

SUMNER, JEFFERSON D.

INTERVIEW

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FIELD WORKER ROBERT W. SMALL

Indian-Pioneer History S-149

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INTERVIEW WITH JEFFERSON D. SUMNER

109 North 2nd St. Tonkawa, Okla.

Born February 4, 1862, Fayetteville,
Arkansas.

Father's name Jesse Sumner

Mother's name Elizabeth Sumner.

Jesse Sumner moved his family, which included

Jefferson D. Sumner, the subject of this sketch, from

Fayetteville, Arkansas, in the year 1870, and located

in Sedgewick County, Kansas, near the town of Wichita.

Jefferson, with his older brother, made a trip

into the Indian Territory in 1874, going down on the

Salt Fork of the Arkansas River to pick wild sand

plums. The plum bushes were laden with this wild

fruit, of excellent quality and they gathered a

wagon load, selling a surplus quantity in the town

of Wichita on their return home. This was his first

trip into the Indian country which is now the state

of Oklahoma.

On March 12, 1889, he entered into a contract

with Mr. H. L. Bigford, a Government contractor, of

Fort Reno, to haul supplies of various kinds to forts

and reservations.

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While Mr. Sumner used his own team and wagon in this work, he relates that at that time Mr. Bigford owned 144 head of work oxen which, later, were fattened on the grass and sold for beef on the market.

About March 20, 1889, Mr. Sumner set out upon his initial freighting trip; loading his wagon with feed at Arkansas City, Kansas, he followed a road or trail that ran about parallel with the Santa Fe railroad to Oklahoma, now Oklahoma City, where he turned westward to reach Council Grove reservation, which was his destination. He crossed the Salt Fork River at a ford near White Eagle Indian Agency, and crossed the Cimarron River at Alford, which is now the site of Guthrie, Oklahoma. Council Grove reservation was six miles west of the present site of Oklahoma City.

On this first trip Mr. Sumner met and formed the acquaintance of Captain William Gouch, who was later the first mayor of Oklahoma City. He also met Mr. Adams who in a conversation about land in that part told Mr. Sumner that he was going to get a certain

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tract of land west of Oklahoma City or kill somebody. Mr. Adams told Mr. Sumner of some old "boomer" who had passed away leaving no one on the land and tried to get Mr. Sumner to settle on it, but Mr. Sumner declined the idea. Later this same Mr. Adams became involved in an argument with Captain Couch, and drew his gun and killed Captain Couch. They were both "boomers."

On different occasions in making these trips he would be halted by soldiers who demanded of him to show some authority for being in the country. He always presented a duly signed "pass" which they invariably read and allowed him to proceed. Near the White Eagle Agency of the Ponca Indian reservation he could frequently see posters warning white men to stay out of the country.

Altogether Mr. Sumner spent about six months in this service.

Some of his work consisted of hauling cord wood from Council Grove to Fort Reno, for use of the soldiers. His pay was \$5.00 per cord and he hauled from one and one quarter to one and one half cords at a load covering a distance of twenty-five miles in about a day and half for the round trip.

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Mr. Sumner relates that the soldiers had told him confidentially, that he could buy his provisions much cheaper at the "Hay Kitchen," as the soldiers called their commissary, provided they had more on hand of any article than what their needs might demand. He states that common salt was at times almost a luxury, having paid 25 cents on one occasion for no more than a hand full.

On April 22, 1889, Mr. Sumner staked a claim about one half mile north of Council Grove reservation, and began the construction of a residence, half of which was dug in the ground and logs used above ground for about half the walls and all was covered with planks.

He broke out ten acres which was planted to corn and produced a fairly good yield; he raised lots of fine sweet potatoes and a good garden. In June of '89, he made a trip to Kingman County, Kansas, after thirty-three head of cattle, all of which died soon after reaching his new place, except one cow and calf he had let his brother-in-law have to keep for milk. Texas fever was the cause of their death.

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After living on his claim for about eighteen months he had to abandon it because the Secretary of the Interior, Mr. Noble, had reversed the opinion of a former secretary, and decreed that no one could hold a claim in that country who was there prior to April 22, 1889. In September, 1890, Mr. Sumner moved to Kingman County, Kansas, where he lived till the opening of the "Cherokee Strip" September 16, 1893. However, he made the "run" into the Cheyenne country when that was opened for settlement, but since he did not like the country he never took up any homestead claim.

On September 14, 1893, he went to Caldwell, Kansas, to register for the opening of the "Cherokee Strip" and two days later made the run from a point six miles east of Hunnewell, Kansas. He made the run on a horse and before starting paid 25 cents for water for his horse to drink. Twenty-nine miles almost due south of the starting point he staked the S.W. $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 10, Township 24 N., Range 1 West, as his claim.

His father and three brothers were in the run; three including his father, got claims, but his father decided he wouldn't have the claim he staked and abandoned

it. In late years, since oil and gas were developed in the country the farm he abandoned was worth a million dollars.

After Mr. Sumner staked his claim he attempted to dig a well but the earth was so dry and hard that he had to give up the task at that time, and he went back to Kansas and got a plow and came back and built his house of sod and bought lumber in Wellington, Kansas, to cover it. The following January 20, he moved to his claim. Wood, which was obtained in the timbered sections along the Salt Fork River and Red Rock Creek, was used for fuel. In the Spring of '94 he broke up forty acres of land which was put in wheat and twelve bushels were harvested therefrom.

The next season he borrowed wheat to sow and harvested twelve bushels per acre at harvest time. The following year his wheat produced thirty-three bushels per acre. Mr. Sumner improved his farm in keeping with others of the community until the year 1905, he sold his farm and moved to his present residence in Tonkawa, Oklahoma.

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'Dead Man's Crossing'.

In 1889, while living a few miles west of Oklahoma City, a Mr. Newton, who had been scouting around over the country looking for a claim, came to my place one afternoon and related the finding of a dead man not far distant, who, it seems, had been hidden in the tall blue stem grass on a strip of prairie land between the timber along the North Canadian river and the timber reservation.

It appeared that he might have been killed in some altercation over a claim, but the identity of his assailant was never established.

As this dead man had been found near a ford on the North Canadian river, this place soon took the name of "Dead man's crossing."

I was traveling a road that passed by a claim where a negro named Smith was starting the foundation of a house on his claim; he had four logs already laid when I was there.

Later, a man named Anderson, contested the negro's claim. In the hearing, the negro swore he took the claim

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on April 22, 1889, and that he laid some logs for the foundation of a house on his claim. Anderson had the negro arrested for perjury in saying that he had laid the foundation of a house and caused him to be sent to the penitentiary.

Afterward, when I had moved to Kingman County, Kansas, I received a letter one day from the United States District Attorney McGuire, stating that he understood I knew something about the Anderson-Smith contest, and the settlement of the claim by said Smith, in April, 1889. I wrote the Attorney McGuire that I did. The Attorney filed motion in court for a hearing in behalf of the negro. I was served with a subpoena to appear as a witness at the trial to be held in Oklahoma City. I went down to the trial as a witness and before testifying I was accosted by three or four old soldiers who warned me that I had better be careful what I swore. I told them I would swear the truth regardless of what happened.

When I took the stand I swore that I was going north after noon, and the road I traveled ran right past where the

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negro, Smith, had staked his claim and that he had placed four logs, the beginning of a foundation for a house, thus showing he had taken the claim. The negro was pardoned from the penitentiary, but being without funds to protect his further interests or have the case opened for a re-hearing, he lost his claim.