

SPEARS, C. G. (DR.)

INTERVIEW

#8926

71

BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for OklahomaField Worker's name Virgil CoursoyThis report made on (date) October 19 19371. Name Dr. C. G. Spears2. Post Office Address Altus, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month January Day 23 Year 18745. Place of birth Mississippi6. Name of Father F. W. Spears Place of birth Mississippi

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Jenora Gray Place of birth Mississippi

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 8.

SPEARS, C. G.(DR.)

INTERVIEWS.

8926.

Virgil Coursey, interviewer.
October 19, 1937.

Interview with Dr. C. G. Spears.
Altus, Oklahoma.

I was born in Water Valley, Mississippi, January 3rd, 1874, and was educated in Latelville, Tennessee, College. I received medical degrees at medical schools in Fort Worth and in Chicago.

In 1895, I moved to Duncan, Indian Territory, where I taught school for three years.

Corn was growing in the middle of the main street of "Rag" town, the town which we know now as Granite, when I moved there in 1900. Granite took the name "Rag" town because all the homes and stores were set up in tents.

During the two years I spent at Granite the smallpox plague hit the country and people by the hundreds died. Victims were stricken so fast that a pest house was set up just west of Granite, where all the victims were taken. Most of them died and were buried in unmarked graves near the camp and on the hills.

SPEARS, C. G. (DR.)

INTERVIEW.

8926

2

At that time vaccination was new, not, of course, to us doctors but to settlers of old Greer County. Before it became compulsory many people absolutely refused to be vaccinated. One man threatened my life if I ever came back to his house and tried to make him be vaccinated. But he never carried out the threat because he and his wife died some ten days later.

During that time I learned a lesson which I shall never forget. Six boys came to me and were vaccinated. It did not take effect. Six times we had the same results and then I told the boys to go home, that they were immune to smallpox. These boys lived on the river east of Granite, and were members of two families living in the same house. In one family there were twelve members. In the other, there were fourteen. Three members had been vaccinated during the Civil War, and these three cared for and buried every other member of

SPEARS, C. G. (DR.)

INTERVIEW.

8926.

the family including those boys whom I had vaccinated. After death, it was learned that several shipments of the serum had been without immunizing power and therefore the vaccinations did not "take".

This awful plague almost put our county into bankruptcy. Thousands of dollars were spent in caring for and feeding the stricken people. But thanks to medical science, this dreaded disease has almost been whipped out.

I had been vaccinated years before coming to Granite, but I have no idea of the number of times I have vaccinated myself trying to get the vaccine to "take" on me again. I was scared almost to death.

I would go into home after home where three or four persons lay dead and where others were dying. The victims did not resemble human beings for they were covered from head to foot with scabs, their flesh was swollen and discolored, and life could be detected

SPYARS, C. G. (DR.)

INTERVIEW

8926.

only by the rise and fall of the chest, which motion caused the skin to crack and break. Such suffering and grief I never want to see again. I could only hold my nose, administer as best I could and hurry away.

I had one very unusual case in my medical practice in Granite. Late one afternoon, a man from across the river came to me and said that his wife was to be confined and that I must come immediately. Now there had been heavy rains and I knew the river would be "up". I told the man I could not cross, but he insisted that I come for he had crossed himself. So I hired a team and hack and we started out.

When we reached the river the man said, "Follow me", and struck out. He was on a large horse, and every now and then the horse's head and the man's head

77
SPEARS, C. G. (DR.)

INTERVIEW.

8926.

5

would bob up and then go completely out of sight as the big waves rolled by. When the man reached the other side he motioned for me to come on. I looked at my small ponies and then at the roaring water, fully a half mile wide, and thought of my patient. But I reasoned that I could never make it and that every one concerned would be as well off with me on this side of the river as they would be with me up the river somewhere drowned, so I motioned for the man to go on, and I drove back to town.

Those were the days when one found it difficult to go places because of mud and swollen streams. I can remember when I would take the alleys at Altus rather than drive through the deep mud on "Main Street". With the coming of automobiles and good highways and bridges, transportation was facilitated but I am afraid that the drainage of the land has done our land more harm than most of us are aware. One no longer sees

SPEARS, C. G. (DR.)

INTERVIEW.

8926.

6.

fields covered with water for several days at a time . Our highways and culverts are so constructed that quick drainage is possible, resulting in soil erosion and the loss of precious moisture follows which is so necessary to growing crops.

I saw the first train come into Granite on the Rock Island and also saw the first train come into Altus on the Frisco line. I helped K. C. Cox, owner of the land where Granite was built, lay out the plan of the town.

When I moved to Altus there were two other doctors practicing here. They were Dr. J. E. Fowler and Dr. Saddler. George D. Pendleton had a drug store on the east side of the town square and I got an office in the back of it. George Pendleton and I are the only persons who were in Altus at that time who are still in the same business they were then.

SPEARS, C. G. (DR.)

INTERVIEW.

8926.

7

I remember some escapades I experienced during the early days in Altus. An elderly lady had been riding with me in a buggy and had just alighted when my horse, "a nice gentle one" when I bought it, jumped forward and circled back through town. I threw the top of the buggy back, my hat flew off and several cowboys rushed for their ponies just as the horse started out Broadway and headed east of town. He dashed at top speed until we came to a break three miles out where three or four wagons were stopped. I knew I could never get my horse and buggy through there so I headed for a barbed wire fence and left the buggy just as it turned over. It was thrilling, but what if the elderly lady had been in the buggy?

Then came the days when automobiles were introduced. I purchased one and after some little practice at driving, started out on a call to Frank

SPEARS, C. G. (DR.)

INTERVIEW.

8926.

8

Simpson's place. It was muddy that day but I made it fairly well until I wheeled upon a little bridge and the car began to skid sideways. It crashed through a fence and headed out across the prairies. Bystanders say that I was yelling "whoa" with every breath.

I have been County Health Officer at Altus for the past twenty-five years.
