claims.

We later learned that our claims were forty miles from Arkansas City, and the time in making this drive was two hours and forty minutes by the watch. The next day I borrowed a plow from a neighboring claimant and plowed a

furrow around my claim. Soon afterward one of my companions in the race who had a claim adjoining mine, and I began the erection of a sod house which we built across the line of our claims - one room of the house being on his claim and the other on mine; thus we lived for some time.

Our first three crop years were dismal failures; some of the settlers starved out the first year or two and left their claims never to return, but the most sturdy and determined stayed on and endured every hardship and privation through this succession of dry years. One fall I went to the Arkansas River bottom where some corn had been raised and husked corn for three cents per bushel and thereby accumulated a "grub-stake" and returned to my claim.

Prairie chicken were plentiful in many parts of the new country which afforded us wild meat occasionally.

On one occasion when hunting with my neighbor claimant or "pardner" as I usually called him (who occupied one room of the house) we ran across a badger that darted into a hold in the ground, and since my "pardner" and I had helped dig so many wells over the country and had good tools to dig with we decided to dig "Mr. Badger" out and see a

fight between him and a big bull dog which our neighbor owned. When we got the badger out he looked so fat and nice that we dressed him and carefully cooked him until he was nice and tender, and a more delicious meat was hard to find than that badger after he was dressed and cooked.

The first winter on our claims we hauled wheat straw from Kansas to feed our stock through the winter. No feed was in the country except what was hauled in.

After the dry years came and tried our mettle, we were blessed with more abundant rainfall and good crops and we prospered and improved our claims and the country in every way.

In 1896, the communities began to build school houses and improve roads and later church houses were erected here and there over the country. Previous to the erection of church houses, church services and Sunday school were held under brush or straw arbors or in private homes.

For several years after 1896, abundant crops resulted in more prosperous times in the new country and

gradually we improved our homes, schools and churches, roads and bridges, new improvements of every kind were very noticeable; towns began to spring up in later years and higher grades of school were established and taught.
