

STRICKLAND, I. T. (MRS.) THIRD INTERVIEW 8754

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

STRICKLAND, I. T. (MRS.) THIRD INTERVIEW 8754 ✓

Field Worker's name Herbert Rogers
 Report made on (date) September 13 to Sept. 17 1937

Name Continuation of I. T. Strickland (Mrs.)

Post Office Address Alva, Okla.

Residence address (or location) 14 Fourth St.

DATE OF BIRTH: Month March Day 14 Year 1859

Place of birth Osceola, Missouri

Name of Father _____ Place of birth _____

Other information about father _____

Name of Mother _____ Place of birth _____

Other information about mother _____

For 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 _____

Herbert Rogers
Interviewer
September 13 to 17, 1937

Interview with
Mrs. I. T. Strickland
Alva, Oklahoma.

The fact is known to but few people today, that the original name of Salt Fork River, in northern Oklahoma, was the Nescatunga River.

Nescatunga is an Indian name but just what it signifies is only conjecture. From an Indian legend handed down to the tribes who formerly occupied this part of the country, we have information as to many of the characteristics of the stream. This legend describes what took place many years ago. The Indians believed that the Great Spirit, Manitou, became angered and sent a big sand wind and filled the river with sand and made the water unfit for drinking. So much for the legend.

Indians of later years stated that the stream was in a deep gulch, forty or more feet deep and that within the banks enormous trees were growing and the channel was a flowing stream of clear deep water, on which the Indians traveled by canoes. At that time the river was

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a mile or more north of its present channel; this has been proved by borings made in the sand to the north. The depth in most places is fifty feet to the rock and from this underground stream, a number of towns in northern Oklahoma get their water supply. The Indians were right in regard to the depth of the original stream, and the water is clear, pure and inexhaustible.

The source of Salt Fork River is in Comanche County, Kansas. It is formed by several small creeks, known as the Nescatungas, fed by numerous springs coming from sands, known as "sheetwater" sands, which underlie the entire western plains to the Rocky Mountains, at a depth in some places of two hundred feet, but the outcroppings occur along these creeks in Comanche County. The water to begin with in Salt Fork River is clear and pure.

A little way down Salt Fork is the place where its brackish taste begins. This taste is from the "gyp" water it receives from Cave Creek which heads in the Gypsum hills in which there are many caves and much

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water flowing from the caverns. In one cave in particular the stream of water is about six feet in width and six to eight inches deep and very "gyppy." A mile below on the bank of Salt Fork there is a deep hole in "gyp" rock. It is some twenty feet across and weights have been let down over a hundred feet without striking bottom.

Another peculiarity of Salt Fork River is that no creek of any considerable length flows into it from the south side, but from the north side there is Yellowstone and Little Yellowstone, Creever, Driftwood, Boggy and Turkey Creeks in Woods County, and other smaller tributary branches. There are Big and Little Mule Creeks, Medicine River, Big Sandy Creek, Little Sandy Creek, Pond Creek, Deer Creek and Chikaskia River. These streams all add to the flood waters of Salt Fork and empty into the Arkansas River southeast of Ponca City. The windings of the river gives it a length of over two hundred miles.

HEADING WEST AND PICKING UP BUFFALO BONES

In the fall of 1886 I made a sale of all my personal

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effects in St. Clair County, Missouri, and with two wagons and teams, my wife and three children, all small, headed west. After two weeks travel, we arrived at Medicine Lodge the county seat of Barber County, Kansas, where my mother and two brothers were.

Medicine Lodge was at that time only a small hamlet or cattle town, as saddled ponies were hitched to the racks all around the square.

I freighted corn to Camp Supply that fall and winter loading with cedar or salt for the home trip, doing anything to keep soul and body together. I made one trip to Camp Supply all alone with two wagons loaded with corn, trailing one wagon behind the other, dropping trail through hard pulls with four horses hitched two abreast of the wheelers and with no company except a large Shepherd dog. I camped not far from the Indians at Camp Supply and could hear the tom-toms and the humdrum singing of those wild people who were liable to kill us at most any time. The Government soldiers were stationed there to control these Indians. I would hear the boom of the cannon in the early morn-

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ing. The cannon was fired to let the other forts know that Fort Supply was still in existence and was all right as far as the Indians were concerned. But I was not molested in any way.

In the spring of '87 I again started west. Western Kansas was on the boom and the roads were lined with prairie schooners headed west. We got along fairly well but it was yet January and cold, the family had to stay in the covered wagon, covered up, to keep warm.

When we got to Englewood we switched to the southwest crossing the Cimarron by cutting the ice, which was a foot thick, and the thermometer must have been twenty-five below zero.

There were three other men in the group and we cut a large lane through the ice and then put the horses through the ice and whenever the water touched them it would freeze and their tails were frozen solid. I loved my horses and it hurt me to have to put them through, but I had to.

The other fellows drove on but I saw an old sod house not far from the trail and drove up, out my four horses

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two days into the Panhandle of Texas where there was at that time no living thing except coyotes, antelope and cattle. The country was level as a barn floor and we had no roads at all as there were absolutely no settlers at that time. We crossed one dry swamp or lake that had been dry so long that the cracks were a foot wide and eight feet deep so that a fellow had to watch his step. About half a day's drive farther on we came to holes knocked in the earth and many dead rabbits and prairie squirrels. We filled our horses, barrels and jugs and drove on out where there had not been rain for six months, judging from appearances.

Here we found buffalo bones in abundance and began loading our wagons with them by filling the wagon up to the top of the wagon bed and by setting up buffalo heads around the outer edge and then piling them up to the bows. There had been a slaughter of buffalo here and we loaded our wagons within a radius of two miles, only taking the biggest and heaviest bones. On this smooth level country we could see a buffalo head or a hip for

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inside and rustled a lot of wood and built a splendid fire. I not only thawed out my family but the horses as well. The next day was not so cold and we drove on till we arrived twenty miles above Beaver City in "No-ans-land" at a small place called Boyd.

The settlers ahead of us who had been there for sometime, came out to give us a welcome to their vicinity, saying that if we would only stop, they would find us a fine claim not far from the little burg, which we decided to do. We built a sod house and plowed out twenty or thirty acres, which we put out to Kaffir.

Along about August 1887, being very hard put for money, three of us decided to go south and gather buffalo bones.

A fellow by the name of Billy Endsfield and a long angular fellow by the name of "Arkansas Smith" and I, with one team, headed south; none of us having ever been in that direction. We were equipped with a frying pan for flapjacks, a smoked quart can with a bail for coffee and a bit of grain for the teams and a barrel of water for both man and beasts. We drove the better part of

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that I had entered "fairy" land. One thing which I saw was a bunch of wild horses, some of whose manes and tails dragged on the ground and as they ran away into the distance they were raised up into the air and looked twenty feet high. One other sight that I must not omit was a large and beautiful city with church spires, streets and towers which loomed up into the air one hundred feet high and so rarified was the atmosphere, that if we had had a power field glass I believe we could have made out the traffic on those streets, although this city must have been one hundred miles to the southwest in Texas or perhaps in Mexico.

As I was driving the best team, I was placed in the lead and followed a northwest course along the cow paths which grew plainer every mile of the way. Along in the shank of the evening we began to see cattle and the farther we went the more cattle we saw, until just before the sun went down we came in sight of the Paledora a fine stream running two or three feet deep heading southwest and emptying into the Beaver River below the town of Paledora.

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Our horses pricked up their ears and would have begun to trot had we not held them back. There were no roads and we did not care to lose any of the buffalo bones which were valuable. Our wagons were filled to the bows with these buffalo bones and we needed the money which we expected them to bring at their sale.

I had taken off the bridle reins so my team could feast on the luxuriant buffalo grass which was almost as good as oats. The nearer we got to the stream the faster my team went and it was hard to hold them back, so into the water we went, waist deep. I landed waist deep in that fine flowing stream and with hundreds of cattle above and below I buried my face in the water and proceeded to fill up. We pulled across the Paledora and drove up to a cow-camp where they had a fine spring of water and there we stayed all night. I was weak from my fast but after frying some flapjacks and drinking some coffee I felt no bad effects from my hard experience.

We took those buffalo bones up to Liberal, Kansas, which was the end of the railroad; at that time Liberal

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was new, and we sold these bones for \$8.00 per ton and I spent the entire amount for food for the family at home in the sod house.

We had only a squatter's right there but we stayed till the summer of 1888 when we decided to give it up as the hot winds come across that buffalo grass for miles from the south, and our kaffir was waist high and badly burned with the hot winds, so I loaded the family into the wagon and moved back to Barber County, Kansas, near Medicine Lodge, where I stayed until the opening of the Cherokee outlet to settlement in 1893. Then I made the race securing a good claim straight east of Alva seven and a half miles. It is a good place.

DEAD MAN

Bob Harmon and I had been to Alva and were starting for home when, east of town where the pavement ends, we met a pair of iron grey mules hitched to an open spring wagon.

We formed the opinion that they were without a driver as there was no one in sight. We were in a one horse buggy and we stopped the team to see what was the matter,

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and saw the owner lying in the wagon box, dead, with his head toward the back end. We examined him and were sure he was dead, so Bob said "You drive back to Alva and I will fetch up the corpse." I drove back and found Brad Farris who was Chief of Police and told him of the find. Pretty soon Bob came with the dead man and everybody gathered around to see if he knew the unfortunate driver. Brad looked him over from top to toe and then turned him over and there lay a quart whiskey bottle half empty. Brad said, "Yes he is dead-drunk." This man whom we thought dead, but who was only drunk, was a stranger and had come into Alva from the east.

WE START TRIP TO COAST.

Twenty-nine years ago this September, I decided to sell all my cattle and horses and drive through to the south coast for the winter. Col. W. W. Campbell was acting as auctioneer. My sale brought some \$2,000 which I put in the bank, taking just enough for current expenses. We put new bows on my wagon and a new sheet, so we

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were all ready to start for the south coast the day after the sale.

We took only bedding, cooking utensils and something to cook and I had my guns, a winchester shotgun and a winchester .32 rifle.

The first night we camped a few miles this side of the Cimarron River and the next day took dinner just this side of the river among some large cottonwoods. I did the flapjack work, as my wife was not used to camping out as much as I was. She fried the meat and made the coffee while I was flipping the flapjacks, turning them by pitching them in the air and catching them as they came down. I thought that my wife seemed depressed as we left all settlements behind.

We crossed the Cimarron River where there is now a good wagon bridge, and headed up a long ridge toward the blackjacks where I had killed deer before the opening of the strip forty-four years ago.

My brother and I brought out eleven deer and a

dozen wild turkeys in the fall of 1892 after it got cool enough so that they would not spoil, and we took them on up to Medicine Lodge where we lived before the opening of the strip.

Mile after mile without seeing a soul we went, when Mrs. Strickland said, "Oh, my, where are you going?"

We made only about twenty-five miles a day at this time. We stopped a day at Seiling, which had only one or two stores. I gathered some blackjack limbs and built a fire to cook supper and some three or four men came to our camp and sat around on their haunches and smoked and looked on and talked. Mrs. Strickland did not like their looks at all.

The next day we drove down a mile long hill to the South Canadian River. But instead of crossing over to Talogs we headed up the river on the north side to a place where I had a cousin who had moved there from Cherokee. When we arrived my cousin was not at home as he was a preacher and was holding a protracted meeting somewhere up on the South Canadian. His wife had been alone for more than a week. She gave us a hearty

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welcome but said she had run out of provisions, all but sweet potatoes which she had in abundance. She had no flour or meal or lard. My cousin had about eighty head of big fat hogs in the lot which he had left for her to feed and water.

My cousin and his wife lived in a rather large frame house; the foundation was made of cotton rock with plenty of holes in it. I can truthfully say that I never saw so many long-tailed rats in any other house. These rats came from under the house and from out of the wall and made a terrible fuss, especially in the evening. I shot twelve rats the first evening.

The next morning I was out betimes and killed a lot of squirrel which we had for dinner, but we had to boil them as the housekeeper had no grease. I believe there were more squirrel in that large timber than anywhere I had ever been. It was a hunter's paradise. In the afternoon I took my shotgun, and went after the quail which did not act like they had ever seen a hunter. I got all I could carry in a short time, filling my hunting coat and then returned to the house.

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The week passed. Sunday came and with it my preacher cousin came home, bringing with him another preacher. My cousin did not know that his fine and uncomplaining wife did not have a supply of provisions on the shelves of the house. She had just one old hen left, and she butchered her for that preacher visitor. Mrs. Strickland went to her grub-box and furnished the flour and some canned goods, and between the two they had a respectable dinner for the two preachers.

In the evening they must attend meeting over across the South Canadian River. I was invited to go along. My preacher cousin hitched up his sorrel mules and we piled into the wagon and were off. He drove up the river for some distance, then turned in and drove across. He drove up a long ridge and struck a road leading to the church-house.

The meeting opened with prayer by the visiting brother. Then my cousin took the floor, giving as his text "Repent ye and be baptized." He was a good talker and had a small table in front of him on which sat the coal oil lamp. He waxed eloquent and at given points he

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would lean over and give the table a good sized drive with his fist causing the lamp to jump and sputter, and it would have fallen off once had not a good, watchful brother caught it.

My wife and I decided to move on Monday morning, so we crossed to the south side of the river, passed through Taloga and on down the valley to the east. We camped for the night at Cantonement, where the government had a large store to supply the hundreds of Cheyennes and Arapahoes. We got in rather late as the country was thinly settled and then some Indians were coming right behind us and were following us, riding some thirty steps behind our wagon. We did not like this and I asked a fellow where we could camp, and found out he was formerly from Alva. "You had better park your wagon and team inside my lot," he said, "The Indians have their eyes on your fine team and might steal it."

We slept in the wagon but could hear the Indians having a big time not far away. We could hear the drum of the tom-toms and the crooning of the squaws during the dance.

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The next night we camped on a river bottom where we could get plenty of wood for our camp fire. I let my team graze before nightfall and then tied them to the feed box at the back of the wagon. Just about dark my wife began to get uneasy, saying she believed the Indians had followed us to steal our team. She got out the gun saying she firmly believed they were now spying on us and were just waiting for us to go to bed and then they would get away with the horses. We did not get in the wagon where the bed was but she put the children in and they went to sleep. She finally settled on the fact that she could see the Indians back up the road about fifty yards. We stood this until about nine o'clock when we decided to investigate, so my wife with the rifle and I with the shotgun moved slowly back along the road we had come. I had my gun cocked ready to fire if the Indians should make a break but we were agreeably mistaken and our hearts once more settled back to normal for what she had thought were Indians proved to be some stumps about as high as a man's head.

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The next morning my wife prevailed on me to turn towards home. She thought we were getting out of the world as there were no settlements in that direction. I finally gave in and agreed to go home, which we did.

1893 to 1900
ASHLEY AND VICINITY

After the opening the settlers filed on their claims and then most of them returned to their Kansas homes for the winter of '93 and '94. I can only recall a very few who spent the first winter here.

It was hard to stay in Oklahoma and lonesome, too, but in the spring of 1894 settlers began making some improvements on their homes and many shacks were erected and some dug-outs were constructed. When they were finished the families began arriving. Then the young bucks, and some not so young began arranging to play baseball and many a contest we have had. But here is what might have brought back the memories of those other days. While passing over the road south of Ashley one mile, not many days ago, my mind ran back several years thinking of how it was then and how it is now.

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The Short boys lived at Short Springs and raised fast race horses; then south a half mile lived J. C. Buckles who has skipped around quite a bit but is now back on his old homestead. Jim was an old bachelor at that time but married Fanny Romaine and has reared a large family.

Just west came the Moore place which has since changed hands. Then the Morehead place which has every thing cleaned off, even the place where the house stood. Next came the Edwards place and that family, too, has sold out and gone. There is no house left there. Then there's the Ezra Lowe place and Ezra and his wife are both dead. Then there is the Joe Strickland homestead which the heirs still own, but the original homesteaders are both dead and every vestige of improvement is swept away.

On the south lies the W. S. Lowe farm, but the former owners are both dead. Next the Babe Morris claim; he is now dead and his widow resides in Texas. There are no signs of habitation left there.

We then passed on west and remembered the exact spot where we coyote hunters downed a coyote, right on the sec-

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tion line in some high grass. We pictured in our mind's eye just how those hunters looked at that time as they came yelling like Comanche Indians riding their best horses.

There was Fred Aber on his white horse, Joe Strickland riding his bald-faced horse, Babe Morris on his buck, Beacher Crawford yelling in that high falsetto voice; each fellow was yelling for his own particular dog. "Catch him Dewey." "Eat him up, John," and so on.

In those early days we had many hunts and caught many coyotes, and there were hundreds of runs in which a fast wolf would outrun and outgeneral the entire group of dogs and men.

I. T. Strickland, early day pioneer, was born near Osceola, Missouri, March 14, 1859. When a young man he came West and spent a period of time from '76 to '93 exploring what is now Oklahoma.

Hundreds of wild turkeys, deer, antelope and buffaloes were to be seen on the prairies. Mr. Strickland in company with other scouts of the plains, gathered and freighted many tons of buffalo bones, that could be

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seen shining and bleaching on the prairies.

He made the run into the Cherokee Strip in 1893 and secured a homestead which he retained near Alva until his death February 29, 1935.

When in his fifties he became a newspaper reporter and collector.