

ROBBINS, E. U.

INTERVIEW

8434

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INTERVIEW BIOGRAPHY FORM

8434.

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name Robert W. Small

Report made on (date) August 19 1937

Name E. U. Robbins

Post Office Address South 9th St., Tonkawa, Okla.

Residence address (or location) _____

DATE OF BIRTH: Month March Day 27 Year 1874

Place of birth Quincy, Ill

Name of Father J. H. Robbins Place of birth Illinois

Other information about father _____

Name of Mother Elizabeth N. Robbins Place of birth Illinois.

Other information about mother _____

... 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 7.

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Robert W. Small,
Interviewer,
August 19, 1937.

An Interview with Mr. E. U. Robbins,
South 9th St., Tonkawa, Okla.

Just sixty years ago, when E. U. Robbins was only three years old, his father brought him to Wichita, Kansas, which was at that time the terminus of the one railroad that entered the town.

In 1884, the Robbins family moved from Illinois to Sumner County, Kansas, settling not far from the Kansas-Oklahoma line.

In 1889, E. U. Robbins in company with others made a trip down into the country that is now Oklahoma; on this trip they crossed the Chikaskia River, after considerable delay, at a point where the East bridge in the city of Blackwell is now located; at that time the river was up and a new ferry boat had just been completed. This ferry boat had been built from logs hewn from cottonwood trees cut along the river and these logs were bolted together with wooden pins and all were fastened with a wire cable strung from a large tree on either bank of the river.

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While Mr. Robbins was camped on the bank of the river he relates that a family with wagon and team wished to cross the river and that the mother, a large woman, and her five children were placed on two wheels of a wagon and with a team of mules, started across the river on this log ferry boat. The weight of the load on the rear of the log boat proved too heavy and the two wagon wheels started rolling backwards and rolled off into the water with the woman and children. The lady was wearing a dress known as a "Mother Hubbard" and its many yards of fabric floated momentarily on top of the water until the lady sank into the water, pulling the garment over her head as she went down. Quick action of men at the scene rescued all from the stream, but the "Mother Hubbard" dress was completely lost in the rescue.

Soon after the incident occurred a couple of men drove up on the river's bank, wanting to cross. They asked what the fee for crossing was and were told that the charges were two dollars and fifty cents per load. One of the men was driving a light spring wagon and the two decided they could put the spring wagon on the other regular farm wagon and save two

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dollars and fifty cents charges, so they put the spring wagon on top of the regular farm wagon and rolled both wagons on to the ferry boat . The ferry boat was upset in the river from getting out of balance and all was lost, including their provisions and three guns which were in the wagons.

This log ferry boat did not prove a success in every case but after a little use, men learned how to load it to avoid mishaps and it was used for some time but later was abandoned for a boat made of lumber.

Mr. Robbins and his company crossed the river on this ferry boat and pursued the journey southward, crossing the Salt Fork River at the Yellow Bull Ford and thence went on to their destination, which was about fifteen miles northeast of the present site of Guthrie. This was a few days prior to the opening of the Old Oklahoma Lands, and since Mr. Robbins' father had previously been in this section of the country to be opened to settlement and was now in the neighborhood of a quarter section of land he had previously picked out to run for in the opening, the group of men who had come down from Kansas

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stayed on the boundary line till the opening gun was fired, on April 22.

Then Mr. Robbins, senior ^{for} started the quarter section he had previously visited but when he arrived upon the land he observed to his astonishment and chagrin that a family had settled upon it and had put out the family washing on a clothes line and that a garden had been planted and already some few vegetables were peeping through the soil. The elder Mr. Robbins failed to secure a claim, but he and his companions put in some days hunting on Skeleton Creek and killed some deer and wild turkeys.

Mr. Robbins states that on the trip down to this section of country, after crossing the Salt Fork River going south he saw the first "cow girl" he had ever seen. She was galloping her horse in pursuit of another horse and she threw a lariat and caught the horse with all the ease of a trained cowboy.

In February, 1894, Mr. Robbins bought a claim of a hundred and sixty five miles south and a half mile east of the present site of Tonkawa, upon which he built a

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house, barn, and other improvements, including a young orchard; the east eighty acres of this claim was leased in later years for oil and gas rights for the sum of \$80,000.

Mr. Robbins became well acquainted with several of the older members of the Tonkawa tribe of Indians, including George Miles, George Rush, Cochanna Rush, and two old women known as Julia and Elsie;

Mr. Robbins states that George Miles told him that he kidnapped a white baby girl whom he kept and who was reared in the tribe and later became his wife. She is now living at the age of eighty-seven and can frequently be seen on the streets of Tonkawa; however, she cannot speak English and never associates with white people; she paints her face and hands to resemble the full blood Indian and imitates them in every way.

Mr. Robbins further relates that in the early days here old Elsie told him that she liked "white papoose" best of any meat she ever ate; "much better than fat dog", she said.

In 1895, old Elsie, as she is called went into C. Ford's

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grocery store in Tonkawa to buy some beans and a few other articles; she had tied her pony to a hitch rack near by; she bought some beans and after tying them up in a red bandana handkerchief started for her pony. A young fellow named Lee Cline had prepared a small vial of "ho-ka, po-ka", or "high-life" as it's sometimes called, for the occasion and he walked by the pony as she was mounting it and poured some of the liquid on it and Elsie had not ridden but a few steps until the pony pitched her into the air and ran away in a mad run. Elsie's bundle of beans were scattered in every direction and she came back to the store with a 22 calibre pistol in her hands and said "me shoot, me kill him" but Lee had vanished from the scene.

In 1891, some Indians wished to cross the Salt Fork River at the Yellow Bull Ford and the water was frozen so thick that it was difficult to get horses onto the ice. Old Julia, a Tonkawa woman, proceeded to pull off her moccasins and break the ice with her heels not complaining of any discomfort until she had broken a path so the team could ford the river.

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Mr. Robbins relates that he was down in this Cherokee Outlet before the Opening when nothing but long horn cattle and soldiers were to be seen.

At one time he reviewed a string of soldiers' horses, all blacks and bays, tied to a long rope that was stretched up between two stakes for the purpose of feeding them hay, and he says that it was interesting to see so many fine horses at one time. He saw these horses at the Otoe Agency about the year 1891.

Mr. Robbins relates that the Indians were permitted to go up into Kansas in the early days and obtain food and that people living in the southern part of Kansas were frequently annoyed by their visits and that the women of southern Kansas were often scared at the approach of an Indian, and therefore some of the men were usually detailed to stay close to the houses at all times.