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INTERVIEW WITH MR. ALEX SITZ-(alias)-SYKES.

by

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L. W. Wilson- Field Worker.

Mr. Sykes was born in 1870, in the Cherokee Nation, in Indian Territory, at the old "Walker Ranch" on Wild Horse Prairie, about ten miles southeast of the present town of Fort Gibson, Oklahoma. He lived there until he reached the age of thirteen years, at which time he moved along with his parents, to the "Goose Neck Bend Country", which is seven miles southeast of the city of Muskogee, Oklahoma. At this latter place he is rounding out the remainder of his days.

FATHER-Frederick Sitz, was born near Berlin, Germany in 1829 and died in 1887.

MOTHER-Caroline Dennis Sitz, was born near Nashville, Tennessee in 1834 and died in 1885.

Mr. Sykes answers to the questions asked and information volunteered was as follows:

Yes, my father was a German. I cannot recall how or why he came to this country. He served in the Civil War, here is his discharge papers. (Discharge shows private, Frederick Sitz, of Company "G", 6th Regiment, of Kansas Cavalry, that he volunteered his services and enrolled on July 6, 1862 and was discharged at De Valls Bluff, Arkansas June 23, 1865.) (I-am-attaching hereto a photo-static copy of this discharge.)

No, I have never heard him say in what battles he was engaged.

My father's occupation before and after the war was that of a farmer.

He and mother were married after the war. Married near the place where I was born, it was in 1868, about three years after he came out of the army.

I cannot say how my mother got to the Indian Territory. I don't know if she came with her mother on the "Trail of Tears" or grew up back in Tennessee and came or how she got to this country. If she ever told me I don't remember. She died when I was only fifteen years old and did not get to enjoy her companionship like most boys get to do with their mothers.

Mother was one-half Cherokee Indian, to her was born five children, three boys and two girls. I am the oldest boy and there was Marion and Frederick and the two girls, Delilah and Louisa. All are dead but sister Louisa.

My brother Marion was in the Spanish-American of 1898. Here is his discharge. (Discharge shows Marion Sykes was a Private in Troop "L", 1st Regiment, United States Cavalry, volunteered his services and was enrolled on May 14th, 1898 and was mustered out at Camp Wikoff, L.I., Sept. 15, 1898. Photo-static attached hereto.)

LIFE AND CUSTOMS AFTER THE CIVIL WAR.

When father was discharged at De Valls Bluff, Arkansas, he had due him for army service \$700.00, but did not receive it when discharged as this was the amount due in bounty. He had about a \$100.00 to start his life anew. He came to Indian Territory and settled at the place where he was married. I was born in a little log cabin near this place on Wild Horse Prairie.

He tried and did start farming.. His only implements were a bull-tongue, hoe and an old "A" harrow and some oxen. The bull-tongue was similar to the present single-stock, but was all wood that he made himself. With this he did his plowing. I used it some myself after I got large enough but he had horses then instead of

oxen.

The harrow was hewn from the fork of a tree, holes bored through it at proper intervals and teeth were driven in the holes, ~~that was~~ bought at Fort Gibson.

We raised corn, cotton, potatoes, sweet potatoes, beans, tobacco, pumpkins, wheat and had quite a flock of sheep. We did not raise a great deal of anything. We just lived at home. We did not raise hogs. They were wild. A party of eight or ten, in the neighborhood, would get together and go hog-hunting. When we didn't have pork and meat was short we would kill a lamb. I was the official sheep-herder. I had to stay very close with the sheep in order to keep the wolves from catching them. I started this sheep-herding when about seven years old and father always told me that when the wolves came up to hallow, that the sheep would come home and the wolves would leave. This worked fine until one day the wolves refused to go. I knew I dare not run but I began yelling for dear life. The sheep ~~went~~ home and father came to see what the trouble, found me and of course rescued me.

Oh yes, we had lots of game. Wild pigeons, there was a pigeon roost on our place. We would go down there at night and shoot them. There was rabbits, squirrels, deer, coon, O'possum, turkeys and fur animals such as muskrats, mink, fox, wolves and coyotes. I used to trap some when I was a boy. About all the money I ever got was the money that I got from my furs that I sold to a fur buyer at Fort Gibson. I liked to hunt and fish and really there is nothing I like to do better yet than to go fishing. I did a lot of wolf hunting, but really I didn't have to hunt them, all I had to do was

to shoot them when I was herding sheep. In the winter time herds of deer would come up around our barn and feed lot for refuge and food and of course we always had plenty of venison.

We had spinning wheel, reel and loom. Mother and father made the spinning wheel out of walnut. It was put together by driving pieces in a hole of the other pieces at the right place and then wedged with a wooded wedge. There was no glue or nails about it.

We would spin, card, and weave. Made cotton thread, yarn and both cotton and wool cloth. Mother knit two pair of socks for each of us children each year and that had to do us, she also knit us a pair of gloves and a scarf. Of course these were made out of yarn. The women folks would knit lace out of the cotton thread for their clothing.

We had no gin and evenings, after supper we would sit around the fire-place, dry the cotton and pick out the seeds so we could spin it the next day.

We would shear the sheep at the barn, take it down to the creek wash it good, bring it back and let it dry well and then spin, card and weave it.

Of course the clothes were allwhite to start off with. If we wanted different colors we would use green walnut hulls mixed with water and boiled down and this would make a tan, if red or pink we used sycamore bark boiled down, if blue we would use indigo. We could get about every color except a jet black.

Yes, we raised wheat, cut it with a scythe, cradle attached. We would shock it and tie the shocks with straw. Old man Bragg, over on Green Leaf Creek, had an old horse power thresher concern, and he

would come over and thresh it. It usually took about twelve horses and an equal amount of men and women to the job and we had to pay for the horses hire as well as the labor and feed the whole out-fit to boot. Old man Braggs did this for all of those who had a little wheat crop. Father always tried to raise a hundred bushels of wheat a year. We would make two trips a year to mill with our wheat to get it ground, that is two round-trips. The first day out we would make it to the old Gulager place and camp, the Gulager place was on the old Fort Gibson to Tahlequah road, and the next day we would go on to the old water-mill down on the creek south of Tahlequah. I can't remember now who run the mill. We would pay our toll and the next day come back to the Gulager place and on home the following day with our flour. It took us about a week steady to get enough flour on hand to last us a year together with the meal we would get ground. We had an old hand grater to grind our meal. All the neighbors used our grater.

Oh yes, we could always get salt at Fort Gibson every since I can remember. Lard we always managed to get enough from the hogs that we killed on the wild-hog hunts to get us through. Soap, we made that. We had both soft and hard soap. We would save all the ashes from the fire-place in a place made of logs and in the ashes we would put all the cracklins and entrails from the hogs, pour water on them and catch the water as it passed through the ashes, boil it down and make soap. Yes, the Indians made soap the same way.

Yes, we had bean bread, pumpkin bread, cracklin bread besides our corn and wheat bread. We tried everything for a change. We learn bean and pumpkin bread making from the Indians.

We baked our bread in the fire-place in skillets or I guess they call them dutch-ovens. We did all our cooking in the fire-place in skillets and pots.

We bought green coffee at Fort Gibson and Tahlequah, we would parch it at home and had a little square hand grinder to grind it.

Our carts and wagons were made at home in part. The wheels were made at a wagon shop in Fort Gibson, I don't remember the man's name. They were old pin-axle carts and wagons. The axles had a hole in the end of them, and we drove a pin in the hole of the axle to hold the wheel on. We greased the wagons with a black tar grease. The wheels were like the ones today a whole lot.

Lots of nuts, such as hickory nuts, walnuts and chinquapins.

We had lots of wild berries, such as dewberries, blackberries, strawberries and grapes and wild plums. We could always buy sugar at Fort Gibson for our fruits and berries.

I have heard it said that they raised a lot of watermelons and cantalopes but I will take a dying oath that I was twenty years old before I ever saw one grow.

After I moved to Goose Neck Bend we used to take our corn over to Dresback's water-mill to get it ground. They had a saw-mill, too. These mills were over on the other side of the present ^{SOLDIERS} General Hospital in Muskogee. Yes, over on the other side of Agency Hill.

HOUSES AND CHURCHES

The houses and churches were built of logs with shake shingle roofs and usually large rock fire-places. Some of them had punchin floors and some no floors. Some with shuttle windows and others no windows.

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The school houses were of log construction with punchin floors and split logs for seats.

The First school I attended was the Nevins school which was about a quarter of a mile west of the west landing of the Nevins Ferry which I will tell you about as far as the ferry is concerned after bit. My teacher's name was Mr. Gray.

The second school I attended was the Frozen Rock school which was about one quarter of a mile south and an eighth of a mile east of the present Frozen Rock school and it was of log construction, punchin floors and split log seats. My teacher's name was Colonel Harris who was a brother to Red Bird Harris. He lived with Red Bird up at the old Confederate Fort Davis location.

The third school I attended was at White Church at the same location as the present White Church school. It was of clap-board construction. My teacher's name was Carrie Burchart.

They taught the English language in these schools.

Church was held in the Nevins school and Frozen Rock school but there was no church services at that time in the White Church school.

We attended Camp Meetings considerably. Arbors were constructed of poles, limbs and leaves where the preacher preached his sermons but the congregation would roll up logs and sit on the logs and listen to him. We would stay at these Camp Meetings two or three weeks at a time. Just bring enough provisions to camp out and stay. I have an old Camp Meeting Ground back here on my old home place now where we used to go to church.

FORDS AND FERRIES

The Nevins Ferry was controlled, owned and operated by Mose and Julia Nevins. Mose was shot and killed near the east landing of the ferry the year which I have forgotten but Julia continued to operate this ferry. Last year I went down to where the old ferry used to operate to just see what changes had been made.

The east landing of the ferry was on the east bank of the Arkansas River at the mouth of Grand River and the west landing was on the west bank of the Arkansas River at about the present location of the Muskogee pump station. The Nevins home is still in use by a man named Lee Cunningham. This home, when the Nevins lived in it, was of log construction. The old log house is still intact. Just north of the Muskogee pump station is a log house that old Aunt Dina used to live in. She was a tenant on the farm for the Nevins family as the Nevins owned hundreds of acres around them. Nip Blackstone used to run a store and commissary at the west landing and this store was constructed of native lumber which was brought up the river by steamboats from Ft. Smith.

I have crossed this ferry many many times and it was used extensively for handling all traffic east and west and it was on this ferry that the old stage coaches and mail hacks used. I remember coming down to the ferry one morning and the boat was frozen in the water. That a steamboat had unloaded a large pile of native lumber and a crew that was congregated around the ferry laid the boards on top of the ice so that we could get across. It was too slippery to try to put our horses across without this footing for them.

Smith's Ferry was controlled, owned and operated first by ~~an~~.

Messrs. Smith and Van Noy. This was Mr. Junior Smith. Its location was down the river about eleven miles from the Nevins Ferry and the people in the vicinity of the Goose Neck Bend Territory used it considerably in taking their cotton and corn to Braggs, Oklahoma and to do their shopping. This was nearer for them than to come to Muskogee. This ferry was abandoned just within the last year or two and was last operated by a man by the name of John Dunham.

Rabbit Ford crossed the river just below the Muskogee power plant ^{between} and the present Frisco railroad bridge. This was a very dangerous ford and of course could only be used when the river was extremely low.

Frozen Rock Ferry was located just below Rabbit Ford and was owned by the Rogers Brothers. I don't remember the year this ferry was started nor when it was abandoned.

TRAILS AND ROADS

The Texas road started at the west landing of the Nevins Ferry, ran west a short ways and then in a southwestern direction for about a mile which would make it cross the east side of the present Country Club Golf ground and thence south for about three miles. This is as far as I ever traveled the Texas road.

Tahlequah Road, the Tahlequah started at the east landing of the Nevins Ferry, ran in a northeast direction along Grand river, thence east by the present Frisco depot at Fort Gibson, thence northeast across Corral Branch, coming out at Nathan Johnsons place "this is where we usually intersected this road when hauling wheat to the water mill over by Tahlequah" thence east six or seven miles coming out near the old Boys seminary and thence north

to Tahlequah.

STEAMBOATS

In my boyhood days there was a number of steamboats on the Arkansas river. They came from Memphis, Little Rock and Ft. Smith. Some of the landings I heard them talk of were at Skullville, Tamaha, Webbers Falls, Nevins Ferry. These were the landings on the Arkansas between Ft. Smith and Nevins Ferry. The cargoes were merchandise of all kinds and they would take back cotton, hay and sometimes logs. I remember seeing the Border City, Lucy Walker, The Memphis Packet and lots of others I can't name. I did not know any of the captains.

RAILROADS

The M.K.&T. railroad was built through Muskogee in 1772 and 1773. The Missouri Pacific railroad then called the St. L.I.M.&S. railroad, was built through Fort Gibson in 1887 and when this railroad reached the vicinity of the present town of Braggs, Okla., the town of Braggs was named after old man Braggs that I told you about that used to do our threshing. Old man Braggs at this time owned an old water-mill on Green Leaf creek.

The city of Muskogee, Oklahoma was moved from the north bank of the Arkansas river, what was then known as Tent Town, to this city's present location. The first store in Muskogee was owned by a Mr. Patterson. The first butchershop was owned by a Mr. Lacy and the first hotel was owned by Mrs. Strokey. This all occurred in 1882 the year the railroad reached this vicinity.

FORTS-POSTS AND CAMPS

I know of no ~~forts~~ except Fort Gibson at Fort Gibson, Okla. The soldiers were there at the Fort when I was born and I cannot say when they left other than heresay for I had moved to my present home. I believe though, it was in 1889.

MERCHANDISING

The log cabin in which I was born, I found after I grew to be a good sized boy, a roll of green back confederate money hid above the door in a crack and used to use it for play money as father said it was of no value. I thought at first I had found plenty of money. Of course this was used as a means of exchange during the confederacy.

In later years when we had no banks in the country, and you desired to make a borrow in order to make your crop, you would go to your merchant and make a mortgage on whatever stuff he would accept and he would issue script which was used as a medium of exchange with all the merchants in town. I well remember the Spaulding Script. It was about four and a half inches long and two inches wide. This script was issued by H. B. Spaulding in the cit. of Muskogee, Oklahoma. It had H. B. Spaulding's picture on one end and the amount on the other end. This script ranged in amounts from five cents to ten dollars. People wanted sure enough United States money and would sell this script to scalpers at a discount ranging from ten to twenty-five percent on the dollar. The time soon came when they insisted that Spaulding take up his script and they insisted so strongly that he finally recalled all of it and quit. It came near, if it did not, bankrupt him.

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Of course we have always had from the days of script, United States money in the city of Muskogee. And when the banks began to open up there was no further need of such money as script.

COMMENTS

You will note that Mr. Sykes parents died while he was still in his teens and it was by lots of toil and sacrifice that he managed to rear and educate a large family with the meek facilities that were available and at the same time accumulate to the end that he was one of the most well to do farmers in the surrounding country although in late years he has suffered untold loss through sickness, afflictions and unforeseen accidents in his immediate family as well as numerous crop failures.

He is a very admirable old gentleman and has always been considered honest, thrifty and admired by all his old associates, friends and neighbors.

To all whom it may Concern



Recd 1865

Know ye, That Frederick Fitz

Private of Captain Robert Henderson

6th Regt. of Stannus Cavalry

Volunteers, who was enrolled on the 19th day of July

1864 and eight hundred and eighty two to serve three years or

until the war, is hereby **Discharged** from the service of the United States

on the 19th day of June 1865, at Orville

Missouri by reason of Genl. Geo. B. S. Washington

(The fact of his being entitled is known to exist.)

Frederick Fitz was born in

Germany is thirty three years of age

and by occupation a Farmer

Given at Orville on the 19th day of

June 1865

This will be erased should there be any thing
in the physical condition of the soldier
not right for the Army.

Wm. C. McVey
Commanding the Regt.
Orville

James B. McVey
Genl. & Hon. Col.
Orville

of the Town of
County of in the State of
on this day of in the year

on personally appeared
before me, the undersigned, Justice of the Peace for the County
of above mentioned,

who being duly sworn according to law, declares that he is the
identical who was
in the Company commanded by

Captain in the Regiment
commanded by
he enlisted on the day of

for the term of and was discharged
on the day
of reason of

and subscribed to before me this and your above written

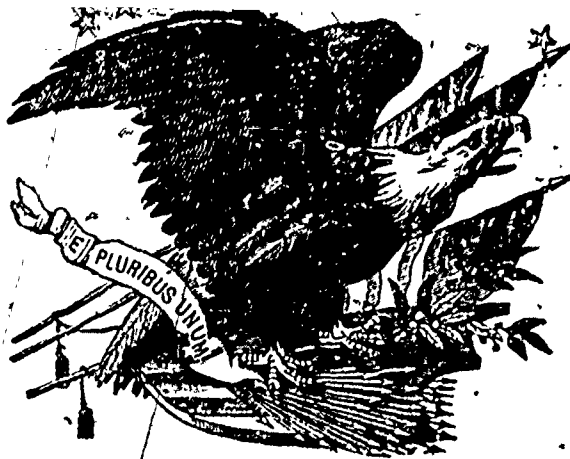
certify that before
on the above affidavit, purports to have been made, is a Justice
of the Peace duly authorized to administer oaths and that the
above is his signature

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed
my official seal, this day of
in the year

at in the State of

582

Clerk of the Court



44.16
583
Camp Wikom L.

15 Nov 1891

George B. Smith

To all Whom it May Concern:

Know ye, That Marion Lykes
Private of Company M, of the First Regiment
United States Cavalry Volunteers, who was enrolled in the fourteenth
of January one thousand eight hundred and ninety
to serve for a term of one year or during the war,
is hereby DISCHARGED from the service of the UNITED STATES, by reason of

* NO OBJECTION TO HIS REENLISTMENT IS KNOWN TO EXIST.

The said Marion Lykes was born in
Indiana in the State of Indiana
when enrolled was 24 years of age, 5 feet 7 inches high,
fair complexion, blue eyes, dark hair, and by occupation

GIVEN at Camp Wikom this 15 day

Commanding the

Mustering Officer.

* To be erased should there be anything in the conduct or physical condition of the soldier rendering him unfit for the Army.

MILITARY RECORD.

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Noncommissioned Officer:

None

Distinguished service:

None

Battles, engagements, skirmishes, expeditions:

None

Wounds received in service:

None

Remarks:

Very good character

3-1276

Commanding

Prof. M.