

SMITH, J. H.

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Form A-(9-149)

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

Field Worker's name Robert W. Small

This report made on (date) August 13, 1937

Name J. H. Smith

Post Office Address Tonkawa, Oklahoma.

Residence address (or location) 905 East Grand Ave.

DATE OF BIRTH: Month May Day 11 Year 1861

Place of birth Illinois

Name of Father William S. Smith Place of birth Kentucky

Other information about father

Name of Mother Mary Wing Smith Place of birth Maine

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.

Interview with J. H. Smith
Tonkawa, Oklahoma

In 1874, the father of J. H. Smith settled in Sumner County, Kansas, about forty-five miles southwest of Wichita, Kansas having moved to Kansas from Illinois. Mr. J. H. Smith was born in Illinois.

In 1880, when about nineteen years of age, Mr. Smith made his first trip into Oklahoma Territory; on which occasion, he was employed by a dealer in horses, to assist in driving a herd of ponies from Oklahoma Territory to Kansas.

To reach their destination in the Apache Indian Reservation, they followed a trail in Oklahoma Territory that ran south near the present site of Enid, crossing the Salt Fork River about where Pond Creek is now located from a point near the site of Enid they pursued a more southwesterly course to the Apache Indian Reservation, where they obtained about forty head of ponies from "squaw men" in that reservation. They paid from \$6.00 to \$8.00 per head for the ponies that had not been broken for riding. When a pony sold it was a part of Mr. Smith's duties to break it to ride, which was often

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a rather hazardous undertaking. The ponies were driven back over the trail to Kansas. Mr. Smith states that fine corn was grown on the Kaskita River in the year of 1880, although the quantity grown in the Indian Reservation was not large.

In 1880, Mr. Smith, in company with three other men made a trip to the Chikaskia River to obtain some fish; the four men had two wagons and teams to haul their fish home with them; after getting within a few miles of the mouth of the Chikaskia River, which was their destination, a couple of Indian Scouts accosted them and asked what their mission was, and they told the Scouts that they were going down south to work on a new railroad that was being built through the country. The Indian Scouts let them proceed on their way. They arrived at the appointed place on the river a little after dark, and proceeded to seine the river for fish; the first drag netted a good catch, among which was one cat fish that weighed ninety pounds. They got all the fish they wanted and packed them in kegs which they had brought along for the purpose and then retired for the night.

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Two of the men did not go to sleep, and in a little while they heard dogs barking at some Indian habitation not far distant and this only increased their uneasiness for fear of the Indian Scouts and after some argument they all hitched up their teams and drove away. They went to a spring near the Yellow Bull Crossing on the Salt Fork River, where they arrived about day light and had their breakfast and proceeded on their return journey with plenty of fish for the four families and some to give to the neighbors.

On one occasion while working on a farm in Sumner County, Kansas, Mr. Smith states that a friendly Cheyenne Indian came out to where he was working and handed him a piece of paper which Mr. Smith put into his pocket, thinking that he would read it when he went home or at some leisure time. He had no sooner put the paper into his pocket until the Indian began to make all kinds of gestures and began to talk in broken English and made Mr. Smith understand that the paper was his pass that the Government had given him to use when he went outside of his own reservation or into the states for transaction of any business.

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The Indian then told Mr. Smith that he wanted fat dog and said Indians like fat dog. Whereupon Mr. Smith returned the piece of paper to him and told him that he did not have any dogs to offer him.

Previous to the opening of the Cherokee outlet, Mr. Smith had made several trips down into that part of the country in order to familiarize himself with the best sections of farming country and to be prepared to stake a good claim when the "Strip" was opened.

When the ^{hour} /for the opening Mr. Smith, and his brother-in-law started in a spring wagon from near Caldwell, Kansas. In the mad rush they started pell mell across the prairies, intending to find a road that led down into the country where they wished to go, but in the dust and confusion they passed over the road without noticing it and drove several miles over the burned prairies. Finally, Mr. Smith saw in the distance to his right, or west of him, a sand hill that was located east of the present site of Lamont, This sand hill was a land mark at that time and they got

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their proper bearings from that and proceeded directly to the spot they wished to reach.

Mr. Smith staked the southeast quarter of section fourteen, township twenty five north, range four west, quarter section of land adjoining Mr. Smith's claim was staked by his brother-in-law.

Mr. Smith spent the night on his claim and the next morning he went to a spring near Lamont to get a keg of water and returned to his claim and the next day went to the filing office at Knid, to file on the claim. Such a vast throng had assembled for that purpose to Knid that the authorities at the land office took the names and addresses of all claimants and told them they would be notified when they could file.

Mr. Smith returned to his claim and began the construction of some sheds for his stock and then built a stone cave, or cellar. A short time later he bought a small two room house in Kansas and took it down in sections and moved it to his claim and rebuilt it and moved into it.

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Mr. Smith states that storms and cyclones were very common in the Cherokee Outlet in the early days and that almost everyone had some story of their claims. He recalls later that he had watched a cyclone coming and once he saw one coming directly toward him and it took him a long time to get in the distance and carried it up in the air and he started for the storm cellar and stayed there till it was past when he learned that it had done over several houses. Mr. Smith raised quite a few hogs, cattle and horses on his farm in addition to a good acreage in wheat and corn. After the first year Mr. Smith's wheat and corn produced abundant crops.

Mr. Smith bought a hundred and twenty acres of "dead Indian" land in 1900. Mr. Fry, Indian agent at Red Hook, had told him about this land and had shown it to him. This land had an Indian burial ground on it which contained seventy-five or more bodies, all of which were placed on top of the earth and a covering was spread over the bodies

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and then a small house with shingle roof enclosed it all. A small opening was left or made where cooking vessels might be pushed in with food which was carried to the dead at regular intervals for a year or two after death.

Mr. Smith states that he had rented this land out after he bought it and that the burial ground was covered with tall grass which from some cause caught fire and burned the grass and all the houses down and charred the bones of the dead that were within the little houses and that the Indians of the community gathered in great numbers and bemoaned the loss with intense grief and gathered up the charred bones and took them to another burial ground for interment. These Indians were said to belong to the Otoe tribe.

A few years after the new country of the Cherokee Outlet had been settled and farmers were raising bumper crops of grain in Mr. Smith's neighborhood, he, with others got up a petition signed by the citizens of the community

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asking the Frisco Railroad to put in a switch, a stock pen and a loading platform on their road near the Salt Fork River so that the farmers might have a more convenient center from which to ship their grain and stock to the markets.

After this movement was started Mr. Smith and three others were selected to meet with a Mr. Beckham, representative of the railroad company, and discuss the matter.

The meeting was held and a contract was entered into.

Some of the principal provisions of the contract were that, the Railroad Company would place a switch, stock pen and loading platform at some convenient place where it would accommodate the interested persons of the neighborhood, and further agreed that when sufficient business justified, a station would be built also. In consideration of this contract Mr. Smith and the other three members of the committee were required to sign notes to the railroad company, in the sum of three thousand dollars to be paid at a certain time. The committee

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obtained a tract of land which they had surveyed into town lots and proceeded to sell enough of the lots to pay for the land and to pay off the notes which they had signed, and thus the town of Salt Fork was started. Merchants put in grocery stores, dry goods stores and drug stores and other businesses; and also three grain elevators were built.

The railroad company would only take freight for shipment when some one was at the platform to help load it and to give proper shipping instructions. There was no agent and this manner of having to wait out in the open for some slow freight to come along to load your goods, or whatever you desired to ship, soon became unpopular and the railroad company made no promise of building a depot and placing an agent in charge. One evening about dark a number of the citizens of the town attired in female garb were seen going up the railroad track with buckets in their hands to a point where the railroad track presented a considerable grade and they

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proceeded to "grease the track" and await results; soon the daily freight came along and all of a sudden the wheels began to buzz and the train stopped.

The conductor took the caboose and hooked it on to the engine and managed to get down to land, and spread the news to the railroad officials. A man was sent to the town by the railroad company to find out what the trouble was. He came and talked with the banker of the town who was told to send a committee to St. Louis, to confer with head officials. Mr. Smith and two other men were sent to St. Louis where they had a conference with the head officials and showed the officials the contract and Mr. Smith convinced them of the need of a depot at their thriving young town and in less than thirty days a new depot was under construction. Mr. Smith has acquired a quarter section of fine land in Kay county and a good quarter in Noble county besides one hundred and seventy acres of fertile land within seven miles of Council Bluff,

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Iowa. He owns two modern residences in Tonkawa.

He moved to Tonkawa, in 1904, and is a director in the Bank of Commerce at Tonkawa.