

LEGEND & STORY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

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JACKSON, H. LEE THIRD INTERVIEW 13692

field worker's name Gomer Gower

this report made on (date) April 23, 1958

This legend was secured from (name) H. Lee Jackson;

address Poteau, Oklahoma.

This person is (male or female) ~~xxxxx~~ ~~xxxxx~~, ~~xxxxx~~, ~~xxxxx~~,

If Indian, give tribe _____

origin and history of legend or story Construction of railways

through Wade County, Choctaw Nation and their effect upon
the lives of the inhabitants.

Write out the legend or story as completely as possible. Use blank sheets and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 7

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Gomer Gower,
Investigator,
April 23, 1938.

Interview with H. Lee Jackson,
Poteau, Oklahoma.

I resided in the then densely timbered area lying between Talihina on the west and Page on the east, in what then was Wade County, Choctaw Nation, and now Le Flore County, Oklahoma, before either the Frisco or the Kansas City Southern Railways - 1886 and 1892 respectively - laid their ribbons of steel through it.

Before the construction of these railways, the people residing in that region lived at a distance of about seventy miles from the nearest railroad point - that at Fort Smith, Arkansas - and, for that reason, active commerce was unknown to them. Such cotton as was raised had to be hauled by wagon and ox-teams to Fort Smith before it became an article of value. Even at that every family sought to raise some cotton, as it was the only means of raising some cash. It was the only article which could be sold for cash - all other excess farm produce could only be disposed of by exchanging it for articles of merchandise at some community store.

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It was by this means of exchange that such articles as sugar, coffee, salt, clothing and shoes and other household necessities were procured.

Under these conditions very little ready cash was in evidence, nor was much of it needed as in those territorial days no taxes were levied against the citizens and but \$5.00 permit fee, annually, against the outlanders. No land notes had to be met and paid. So, all in all, the people led a quiet, contented and happy life. Little, indeed, they knew or cared about the hustle and rush of those who were in direct contact with commercial life. With a bounteous supply of choice hams, shoulders and side meat hanging in the ever present smokehouses, corn cribs bulging with at least a year's supply of the means to provide corn bread and good feed for animals and fowls, a few good cows providing unlimited quantities of milk and butter for the use of the family, their simple requirements were easily met.

The coming of the railroads into that quiet and peaceful region transformed it into a bustling, noisy, and sad to relate, a very lawless one. The laborers employed in

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their construction were not, in all cases, of the best element. Camp followers, of both sexes, preyed upon the guileless railway laborers. Gambling houses and dance halls, with their painted ladies, all devised to separate the laborers from their hard-earned wages, ran wide open, both day and night.

In addition to that form of lawlessness, the sale and consumption of liquor, an ever accompanying evil of other forms of debasement, was carried on despite the heroic efforts of the law enforcement officers to prevent its introduction within Territorial limits under the regulations governing the possession or sale of liquor, but the officers usually contented themselves by destroying the containers and spilling the contents upon the ground where it could not be retrieved. The sale of whisky was a penal offense. Notwithstanding that the traffickers in that iniquitous business faced arrest, conviction and a long term served in a Federal penitentiary, many ran the risk of prosecution, finding allurements in the profit to be made in its sale and the satisfaction they felt in being able to outwit the ever watchful officers.

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Imagine the chagrin of the officers when on one occasion two enterprising whisky peddlers, as they were then known, had a barrel of whisky which they had bought at Fort Smith and shipped by freight to Talihina, hoping that the officers would be absent from the depot at the time of its arrival at Talihina, and that in their absence they would be enabled to remove the consignment to a hiding place from which they could draw upon it as the demand justified. To the complete consternation of the peddlers, the officers were present at the depot when the barrel of whisky, among other shipments of freight, were unloaded from the train. It was the duty and custom of the officers to inspect all shipments when unloaded and to satisfy themselves as to whether or not liquor was included. If the shipment was found to include liquor, it then became their duty to confiscate and destroy it, or, at their discretion, keep a strict watch over it until an unsuspecting claimant appeared, in which case an arrest for possession of liquor was in order.

This was the opportunity for which the officers longed. The wily peddlers, however, contented themselves in watching,

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from a distance, the movements of the officers, hoping that some contingency would call them away from the premises for a time and that during their absence they, the peddlers, would be given an opportunity to claim and cart away their illicit consignment.

On one occasion such a contingency did not arise, but, finally, the officers directed the freight agent to place the barrel of whisky in the storage room and to permit no one to take it away without first letting them know when a claimant appeared. Under such circumstances, both the officers and the peddlers were non-plussed, at the instant. The peddlers, not to be outwitted in that battle of brains, found occasion to loiter about the depot, on various pretences, and were thus enabled to fix the exact location of the barrel of whisky within the depot, with reference to the distance it occupied from the walls, windows and doors.

As is usual in the construction of freight depots, the floor is raised some four or five feet above the ground level, leaving considerable space between the ground and the floor. After a waiting period of several days by both

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the officers and the peddlers, the peddlers gave up all hope of procuring their whisky which remained in custody of the depot agent who was in league with the officers in apprehending the violators of the law, and ceased their loitering about the depot.

A few days later, the officers had given up hope that someone would appear to claim the liquor and proceeded to make arrangements to destroy it. The freight agent was directed to place the barrel outside the building so that the flowing liquor would not contaminate other goods which were stored within the building. The agent provided himself with the handy freight truck, seen around all depots and, placing it in a tilting position so that it was ready to have its protruding scoop slipped under the edge of the barrel, gave a mighty heave, anticipating that the barrel of whisky was very heavy, but, to his surprise, it was but as the weight of a feather in comparison with his expectations and he and the barrel went tumbling to the floor. After this ludicrous occurrence and an inspection of the barrel it was found that the end which was on the floor had been deftly tapped with an auger

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through a larger hole which had been made from the lower side of the floor, and the contents drained. There can be no doubt as to who procured the liquor from the barrel.

The lesson learned by the officers through that occurrence was to nevermore come across liquor without destroying it.