

SMITH, GEORGE M.

INTERVIEW

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W. T. Holland,
Investigator,
Dec. 30, 1937.

Activities of George M. Smith
Carbondale, (Tulsa) Oklahoma.

I learned a trade when a boy. It was, more or less a custom for a boy to learn a trade, so I chose mechanics. This was back east, in Clay County, North Carolina, where I was born February 4, 1870.

The yearning for travel and to see the country, and especially the West, caused me to come out here. My first stop, of any length of time, was at Fayetteville, Arkansas, where I got a job with the firm of Pratt & Ferguson. Ferguson was a Texan... This firm owned and operated a mill at Fayetteville and had mills at Westville and Stillwell, in Indian Territory.

Ferguson, being a Texan, was interested in cattle, so he and Pratt had sixty cars of Texas cattle shipped into Red Fork. I was delegated to take twelve or fifteen cowhands and unload and drive these cattle out on the range, which was in and near Tulsa. We got these cattle in March or April and ran them during the summer and shipped them out in the fall. I have grazed cattle, forty-five years ago,

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where Tulsa's Municipal Building now stands. There were two hundred and forty people living in Tulsa then. It was a typical western cow town, wild and woolly, however I was able to keep out of trouble then and thereafter.

Cattle thieves were plentiful and ranchers lost a lot of cattle. We, however, heard of their activities, so one or more of our hands always kept watch at night. I recall that one night, after my watch was over, I had taken the saddle off my horse, and tied him out, and had lain down, with my head on my saddle, when I heard horses' hoofs, and sure enough I espied a horse-thief and drawing my six gun, fired at him. This aroused the others and they gave chase and soon had driven them away. We learned the next day, that a rancher, north of here, lost one hundred head of cattle that same night, so we always thought that the same gang who attempted to steal some of our cattle, had succeeded elsewhere that night.

I have driven thousands of cattle across the Arkansas, at Tulsa, and have lost quite a few in the quicksand. We were able, sometimes, to save them by roping them and pulling

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them out with our horses, but not every time, as when they got started down it was not easy to get them out.

In 1894 I was married to Luda May Sherley, a school teacher of Fayetteville but a native of Farmington, Arkansas.

I was employed as a mechanic by Pratt & Ferguson at Fayetteville for eight years. Then, in 1900, I got a job as an engineer on the K.C.&S. (Kansas City & Southern) and moved my family to Stilwell. I kept my K. C. & S. job until 1911, when I was employed as engineer in the Stilwell Municipal Power Plant, and served in that capacity for seventeen years.

I was one of the delegates to the First Constitutional Convention which met at Guthrie. I represented Adair County. Of course, I met and knew practically all the delegates to the convention.

William (Bill) Murray was very active in that convention. We delegates were elected by our various county conventions. We had an interesting time while at Guthrie and I suppose drafted a pretty fair constitution. We had good schools, although we had to bear our own expenses, as there were no state Federal funds to help out, and I add, that

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we had no county or state tax to pay, so after all, our expenses were not so great.

I worked on the Kansas City and Southern railway from about 190 until 1911, then for seventeen years was engineer in the Municipal plant at Stilwell; that was until 1927 when I came to Tulsa.

I saw a lot of Indians and observed their actions and customs, and found that if you treated them fairly you had no trouble. But it was best never to drink nor gamble with them. Indians were almost always bad when drinking, and whiskey was always easy to get, both locally and from Arkansas.

I was never arrested, nor was I ever a party to any court proceedings in either civil or criminal courts. I have of course served on juries.

I recall a deal I failed to make which if made would probably have been good financially for me. Jim Maxwell owned and operated a restaurant and wagon yard on Archer Street, east of Main Street. I used to eat there, and hitch my horse in his barn. One night he proposed selling me the whole outfit, including the feed, consisting of a carload of prairie hay. I told him I had only \$25.00 or \$30.00

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"on me", but did have a fine mare, saddle and bridle. He proposed trading all his belongings for my mare, saddle and bridle. I didn't take him up, so the next night a Federal man came in and arrested him for a murder he had committed in another state. He, evidently had "wind" of this, hence his desire to sell.

I knew, personally, a number of the early-day peace officers, United States marshals and so on: Chas. Rhodes and "Red Rogers". Ed Fry was a United States Commissioner at Sallisaw.

The white were taken to Fort Smith to court, and the Indian trials were held in Indian courts at Tahlequah.

I have lived in Tulsa for ten years and am now engineer at the Municipal building here. My wife died in 1932.