

HUTCHENS, WILL

INTERVIEW

#8498

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

Field Worker's name Anna R. Barry

This report made on (date) September 13, 1937

1. Name Will Hutchens

2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 119 South Grand Avenue

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month April Day 23 Year 18 69

5. Place of birth Boone County, Missouri

6. Name of Father Nute Hutchens Place of birth Kentucky

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Sarah (Roberts) Hutchens Place of birth Boone County, Missouri

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 _____.

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Interview with Will Hutchens
El Reno, Oklahoma

Interviewer - Anna R. Barry
Indian-Pioneer History, S-149
September 13, 1937

I was born in Boone County, Missouri, on April 28, 1869. My parents lived on a farm; I don't remember much about my father as he died when I was six years old. I attended a rural school near our home. At the age of fourteen I went to work to provide for our family. I worked at odd jobs, most of the time working on farms; I did some carpenter and paint work. While still very young I drifted to New Mexico and worked on a ranch. Here I made up my mind that ranch life was the life for me. At the age of eighteen I went to Cook County, Texas, and worked on a ranch as a cow-puncher for a man named Day. My first trip over the Old Chisholm Trail (which had been staked by Jesse L. Chisholm) was in the Spring of 1887. About a week before we started on this trip, it was the cowboys' duties to get our herd ready to make the trip. It took us days to get the

herd in shape to start. First we had to get this bunch of cattle separated from the others. We had to see that each animal was branded, before we started, so that we would be able to identify our cattle. As we rounded up our herd of twenty-six hundred cattle from their bedding ground of the night before, each cowboy was alert and ready to go, and so was our herd. They started out like a young cyclone, but as the morning passed they became more settled and by evening each steer was settled into its own place. Our outfit consisted of a foreman, nine cowboys, a cook and a horse-wrangler.

Each cowboy had three horses assigned to him and it was the duty of the horse-wrangler to see that these horses were fed and properly cared for. About every five or six hours we changed horses. The cook, whose duty it was to cook our meals, and the chuck-wagon were usually several miles ahead of the cattle

as also were the horses.

There were no fences in those days, and the country was somewhat wild, but there was plenty of grass and water. We experienced many hardships on this trip to Dodge City, Kansas. We met folks who did not want us going through this country. There were Indians who always wanted beef and there were stampedes. There were rainy days and nights without rest, storms, rivers to swim, and a cowboy who could not swim a raging river was in hard luck.

Our herd crossed Red River at the old Red River station, crossed the South Canadian River below where Union City now stands, and came on up the trail just west of Yukon.

One night after we had crossed the South Canadian River, and had bedded our cattle down for the night, we made camp and were all in bed except one cowboy who was on duty as watchman. To his surprise a bunch of Indians came riding up as hard as they could, whooping

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and hallowing as loud as they could. Our cattle became stampeded and it took several hours to get them quieted down again. We always thought these Indians weren't looking for trouble, but just did this to get our cattle frightened and scattered so they could steal some for beef. It was a very dark night, and we lost three steers that night, so we always believed these Indians stole them.

It took us over three months to make this trip but we let our cattle graze each day so they would be in good shape when we reached the market at Dodge City, Kansas.

By the time we had reached Dodge City I had had enough cowboy trips, and made up my mind I would leave this outfit and return to my old home in Missouri.

Again I returned to Oklahoma. I landed in Oklahoma City on a Santa Fe train the day before the Opening, April 21, 1889. Oklahoma City was known then as "Oklahoma Station." The 22nd of April fell on Monday.

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On the Sunday before the country opened, thousands of people were in the camps on the borders. By Monday morning fully one-half of them were gone, and were no doubt within the prohibited lands. At that time there were few roads in the country, and no bridges, and through the country were running many streams which could be crossed only at certain points. This being true, the stranger could make no headway whatever, as against the person who knew every pathway, every ford, and every piece of the best land. I was one among the thousands who remained within the bounds until the great rush was made at noon, and I don't think I have ever met or heard of one who obtained a tract of land or lot of any value by settlement. Many of them bought off sooner settlers, after the country was opened, and in this way obtained valuable lands and lots. Soon after the Opening thousands of these persons who had been in on the land before noon boldly told it around and not long after this the land department declared

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that any person who had been within this land before noon April 22, was disqualified. After this they kept a little more quiet but at the land hearings friends and relatives swore that they had not been within this land before the opening. It is said that a number of innocent men served terms in the penitentiary over disputes of land and lots in Oklahoma City.

Another item I would like to mention was the bone trade at Dodge City. When we drove cattle to market, the herds were immense. There were great stacks of bones piled up by the railroad tracks, hundreds of tons of them. It was a sight to see them. They were stacked up away above the tops of the box cars and often there were not sufficient cars to move them. The bones were a great help to the early settlers in the Territory for a long time; had it not been for the bone industry many poor families would have suffered.

Another fellow and I left Oklahoma City soon after the run in 1889 and came to El Reno. I never

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did file on a claim. At this time El Reno and Reno City were very busy little places with row after row of frame shacks going up, so I started out to try my hand at the carpenter trade. At that time we received thirty cents per hour working as a carpenter.

In 1892 I drove the Todd stage from El Reno to Cloud Chief over to Cordell, then on to Arapaho and back to El Reno. After working at this for about a year I worked for the Todd livery stable driving drummers all over the country and some times we would be gone a month at a time.

In 1895 I went to New Mexico to live, married in this state, but finally drifted back to El Reno. We never had any children of our own, but we raised ten orphan children in our home. At one time we had five orphan children living with us. Today they are all grown but a few years ago my wife passed away.

I have spent six years as chief of police here at El Reno, and four years on the sheriff's force.