

STEPHESON, L. E.

INTERVIEW

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BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for OklahomaField Worker's name Zaidee B. BlandThis report made on (date) September 13, 19371. Name L. E. Stepheson2. Post Office Address Altus, Oklahoma3. Residence address (or location) 612 North Hudson Street4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month July Day 16 Year 18615. Place of birth Mississippi

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 _____.

Interview with L. E. Stepheson
North Hudson Street, Altus.

Interviewer - Zaidee B. Bland
Indian-Pioneer History, S-149
September 13, 1937

We left our old home near Fort Worth, Texas, in the Fall of 1887. We shipped our goods to Harrold, Texas, sixteen miles east of Vernon, Texas, which was as far as the railroad went at that time.

We drove through with two wagons and four horses. We had the wagons loaded lightly since we had shipped most of our things. My wife already had people living near what is now Headrick. This was all disputed land but we were determined to take our chances of getting land and making a permanent home.

than
other. Being water-bound for three days and breaking an axle on one of the wagons we made a very nice trip.

I first settled near the Salt Fork of Red River but my wife wanted to be nearer her people so I sold my right to file and bought out another man's right near Headrick. We proved up on this quarter and own

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it to this day. One of my sons farms it for us now as we feel that we have worked long enough and can afford to take life easier. I lived on this place twenty years.

It was the northeast quarter of section 17, 2 North, 18 West. I later bought another quarter, Northeast 20, 2 North, 19 West, and I also own this quarter now.

HOUSE ON HILL.

Our first home was a half dug out. It was a hole in the ground walled up with poles three feet above the ground, covered with split logs, which in turn were covered with dirt and chinked and daubed so that it could not leak.

In 1891, we built a one room house above the ground.

FURNITURE.

We brought with us from Texas our cook stove, sewing machine, bedsteads, tables, cane-bottomed chairs, dishes and cooking vessels. Most of our cooking

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vessels were of iron. Our buckets and tubs were of wood, either of cypress or cedar. Our milk vessels were crocks. We had wooden bowls and trays for mixing breads and mince-meat and such things. We had some tin vessels but not many.

CROPS.

Cotton, corn, cane, sweet potatoes and garden truck were raised in abundance after the first year. The first year we did not know so much about the time to plant and we did not raise anything much the first year and came very near being starved out.

We had to go very far to market anything we might raise and to get supplies and that was the really hardest thing on the women folks. Once when I was with some others over in the Nation cutting wood the United States Marshal caught us and took us to El Reno and kept us for thirty-seven days. We were treated nicely and allowed to do just about as we pleased in the day time,

but we were locked in an old barn at night. We were released without being fined at last. We were surely glad to get home.

Our women folks got used to our not getting home when we were supposed to, for there were so many things that could delay us.

Once I started to Vernon to get supplies and got to Doan's Crossing and found that the river was a mile wide. There was nothing to do but camp. Away in the night we heard some people screaming. There were about twenty-five wagons camped near us waiting for the waters to run down. I said "Somebody is in trouble - lets turn out and see."

There were a man, woman and a little child in a hack with a "green" driver who had tried to cross Red River. Both horses were drowned and the people sat there screaming.

Some of us, swam out to them and cut the horses loose, tied lariats to the hack and drew it to shore from the bank. The hack was not more than fifteen

yards from the bank; if the driver had known how to guide the team he possibly would have crossed without trouble.

The next day we waited until afternoon when two little sand-bars appeared in the river and one man who had about fifty bushels of wheat in his wagon and six oxen said he believed he could make it so he drove in. The oxen began to swim almost at once and the wagon went clear out of sight. Only the very top of the bows and sheet could be seen. Again, some men had to swim out and unyoke the oxen and let them swim out and leave the wagon there until the river went down.

Late in the evening, we began to cross, going around the submerged wagon. We had a lot of fun camping at the wagon yard at Vernon. People were there from all over that part of the country. There would be music and card playing and jokes and men would fight at the drop of a hat.

Once, when we were all camped in the wagon yard a school teacher named Will Barger said he would bet any man there that there wasn't a man north of the Red River line who had ten dollars to his name. One of our boys, Mr. Yelldell, threw down his wallet containing several hundred dollars and said, "I live just north of the river and that money is to prove you are a liar and I am here to make you eat your words." Off came Mr. Yelldell's coat and it was all we could do to prevent a fight.

FOOD.

We never lacked ample food for there was so much game whose flesh was good to eat. We ate wild turkeys and antelope more than any other kinds but there was plenty of possum and coon and there was a certain kind of a little rabbit whose meat was so white and sweet that you could hardly tell it from chicken. There was fish any time, if you wanted to eat fish. The place where Snyder is now was a mesquite flat and we usually

hunted turkeys there and in the Otter Creek bottom. I came back home once after a night hunt with three turkeys that I had killed near Mountain Park. My wife had an uncle who was such a good shot that he seldom came in with less than eight or ten turkeys but I never killed more than three turkeys on a hunting trip.

We liked to trap for wolves and polecats. We would go over across Otter Creek and set our traps. We caught seven wolves and seventeen polecats.

When we would be out in the night we would imitate an owl's hoot to let each other know where the other one was.

One time when we got back to camp our horses had strayed away. We skinned all our catch and started out to find our horses. We had our fire by an old stump. A strong, cold, north wind came up and blew the fire into the wagon and burned up our coats, a \$30.00 saddle

all our bedding and when the spare powder which we had left in the wagon began to go off we heard the noise and thought surely the United States Marshals had us again and we all started for camp on a run, only to find everything burned up. Two of our horses had crossed the river and gone home and some of us had to walk all that ten miles in the cold without our coats. I did not hunt any more that year.

SOCIETY AND SCHOOL.

The first church and school-house was called Union and it was about a mile from where Headrick is now. The first church organized was of the Methodist Episcopal denomination and my wife was a charter member and when the church was moved to Headrick, she retained her membership. It is now more than forty years since the church was first organized. Our children were raised up in the M. E. Sunday school. One of our daughters, Lily, received a prize for not having missed going to

Sunday school a single Sunday in three years.

Many of our neighbors had dances but our children found plenty of social activity in the church. They used to attend picnics, too.

Our children have all finished high school and some of them have gone to college and have degrees and life certificates to teach.

I used to trade at Frazier and hauled the first four horse load of lumber from Vernon to build the first Methodist Episcopal parsonage in Altus in 1891.

We have had Indians eat with us but we never were afraid of them. We have heard Quanah Parker's son, White Parker, preach. He is a pretty shrewd man and a good talker. His father adopted a white boy who grew up with "White" and was always wanting more land. He had an allotment with Quanah's own son but that was not enough; he wanted more; he had seven quarters of land and was trying to buy "White's" allotment. In talking of the incident, White said "You better be careful; you no pockets in

your clothes; you cannot take land with you into the spirit world."

The Indian trail led by our house and when an Indian was passing our house about noon he would get off of his horse and come in and sit down and if we were through eating my wife would always fix food for him. If we were still eating, the Indian would eat with us and everything would be as usual except the women folks would leave the table.

We liked our neighbors and I guess they liked us, anyway we were always neighborly and the very worse dangers to us were high water and quicksand.

CLOTHING.

We bought the goods at Vernon for the girls' and my wife's clothes and my wife made them.

As for us men, we traded sweet potatoes, and sometimes feed, to the Indians for ducking pants and red wool shirts whenever we needed them.

An Indian would trade almost anything for sweet potatoes.