

SKIPPER, G. N.

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) March 28 1938

1. Name G. N. Skipper

2. Post Office Address Tonkawa, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 404 South 5th Street

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month July Day 22 Year 1857

5. Place of birth Illinois

6. Name of Father John W. Skipper Place of birth Illinois

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Mary Saddle Skipper Place of birth Illinois

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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Robert W. Small
Investigator
March 28, 1938

Interview with G. N. Skipper
Tonkawa, Oklahoma.
404 South 5th Street.

I was born July 22, 1857, in Illinois and lived there until in the early Spring of 1893 at which time I moved my family from Illinois to a farm about six miles from Mulhall. My wife's people lived in that part on a farm and they assisted me to get located on farm land near them. About all I had was a family; no money and no job; I worked at anything I could get to do but there was nothing much to do outside of a little farm work.

When the proclamation was issued opening the Cherokee Outlet to settlement I began to prepare all I could to get ready for the Opening; I went to a registration booth near Orlando and registered for the opening run and I saw more people at this registration booth than I have ever seen before assembled at one place.

After considerable delay, I got registered and on the day of the big race I made the run from near Orlando. I had always wanted a farm with timber and water on it and when I made the race I went into a section that had timber

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and water and secured a claim that had a good spring on it and also had timber. But the land was not very good and since the Government had decreed that this land should be paid for at the rate of \$5.00 per acre at the end of five years, I got to studying about what it would cost me, to say nothing of the improvements I would have to place on it and the more I thought about that \$5.00 per acre the less I thought of the claim.

There were quite a few claimants who came there to the spring for water and along late in the afternoon an old man, driving a team to a wagon, stopped and asked if he might get water and stay there overnight. I told him he could and that night we conversed together quite a bit and I learned that the old gentleman was a Civil War Veteran. He had a wooden leg and had driven over quite a bit of country but had not been able to find any vacant claim and was very much interested in trying to get land somewhere in the country, if possible.

I went to bed and lay there thinking about the rough claim I had staked and the \$5.00 per acre I would have to pay for it so the next morning I called to the

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gentleman and he came to me and I told him that I had decided to leave my claim and that if he wanted it he could pull my stake up and place his own there, and a happier old man I never saw than he was.

I went back to my home near Mulhall that day and a neighbor and I got together and decided that since we each had only one horse apiece we would put our horses together and get a wagon and start out looking for some better claims than the one I had abandoned.

On Thursday following the Opening we struck out into a section of country west of Perry; I knew that several Chickasaw Indians had made the run for the sole purpose of selling out as soon as they could find a buyer and we were looking for men of that kind. About ten miles west of Perry I stopped and talked with a claimant who told me he was from Iowa and that he had been there on the claim since he staked it and had not had but little to eat since he had been there. He said he had sent to Perry by two or three different people, none of whom he knew, to get something for him to eat and that none had ever returned and he was out the money he gave them and also was out of food. He showed me a part of his round trip ticket he had

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bought in Iowa and said he would sell out if he could get \$10.00 for his claim. I told him that I would give him \$10.00 for it if I could get a filing on it and he agreed to let me place my filing on it before I paid him. He took my name and address and I took his and agreed to send him the \$10.00 after I filed on the claim. It was about sixty days before I got my filing through on the land at which time I wrote the fellow a letter but I couldn't get any reply. I wrote him two more letters later but never did hear from him after he left the claim.

I built a home on the claim by digging down in a bank about four feet and then building the sides up with sod; I also placed a sod roof over it. I made a small window in either side and one door at the end and had a dirt floor; the house was about 14x16 feet. I also built a sod barn about fourteen feet square. I had no well or spring on the place so hauled water a distance of about one-half mile as long as I lived there.

I broke up about thirty-five acres of sod the first year which I planted in kaffir and cane; the kaffir made a fine yield and I cut it up and shocked it in the field,

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but the prairie chickens tried to eat it all up and I had to haul it out. I had put out a crop of wheat on a share basis down near Mulhall in the Fall of 1893 and that made about twenty-five bushels per acre, but after I hauled my part to Mulhall to sell it I only got 25 cents per bushel for it.

In 1895 I sold my claim for \$600.00. I bought a span of young mules and a new wagon and moved my family back to Illinois where I was raised but after three years in Illinois I came back to Mulhall again and rented land in that section of country and farmed for over twenty years.

Cotton was the principal money crop and I put most of my time and efforts in raising cotton. I had a large family and in those days it was easy for a man with a large family to rent all the good land for cotton that he could cultivate. In 1907 I raised fifty bales of cotton, one of the largest cotton crops I ever grew. My children were deprived of an education by staying in the cotton fields from early spring until late in winter working in the cotton.

We had lots of sickness in our family; we had thirteen children born, of whom only nine lived to be grown.

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Doctor bills, loss of time from work on account of sickness, and other bills incident to sickness kept my nose to the grindstone, in spite of all the hard work I have always done.

In the Spring of 1894 I had forty acres in corn and it looked very fine about the time it began to tassel but in less than two weeks the hot winds had completely ruined it so that I never got a penny from corn that year.

I raised castor beans as a side line for a few years but never grew many at any time - just a few bushels each year. They were about as profitable as growing cotton and did not require as much work.

There were some deer in the timbered country where I lived not far from Mulhall, and a few turkeys and lots of prairie chickens when I went there in 1893.

There were few schools in that country in 1893 for people did not seem to take as much interest in schooling their children as they did raising cotton. Church and Sunday Schools were seemingly factors of little importance in many communities of that section of country in the early days.

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In 1921, I moved from the farm to Ponca City and worked for the Marland Oil Company at that place for some few years, then in 1928 I moved from Ponca City to Tonkawa, where I have resided since.

Owing to poor health I have been unable to work but little in the past two or three years. It seems very odd to me to not be able to work everyday for I was never used to being idle since I can remember till now.

I was married sixty years ago the 10th of last March. My wife is quite active for her years and performs all her household work daily.