

4 1 1



INDEX CARDS

Pioneer Life--Oklahoma Territory
Water--Oklahoma Territory
Farming--Oklahoma Territory
Timber Stealing
Fords--North Fork of Red River
Greer County
Social Gatherings--Oklahoma Territory
Fishing--Oklahoma Territory



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

Field Worker's name Virgil Coursey

This report made on (date) May 17 1937

1. Name Hampton A. Steele

2. Post Office Address Altus, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 423 North Hightower

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month September Day 19 Year 1863

5. Place of birth Limestone County, Texas

6. Name of Father Hampton Steele Place of birth Montgomery County, Texas

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother _____ Place of birth _____

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 Hampton A. Steele
423 North Hightower
Altus, Oklahoma.

My father was Hampton Steele and my grandfather was Alfonso Steele, last survivor of the Battle of San Jacinto. I came to Jackson County from Limestone County, Texas, in 1897. It was then known as Greer County, with Mangum as the County Seat.

In 1898 I homesteaded a quarter section of land three miles south and three miles west of the present town of Altus. This farm is sometimes called the Tinney farm. I had a wife and three children.

We first lived in a dugout with Grandma Chisum, an invalid. She was the mother of Clabe Chisum. Later, I hauled lumber from Vernon, Texas, and built a half dugout. This dugout had a dirt floor and muddy water. oftentimes dripped through the ceiling when it rained. I remember that one day we were away from home and an unusually heavy rain fell. When we returned to our dugout, we found it filled with water. An investigation revealed that rats had bored holes under the floor in such a way that water ran in. We had a very discouraging time restoring the place to livable conditions.

Later, we added another dugout and eventually a small boxed house. With this we felt as if we lived in a palace.

We managed to catch some water from the roof of the house and dugout, but often had to go miles to wash our clothing. The water from wells was awfully hard and salty.

However, we were blessed with good crops. We had a team, a wagon and a few farm implements. Our principal crops were cotton, corn and maize. There was a gin here, but it often took from one to two days to get a bale of cotton ginned. We were told that it was practically impossible to raise a garden, but with determination and by planting a variety of garden seed, we were rewarded with a fine garden which furnished us all the vegetables we needed.

Hogs were killed in the winter, salted down in dry salt. In the summer, a rabbit or chicken could be dressed, placed in a bucket and lowered into the well where it just touched the cold water. Milk and butter were also preserved this way.

The provision of fuel was one of our major problems.

- 3 -

There were practically no trees here. Of course, coal could be hought at Vernon, Texas, or at Mangum, but money was scarce. So we went into the Indian Territory, over/near Mountain Park, a trip of some thirty or thirty five miles. I remember one trip in particular. He arose early and I hitched up my team and waited for my neighbor, a Mr. Monroe, who lived some four or five miles west of me. When he arrived we started out with our two wagons. When we arrived at Altus we stopped and filled our water jugs from a well on the square. It was, I would say, about where the Daughters of Confederacy monument now stands. We reached the woods about sundown and loaded our wagons.

We usually bought our wood from Chief Old Black Horse, a Cherokee. We found it difficult to talk to Old Black Horse without the help of his interpreter, but when he held up two fingers and said, "twenty-five cent," it meant that if one had two horses or mules to his wagon, the load of wood would be twenty-five cents. A three-horse load cost thirty-five cents, a four-horse load cost fifty cents.

Now the risk in making these trips was in getting caught by the marshals or wardens. The Indians usually

knew if they were near and would give one a tip. On this return trip we had gone until after dark, and were dropping the traces preparatory to camping for the night, when we were accosted by a man who suggested that we had better drive on to avoid contact with the wardens. We followed his suggestion.

On these trips we always carried a chain with which to lock the back wheels of the wagon while going down steep inclines.

Now crossing a river is perilous if there is a headrise on. There was no bridge then, of course, across North Fork, and we crossed at Gates Crossing, a little north of the present bridge. We stopped a good ways off from the bank and I picked my way down into the river, and listened. I could tell from the sound of the water that there was no headrise on. So

I crawled back on my wagon and told Mr. Monroe to follow along behind, but cautioned him to keep some distance back so that I could tell him if I got into quicksand; so we proceeded carefully. I called back occasionally, "all right," and we got across just fine.

My children attended school at Old Frazier and had

to walk several miles. High water from Bitter Creek and the river was a handicap. It was for this reason that we later moved to Altus and put the children in school there. However, I continued to farm for several years longer. I lived on this place some eight years.

Life was not all work in those days. We had camp meetings and people for miles around attended. The whole family piled into the wagon for trips to town, just for the outing. We usually had some chickens or eggs to trade for necessities not provided. I also, occasionally, made trips to Vernon for the merchants, hauling merchandise and taking some merchandise for my pay.

Trips to the mill to grind corn were made quite a gala affair. It was usually on a Friday afternoon.

~~The corn was carried to a mill over on Turkey Creek~~
(west of the river). After the corn was delivered, a suitable place was found, and we pitched camp. And then the fishing began. For a trap, we used a banana crate covered with poultry wire, one end of which was shaped like a funnel. A rabbit that had been killed for a day or two was placed in the trap for bait. We

got fish by the tub-fuls. Of course, at a later time, laws did not permit use of traps. Saturday, we secured our cornmeal, covered our tub of fish with an old tarpaulin, and returned home; after which we had a supper of fried fish, cornbread pone and coffee.

Interviewer's Note:

Mr. Steele's father, Hampton Steele, wrote a history of Limestone County, Texas, 1833-1860, which we have read with absorbing interest.

As stated in the interview, his grandfather, Alfonso Steele, was the last survivor of the Battle of San Jacinto.

Mr. Steele's wife died about one year ago.

Mr. Steele still portrays the pioneer spirit. He has a well-kept home, a fine vegetable garden. He is active and in every way continues to "carry on."