

SMITH, GEORGE B.

INTERVIEW

#7295

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An Interview with George B. Smith - Red Fork, Oklahoma.  
By - W. T. Holland - Field Worker.  
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I came to Red Fork in August, 1901, after the Bland and Clinton oil well in Red Fork had come in, in June.

At that time the Standard Oil Company had a blanket lease on all this territory and there seemed to be a disposition to keep secret or at least to minimize the importance of finding oil so as to keep down a boom or stampede into this section. It developed later through an oil field scout that a well had been drilled in another section from the Bland well and oil had been found there in abundance, but the well had been plugged and the report went out that it was a dry well.

To file on town lots in Red Fork it was necessary to have permanent improvements, and these permanent improvements could be either a water well on the lot, or a building, so my mission here was to build houses.

I was employed by Boston Wilson, a druggist, and Joe Milner, a wholesale merchant, both of Oklahoma City, to come here and build some houses, and I being a contractor took the job.

I got together several men and came to Red Fork

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in August, 1901, and began the construction of houses and in all, I constructed about a hundred houses. These houses were small but a family could live in one, and they constituted permanent improvements. One object of building these houses was to get people to file on the lots, and when that was done, they, in turn, could contract with a driller or could lease their lots to others to drill for oil. I, with almost all of my men, filed on lots and I got oil on mine and had a producing well for about ten years, and could have had production longer if I had known then what I learned later. My well ceased to respond to the pump and stood idle for some time, and later on some men wanted to "pull" the casing, and in taking out the pump rods, found that the trouble was with the pump and, at that time, oil stood three hundred feet up in the well.

Some crooked business was practised here in the land office - not by the officials, but by people who had access to the office or files. Most anybody could and did go into the office, and the file room too, but the officials didn't seem to suspect anything until they began to have complaints from people.

I had filed just north of my present lot, and had put down a rock foundation and passing one day I noticed that it had been torn down and some one had filed on my lot, so to the office I went, telling the officials of the matter. They looked through their papers but failed to find my papers, but admitted to me that they remembered my filing but couldn't find the papers. I found the man who had chewed up my papers, but I had to file again, and that time I saw to it that my filing was recorded. There were many tricks played here, and in fact all over the Territory, regarding claims.

Mrs. Clinton, the mother of Dr. Clinton, a pioneer physician of Tulsa, had her allotment near here and she set aside a plot from her land as a cemetery, so this is now and was the first cemetery in Red Fork. Some prominent citizens of the early days are buried here. It is on Forty-third Street.

A great number of people were buried there who died in 1901 when an epidemic of smallpox hit the community. In fact, this cemetery covered a great section of territory.

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People were curious about anybody they didn't know. I suppose that was due to the fact that so many people came into the Territory named Smith or Jones when Smith and Jones were not their real names.

I recall a visit to my brother who lived nine miles out from Talihina . I got to Talihina, but failed to find a conveyance out to my brother's house, and as no one would take me out, I got the direction and started out on foot, going as directly as I knew how as there were no roads nor fences. So, I struck out and after walking some miles, came to a ranch and saw a great herd of cattle, and while I was uneasy about passing through this herd of cattle when I saw an open space in the herd I walked through it unmolested, but later was told that I was in great danger while passing through that herd, or any herd of cattle on foot.

I met a man after passing these cattle and made inquiries about my brother, but this man said that he never heard of him. I thought I was close to my brother's home, so a little later saw a house, and stopped to make further inquiry - here I found my brother. I told him of

my experience and he had a good laugh and told me that he knew this man and the man knew my brother. He was my brother's closest neighbor. My brother said that this man was only doing this to protect him as the man thought maybe I was an officer coming to arrest my brother. This was a common practice, this thing of being cautious about giving names to strangers.

We all know that hordes of fugitives came in here to escape the penalties for crimes committed elsewhere, and I had quite a lot of fun in that respect, regarding my name which is Smith but I told them my present name was Smith and that was the name I was born with.

Speaking of adventures - I remember being called out one night in 1904 - a friend called me and told me they were going to mob a negro over in Tulsa. I told my friend I would have nothing to do with a mob, but would go over and maybe I could help to prevent it. Daddy McClanahan was City Marshal and was a small man who carried two long guns that came almost to his knees. He was a comical sight, trying to stem that crowd Henry Starr who had just been released from the "pen" was

there and was very active. He saw the City Marshal and went over to him and told him he had better take his guns and fade away as he might get hurt.

Mr. Marr, a banker, appeared and made a speech, appealing to the crowd to disperse. He was followed by the Mayor, Mr. Mowbray, who also spoke, so finally the crowd left.

Starr had two axes. The jail was a wooden structure and they intended to chop into it if they couldn't get the keys. So one lynching was averted.