

STROUD, HARRY.

GEORGE W. ISOM--BIOGRAPHY. 10354

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

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Field Worker's name Ophelia D. Vestal, Lawton, Oklahoma

This report made on (date) March 25 1938

1. Name Material secured from Mr. Harry Strand

2. Post Office Address \_\_\_\_\_

3. Residence address (or location) \_\_\_\_\_

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month \_\_\_\_\_ Day \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_

5. Place of birth \_\_\_\_\_

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

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 16

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Ophelia D. Vestal,  
Investigator,  
March 25, 1938.

Biography of George W. Isom,  
Lawton, Oklahoma.

An aged Miner who came to the  
Wichitas in 1866.

Deep in the foothills of the Wichita Mountains, an aged man, George W. Isom, lived with golden dreams. His home was located in a remote corner of the Wichita National Forest and Game Preserve, a spot which was very dear to his heart for many many years. His eyes first gazed on the Wichita Mountains before the hand of civilization had marred their beauty, before the ravaging hand of man had destroyed the beautiful creatures of nature, and before railroads had extended their ribbons of steel into the great reservation of the Plains Indians.

George W. Isom's life was filled with romance, adventures and hardships. He was attracted to the Wichita Mountains by stories of buried gold, remaining there through all the years firm in his belief that beneath the boulders of these mountains was hidden a treasure which if properly developed would pay the national debt. Platinum, gold, silver,

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copper, zinc, lead, iron and aluminium are the deposits which he thought would be found in paying quantities. Shafts sunk through rock formations through tedious work and much expense are visible testimonials of his confidence in his belief. He held on determinedly to the claim he staked in 1886, guarded his property closely during the opening of this country in 1901, and in later years when intrusion was threatened.

Mr. Isom was born in Gate City, Virginia, in 1844. He enlisted in the Confederate Army when he was very young and served in the 16th Regiment, Company A of the Tennessee Cavalry. He was sixteen years of age at the time of his enlistment and because of his being so young, his name did not appear upon the muster rolls of his company. He served during the entire duration of the War and a portion of the time was a member of the famous raiding band of Morgan.

With a fair education and wishing to become a chemist, Isom started out at the close of the Civil War to make his fortune in the newly opened gold fields in New Mexico and

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Colorado. Doing the assay work for miners, who were finding unlimited fortune in these virgin territories, he was enabled to locate claims which were sold to good advantage later.

Accumulating a considerable fortune in gold, his mind turned back to Virginia and he started his homeward trek. With a good riding horse and a pack animal he started alone across the country. This was before there were railroads throughout the Territory and the hardships of traveling in this manner, did not deter him because of courage acquired in rough mining camps and during the Civil War.

By slow stages he swung across the Staked Plains in Texas. Reaching a point near the present location of Sweetwater he had an experience wherein it was necessary to use great diplomacy. His pack animal carried a small fortune of \$32,000 in gold, in bullion form, representing the accumulation of his activities. Riding into a creek he was suddenly confronted by two outlaws who had him covered with their guns. Isom thought quickly. Visions of

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the loss of his accumulated fortune flashed quickly before him. The years of hardships in mining camps were too fresh a memory to be regarded lightly, and he determined then and there to resist to death any efforts to take his gold. It was a discomforting feeling he had as he looked into the barrels of these capable buffalo guns which were aimed at him from either flank. Flight was impossible. Any unnecessary movement would have been the signal to start a blaze of death from those vicious guns which were in the hands of desperate men. Outlaws from every state in the Union had swarmed to the gold country in search of easy money. Banking exchanges were not perfected in those days and men carried their fortunes with them wherever they went.

Mr. Isom put up his hands as they gruffly ordered him to "stick 'em up". As he looked at the men, he said "Well, what do you want?" "You look to us like a miner who is returning from some gold mines with your wealth. We want your money", they said. "Yes, I am a miner," Mr. Isom said, "but I would not be carrying my wealth on me. From the stories I

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heard of the mines, I went south and there I worked but did not receive any reward. I was unlucky and while many gained wealth, I lost everything I had. Very discouraged I am returning to my parents. Then I am going to the cotton fields of the south and don't think I'll ever go gold seeking again. You are welcome to look through my possessions. My provisions are scant and I have hardly enough food to last me to the next settlement and when I reach there I haven't any money to buy food there. Guess I'll have to depend on the mercies of the people I meet until I reach my home in Virginia."

The outlaws believed Mr. Isom's story, though they had heard many other stories of the same kind. Slowly Mr. Isom and the two outlaws got down off their horses and talked some. A campfire was made and a meal prepared by them of fried bacon and biscuits of sour dough. Until late at night they exchanged stories from different sections of the country. Morning came and the two bandits handed Mr. Isom a \$10.00 bill and went on their way to find other miners that possibly would have money. They each wished him good luck on his way.

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Mr. Isom went on his way. Signs of outlaws and Indians were noted all along his way. Reaching the sandy dunes of Red River he started following the stream. He soon noticed he was being followed by a little group of Indians and his march became a flight. Sometimes he could throw the Indians off his trail and at other times he could see them in the distance following him. After several days of forced swift marching and about to give up and fight it out with his followers, relief came in the form of a little band of soldiers whom he found encamped at a point where Gainesville now stands. This band of soldiers were stationed at Camp Argo which was one of the military outposts of that day.

Mr. Isom stayed in this camp a short while and changed his mind about going on to Virginia. His thoughts ran westward to the Wichita Mountains as he had heard so many stories about wealth in the Wichitas, in the Indian country. News had reached far of the gold found in this area by Mexican miners. Stories had been told of pack trains of animals which had moved out of the Wichitas heavily laden



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with precious ores. A Captain named Marcy, in his expedition of 1852, told of panning gold from mountain streams. After having fully rested, no warnings could change his mind and the journey was started to this wild Indian country. This journey was safe until he came within sight of the Wichita Mountains and then he found he was again being followed by the savages.

The mountains grew higher as he rapidly went toward their protection, and the savages were fast overtaking him when he reached the foothills of the range. Hiding himself and his horses behind some large boulders, he prepared to protect himself from his Indian enemies. The Indians changed their course and rode to a nearby valley. After tying his horses, he walked slowly, hunting his way carefully through the trees and brush trying to see where his enemies had gone. Suddenly looking from behind a large rock he saw an old miner hacking away with an axe. Just as Isom arrived on the scene, several Indians swooped down with war yells upon the lone miner. Taken by surprise the miner offered no resistance and was instantly killed.

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The Indians took his camp equipment, guns and everything of any value and departed. They must have believed the slain man was the one they were following. It was learned that the man slain was named Cox.

The next day, Isom saw a group of soldiers and by waving his shirt he attracted their attention. He reported the death of the miner and the soldiers took the body to Fort Sill and buried it. Mr. Isom stayed in the mountains a few days, then staked a claim, which old timers will always remember as the "Isom home". A large band of Indians, five or six hundred of them, were camped on a nearby plain and when they left Mr. Isom started his return journey to Red River. He went to Henrietta, Texas, which was then the nearest railroad point. He then continued his journey to Virginia, but the following year his feet grew restless again and he longed for the beautiful Wichitas.

On arriving at Fort Sill in 1867, he was warned again to stay out of the mountains. General William E. Jones, Commanding Officer, took a personal interest in this

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young man, Isom. He called the prospector to his quarters. He said, "Look here, young man, what do you mean, don't you know the Indians will get you?" Isom replied, "Well if they do, I'll get plenty of them first." "Have you enough ammunition?" asked the general. "Near two hundred pounds" said Isom. "Well, you'd better get some more and take out there with you," said the general. "Now don't you worry, I know Indians and know how to protect myself and you will not have to send an ambulance squad after me," said Isom.

Isom found his way through the woods and hills to the claim which he had staked the year before and established a camp upon the site of the present Isom home. Indians were all about him but they seemed peaceful. The band that lived in that neighborhood at that time was known as the Pueblo gang named for their Chief, Pueblo. Many things happened every once in awhile. Many a soldier found alone, searching for cattle, was killed and scalped. The Indians seemed to like Mr. Isom. They visited in his camp, often, would feel of his arms, examine his eyes, and

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called him "heap brave man".

After searching for a month in these mountains, he returned to Virginia. During his stay in the mountains, he became acquainted with Jesse and Frank James, Cole Younger and other notorious outlaws. Isom had met most of these people during the Civil War when he was a member of Morgan's raiding band. Returning to Virginia was over various avenues of transportation. He rode horseback to Little Rock, Arkansas, where he took a steamship up the Mississippi River to St. Louis and a stage coach carried him from St. Louis to his home town, Gate City, Virginia.

Living in Virginia for awhile, Mr. Isom seemed to be satisfied. He was married to Margaret A. Clark. In 1884, this pioneer's footsteps shifted toward Texas and he settled near Wichita Falls. Wichita Falls in the 80's was a very different city from the present beautiful city. When Mr. Isom first came there the only buildings were a store building, post office, court house and a few scattered shacks and tents. Continuing to reside in the frontier settlements

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until 1891, he with his family moved to Duncan. During this time, he made frequent trips back and forth to his claim in the Wichita Mountains and resided there weeks and months at a time.

In 1901 when preparations were being made for opening of the country, miners and squatters were ordered by the Department of the Interior to vacate. Secretary Hitchcock had issued orders for their removal and soldiers were dispatched from Fort Sill to put them out. Isom was one that had been there a long time, had kept up his work under the mineral laws of the Nation and he refused to move. He felt that the Government was doing him wrong in asking him to move from his claim.

Mr. Isom was frying a mess of fish he had caught in a nearby stream when the soldiers came to give him orders. He treated the soldiers courteously and invited them to share his meal. They told him their business there, that they were to take him to Fort Sill to appear before a Commanding Officer and tell him why he wouldn't move. Informing the soldiers that his wagons had gone to Rush Springs for supplies, he asked for additional time and agreed he would come in later.

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Appearing before the Captain who had sent the soldiers out to him, he asked what was wanted. The Captain told him he had orders to clear out the country before the opening. He refused to stay away from his claim until a receipt was given him for his property and guaranteed protection of it. This could not be settled so the United States Marshal, Heck Thomas, was called in. He told Mr. Isom that he had orders to throw him out. Mr. Isom was good natured and said, "You can take me out of the state, but the very minute you turn me loose I'll come back." Finally the required receipt was given to Mr. Isom and he retired from his claim until the Opening.

Always believing in the stories surrounding buried treasure and lost mines in the Wichita Mountains, Mr. Isom gave a reason why he should believe it. One day as he was riding to these mountains before 1901, he noticed a piece of paper. He got the paper and found drawn on it a map, roughly giving the exact location of what later proved to be a pretty good mine.

Wichita Mountains history records that the first

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invaders were Spaniards in search of gold. Isom says he has found many evidences of their working at various places. In the early days, he claims, they had an immense smelter located near the town of Ryan, which indicated that they had carried on considerable operations there.

Many legends are current pertaining to seventeen burro loads of gold bullion which the Spaniards are alleged to have taken from the mountain sand, which was later captured and hidden by the Indians. According to Isom, there were extensive mining operations carried on by the Mexicans years before the Opening, during the days when the Wichita Mountains were remote frontier markers. When the Mexicans were driven away, he said, their old workings were completely hidden and the gold they had secured was either taken from the country or buried.

In addition to the Spanish gold, alleged to be hidden, outlaws are supposed to also have secreted their loot in various places. Mr. Isom stated that one time Jesse and Frank James came to his house with accumulated

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proceeds from several bank robberies and holdups and told him they were going to hide their proceeds on his claim. He said they gave him \$1,200 and told him not to try to find where they were burying their gold. Later they returned and took it.

The Isom claim shows many evidences of attempted mining and search for hidden treasure. Throughout the years, people have come and gone with maps and on mysterious errands, Mr. Isom once reported to the sheriff of Comanche County about people slipping in on his claim digging holes, overturning rock and tearing up his claim.

Bob Lion, a nephew of Mr. Isom, resided in the cave home with his uncle. One night he came in and asked his uncle to draw a sketch of the claim where he thought the treasure might be hidden.

A few nights later Bob came in the cave and threw a piece of metal over to his uncle, asking him to put it on the fire and see what it might be. The test proved a piece of solid gold.

Bob, being so happy, worked hard and long hours. One



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time as he was returning to his home he was fired at from both sides of the road. The men took Bob with them in the woods, keeping him tied up by a rope being placed around his neck, his arms bound to his side and he was hanged from a limb of a tree. This was done in great haste and the boy was not lifted far from the ground. His feet barely touched the earth and by stretching the rope, the bending of his limbs and by wiggling about, he was able to let most of his weight on his feet. There was a long tedious struggle until daylight the next day to free himself.

After returning home he was put to bed and was being cared for when a strange man came in telling Bob he should go into town. He went into town and not returning for several days a search was started. Finding the boy he was brought home, but he wasn't satisfied there any more and he would never tell where he had found the gold.

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Stories like this have been common in the life of this aged pioneer. He occupied the reservation when W. T. Waggoner, Burkburnett, Colonel Goodnight, and others grazed cattle on these Indian lands. He knew Chief Quannah Parker and many other Indian Chiefs who were both friends and foes of the settlers and government. He was an invalid for many years caused by being thrown from a burro and receiving injuries that caused him to go on crutches. The home he occupied was a half dugout. A daughter cared for him. He always kept his gun well oiled and his intentions were to guard his claim from intrusion of treasure seekers and others who had no business on his property.

In front of his house are piles of rocks of all descriptions, and tucked carefully away in cans and boxes are specimens of metals that were found on the Isom claim, he always has in mind that if a few thousand dollars could be spent the mines would develop into a paying proposition.