

SWEET, S. P.

INTERVIEW

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Field Worker, Nannie Lee Burns,  
March 1, 1939.

Interview with O. H. Sweem  
313 F. N. E. Miami, Oklahoma.

My father was Edward J. Sweem; he was born in Preble County, Ohio, May 5, 1825, and died at Dexter Springs, Kansas, January 17, 1906. My mother was Susan Sweem, nee Stephenson; she was born in Montgomery County, June 10, 1826, and died in Smith County, Kansas, June 22, 1882.

Oliver E. Sweem, one of a family of nine children, was brought to Marion County, Iowa, when three months old from Montgomery County, Indiana, and brought to Nebraska by my parents when about ten years old. I was born December 4, 1843. On our trip to Nebraska, we crossed the Missouri River on a flatboat May 5, 1858.

Here in Nebraska we had five tribes of Indians within ten miles of us, they were the Sac and Fox, the Otoes, Pawnees, and the Yanktungs and Iowas. The first three mentioned were brought south and the balance were moved north, some of them to the Blackbird Hills. I received some schooling in those days and, as was the lot of most boys, plenty of work.

From the first locomotive touching the Missouri River in 1857 from Hannibal to St. Joe. These engines burned wood for fuel and along the railroad each ten miles you would find a wood station or woodyard. This wood was cut in four foot lengths. The engines called the "chickadees" and they were brought from the north end of the road.

Civil War Service

I enlisted in the Union Army of Missouri in 1864, but it was found that I was too small for the army so half my father's service was credited to me.

One thing that I will mention here is that we live on the "Underground Railroad" between Kansas and Missouri. In 1852 was the dumping ground for the slaves who were being brought from the Southern States.

They would bring the slaves by wagon and they would travel by night. Each night a wagon load of slaves would be taken from one of the stations which were scattered all over the home to another station and the negroes were kept there through the day and at night under guard and were escorted to the next stop.

On The Plains

In May, 1865, I started with a freight train over-land to Denver City driving ox teams, my wagon loaded with corn, flour and bacon. The corn was shelled, and sold at 13 1/2 cents per pound. The flour was sold at one hundred pounds and the bacon sold for 5 cents per pound. They didn't feed us on this bacon but we had wild meat.

On our return when we were within two hundred miles of home we met a freight outfit that was to sick men and I hired to them and went on the Old Oregon Trail bound for Fort Laramie, Wyoming. This outfit consisted of fifty wagons, each drawn by five yoke of oxen with a driver to each wagon, two herders, one wagon boss and an assistant boss, making fifty-four men to each train.

The train was loaded with shelled corn and also with three and three-quarter, cattle and thousand pounds corn.

Our wagons were covered and you would call them prairie schooners.

Our men were armed with light rifles and heavy wagon. Our wagons were of the St. Louis make. This

trip required four months and we found the Indians friendly and in neither of the trips that I made did we ever have any trouble with them.

#### The Pony Express

It was on this trip that I saw the pony express in operation between Fort Sedwick and Fort Kearney and also went on to California.

This Pony Express was a good horse that had been trained not to be lassoed or roped and did not have either bridle or rope and carried a saddle without stirrups and across this saddle was strapped the mail bag. This horse when let out of one station was trailed by five armed soldiers to the next station a distance of twenty-five miles where the horse was changed and the race to the next station continued. The soldiers ride was fifty miles when they were relieved by a new crew.

At this time there was a stage line between Cheyenne City and Denver which each had a daily mail. They were supposed to make not less than twelve miles per hour and these stations were twelve miles apart. At these stations the horses were changed and so quickly was it done that

the driver would not have time to get off the boot. The lines that were snapped to the bridles were unsnapped and as the horses were drawn away the new team was put in position and by the time the lines could be run through the rings on this harness and snapped to the bridles the driver who had not released the reins was ready to start to the next station. Driver's best was fifty miles.

From this trip I reached home September 15th, having traveled two thousand miles.

On my way home I stopped in Nebraska City and having had my pay which was \$50.00 per month and never having by a store bought suit of clothes, I purchased my first one paying \$40.00 for it and when I reached home, my father said I had been extravagant and because of this extravagance would hire me out to them again.

~~I neglected to say that from Nebraska City~~

purchase a ticket on the steamer for the rest of the way home and <sup>I got home</sup> the day/my mother had the best dinner that I remember of having ever had of green beans, potatoes and baked cornbread.

#### The Second Trip.

It was on April 27, 1866, that we started on our second trip, with, as our first destination, Denver City

loaded with Government corn, flour and bacon.

After I joined the Government freight train we were fed with bacon and biscuits and we used buffalo chips for fuel. We saw plenty of Indians but they were friendly and we also plenty of buffalo. I have seen them by the thousands and when they were going north, we stopped but they didn't. We would wait for a herd of buffalo to cross which would delay us sometimes for hours.

We bought fresh meat along the trail from the Indians for  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cents per pound. The Sioux, the Cheyennes and the Pawnees were very friendly. We delivered our freight at Denver and came back to Fort Sedgewick loaded with corn there and started for Fort Laramie. Each wagon carried six thousand pounds of shelled corn.

On the return from Fort Laramie we came to a dry ~~binery~~ and loaded our wagons with dry pine, hauled it one-hundred-miles and sold it for \$40.00 per cord.

Our teams lived on the grass, we carried no feed for them and we were supposed to make from thirteen to fifteen miles per day. Wagons crossing the prairie were always in sight, it seemed one endless procession in those days.

Once we traveled three hundred miles with five hundred families of Mormons. They were Danes and Norwegians on their way to Utah. This journey was through western Nebraska and Eastern Colorado. They were outfitted at old Westport Landing, now Kansas City, and from that point they had to make their way over-land. Even in 1865, you could tell where an emigrant was buried along the trail.

An uncle and aunt of mine and their three children are buried on the trail at Ogden, Utah, who died of mountain fever.

— The farther you traveled from the settlements the purer the air became and you could see a man on horseback for a distance of five miles, but he could appear much larger than he was. Again, we traveled for some distance with a regiment of Mississippi soldiers. Much of the time we had a company of emigrants who would travel with us for long distances.

A good ox in those days sold for \$75.00. Our government wagons never had anything but the oxen but many of the emigrants would have cows in their teams and these would supply the family with milk along the way.



SERIALS OF THE INTERVIEW

Antelope deer and all were plentiful but at  
 Cheyenne and earlier on up to Fort Union was 2 1/2 cent  
 pound. Between Fort Sedgewick and Fort Mitchell  
 were wild horses in droves and hundreds of  
 hundred of other wild birds and animals were  
 and in twenty years ago some of the best  
 Another thing that I noticed was the change in  
 price and things in Colorado and the change in  
 and direction has changed the country but it is  
 the same with New Mexico.

It seems to me that the buffalo and deer  
 They were never far apart.

I knew Buffalo Bill when he was about twenty

and he was the finest looking young man I remember  
 also knew Wild Bill Hickox and Rennee Bill.

My grandfather, John W. Sween, crossed the plains  
 before me. He went in 1849.

The old Oregon trail in those days was to the  
 west as the southern one was then not in use, that is before  
 1849.

The Oregon trail crossed the Missouri river at  
 Westport Landing, went from there northwest to the Platte

River, then to the South Platte, to Fort Laramie and from there to the head of the Snake River, then to the Columbia River and south to California. On the second trip, had traveled 1,000 miles.

On my return home, worked at [unclear] at Richardson's [unclear] court. [unclear] one when my father gave me [unclear] money and told me that I could not win it for myself.

Marriage

February 8, 1872, I married [unclear] of Iowa and we went to live in a [unclear] three-room, box house furnished with [unclear] split-bottomed and other home-made furniture.

In 1875, we went to Smith County, Kansas, and [unclear] staded, remaining there twelve weeks, living for some years in a sod house and sharing the discomforts of the early pioneer. Selling out there we next went to Harrison, Arkansas, but remained there only two years when we moved on and settled twenty miles this side of Springfield, Missouri.

## To the Indian Country

On March 2, 1833, with my family, I crossed the Missouri line and settled in Nowata County on the Verdigris River seven miles east of Bartlesville and took charge of a saw mill for three years. During this time I saw and heard of fifty thousand feet of white pine lumber being cut and other sawing. At this time there were about an equal number of log and native lumber houses in the western part of the country.

In February, 1834, I moved my family to a place and it was while we lived there that I formed a friendship with Clem Rogers, the father of Bill Rogers. I knew Bill Rogers

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from his fifteenth to about his seventeenth year and knowing him in those days he seemed to be a little bit of a ride round over the country and because of the wide acquaintance of his father, he could get a night's lodging wherever he happened to be when night came on.

When we were near the present town of Alton, we hauled our supplies from a general store, then a mile north of the present Bartlesville.

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SWEEM, O. H. INTERVIEW.

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for him here at his elevator which was the first one here  
and built in 1397.