

HARPER, J. B.

INTERVIEW

8571

122

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

Field Worker's name Mrs. Nora Lorrin, El Reno, Oklahoma.

This report made on (date) September 16, 1937. 1937

Name Mr. J. B. Harper.

Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma.

Residence address (or location) 212 East Wade Street.

DATE OF BIRTH: Month January Day 28 Year 1878.

Place of birth Holton Kansas.

Name of Father William N. Harper. Place of birth West Virginia. June 6, 1830.

Other information about father _____

Name of Mother Maggie (Burger) Harper. Place of birth Ohio.

Other information about mother Died in Jackson County, Kansas in 1884.

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.

Nora Lorrin,
Field Worker.

An Interview With Mr. J. B. Harper,
212 East Wade, El Reno, Oklahoma.

Mr. J. B. Harper was born at Holton, Kansas, January 28th, 1878.

His father, William N. Harper, was born in Randolph County, West Virginia, on June 5th, 1830.

His mother, Mrs. Maggie (Burger) Harper, was born in Knox County, Ohio, about 1853 and died in Jackson County, Kansas, in 1884.

His parents were married about 1871. After his mother's death, his father married again.

They came to Oklahoma in 1889, his father coming down in June and filing on a farm thirteen miles southeast of El Reno. All the lands to the north had been filed on and Mr. Harper took what was left.

Mr. William N. Harper went back to Kansas to get his family; they did not arrive at their farm, however, until the day before Christmas 1889. They came down in a covered wagon. Another family named Huffman came with them. The Huffman wagon contained a man and wife and three children. The Harper family consisted of six

-2-

children and two grown-ups. Mr. Harper's father did not make the run but there were a good many farms that had not been filed on when he came down, and he chose one of them. The two wagons came heavily loaded but had no mis-adventures, except that they found it necessary to keep a constant watchout for horse thieves. Mr. William N. Harper slept under the wagon one night in order to keep a more careful watch and one of his horses almost killed him by pawing and stomping him with its fore-feet.

When they arrived at their claim Mr. Harper jumped out of the wagon, and said to his wife and children. "Well! we're home!" There was not a thing to be seen, but the bare, burned prairie; there was not a stick of timber or anything, so they all just sat there. It was all to be built.

They had an over-jet on their wagon. An over-jet was an extension to make the box of the wagon wider. They dug a hole in the ground and set the over-jet with the wagon cover on it over the hole in the ground and that was their first dwelling place in Oklahoma.

HARPER, J. B.

INTERVIEW.

8571.

-3-

They hauled their water from "Shell Creek" which was about half a mile away. They got their wood from the same creek. Soon they built a house out of native lumber, 14 by 18 feet. It had an upper story that was reached by a ladder and was so low you would bump your head if you did not watch out. There were no Indians living around them and they did not see any Indians except when they came to El Reno. There were nearly always Indians on the streets of El Reno. They traded at a little country store called Thurston. There was a post-office at Thurston, too. Mr. J. B. Harper carried the mail from Thurston to El Reno, in 1892-3-4. Thurston was located a mile and a half south and three miles east of the Harper's claim. Thurston was just a little store and post-office and someone contested the townsite and won and they made a farm of it. A man by the name of Spencer got the farm on the north side of the road but Mr. Harper does not know who got the rest.

They built their house on a hill a distance from where they had placed their over-jet and as a consequence could not get any water. They had to dig their well on

lower land so, though they had good water, it was inconveniently located.

They shipped about forty bushels of beans when they came to Oklahoma and sold them for five cents per pound. They bought many things which they needed with this money. There were beans on their table three meals a day for a long time. They lived on almost entirely prairie chickens one year. Their crops were corn, wheat and oats. The first years, they only had one team of horses and one horse died.

The second spring, about the time the wheat was well up, there was the most terrible hailstorm. It was on Sunday evening. It beat everything into the ground for a swath a mile wide and ten miles long.

No one caught out in this hailstorm could have lived, but so far as was known no one was killed. This was the worst hailstorm that Oklahoma ever had. Mr. Harper went back to Kansas in 1898, but before that he worked out as a farm hand away from home quite a bit and was away from home much of the time.

While in Kansas he met and married Miss Belle Wesley, of Ontario, Kansas at Ontario, December 24th, 1899.

After their marriage Mr. and Mrs. Harper lived in Kansas for three years. They farmed while in Kansas and then moved to Jackson County and then stayed there three years, still farming. They then came back to Canadian County and moved to a farm about fourteen miles southeast of El Reno and rented this farm and cultivated it for seven years. The farm was just a half mile from the farm where Mr. Harper's father had lived.

Mr. J. B. Harper and his wife moved to El Reno in 1914 or 1915 and have been in the grocery business ever since he has been there. Mr. Harper's father sold his claim in 1913.

