

STEPHENS, J. M.

INTERVIEW

9755

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

#9755

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INTERVIEW.

Field Worker's name Ophelia D. Vestal

This report made on (date) January 24, 1938

1. Name J. M. Stephens

2. Post Office Address Lawton, Oklahoma,

3. Residence address (or location) South 2nd Street.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month October Day 10 Year 1859

5. Place of birth Texas

6. Name of Father \_\_\_\_\_ Place of birth \_\_\_\_\_

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 \_\_\_\_\_

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An Interview with J. M. Stephens, Lawton, Oklahoma.  
By - Ophelia D. Vestal, Investigator. S-149  
January 24, 1938.

In 1899 my wife and I moved from Bowie, Texas to Alma. We crossed the Red River just below where the highway crosses the river now on No. 81. We drove from Bowie by way of wagon and team, crossing the river in a ferry boat. After we had been at Alma for one year we heard of the opening at Lawton and decided to come to this settlement. It took us almost two days to drive fifty miles. When we arrived here, about all we could see was a rag town; later, it obtained the name of Rag Town.

Water and sanitation problems were bad here in the early days. Just any little wind would blow tin cans in the wells. Many wells were dug very shallow on the banks of Squaw Creek. It was a big job to supply the people with water. It was sold for a penny a bucket and five cents was charged for a team to be watered at the well. A tub was kept at the wells to water teams and cattle all the time. There were over one thousand head of horses here at once. This was a pretty quiet country to live in, even

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though it was so new and there were so many different kinds of people here. The Indians were quiet; once in awhile an Apache would stir up a little trouble while he was drinking, but the Comanches and Kiowas were never heard of.

A thing every one remembers were the fires. They were bad. Water was delivered to our barrel which we kept at our back door all the time filled with water for use in case of fire. When a fire broke out, there being several water wagons here, the first wagon to get to the fire got \$5.00. This meant they rushed for the extra money. But this was a neighborly town. Sometimes one could see as many as two or three hundred people fighting fires. Once during a big fire a group of men tied a large rope around a building and moved the building a few feet and saved it from burning, but the one beside it burned down.

I had some experience in farming, blacksmithing, gunsmithing and merchandise. I began working on guns out in the open but when I had made enough I erected a building for store and shop 12x15 and started to work. My wife attended the little store and I took care of the shop. My wife said she always

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hated to hear people come in telling me about so many ducks they saw out in the country for she knew I'd close up my shop and go hunting, but I never cared much for games or sports of other kinds.

I have seen Lawton grow from a grass prairie up to its present size, but believe that the population was greater in 1901 than now but it might be because we were all outside more. It seemed the people were healthy in those days.