

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

439.536

Field Worker's name Elizabeth L. Duncan

This report made on (date) June 5 and 7 1937

1. Name William S. Robertson

2. Post Office Address Medford, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month August Day 26 Year 1856

5. Place of birth Cameron, Warren County, Illinois

6. Name of Father Bailey Carter Robertson Place of birth _____

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Sarah Huett 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 10

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Mr. Bailey C. Robertson, father of W. S. Robertson, and family moved from Illinois to Sedalia, Missouri, in 1874, where they made their home until the death of both of the parents.

In the year of 1884, Mr. William S. Robertson, the son, moved to Caldwell, Kansas, and made his home on a farm three miles west and south of Caldwell. He took up freighting, and his trips led him to Camp Russell, Fort Reno, the Government School Building at Anadarko, and many other places in Oklahoma.

In the spring of 1885, Mr. Robertson loaded out for the Ponca Agency, which is five miles south of Ponca City (the agency still stands) crossing at Rocky Ford. On this trip, at about where Braman is now located, they encountered the soldiers bringing Payne out. Payne was a

boomer, encouraging squatters to come into this territory. This was not the first time he was taken out of Camp Russell, but many times.

During the winter of 1885, the year of the terrible blizzard the Old Timers speak of, the cattle drifted up against fences and snow drifted over them till they smothered to death, and those that did not smother froze

to death standing. Mr. Robertson saw in one place five hundred head of cattle that had perished in the storm. Thousands of cattle and horses were lost during this storm. Ranchers skinned their dead cattle by cutting the skin clear around the neck and cutting down the center of the under side of the animal, then hitched two mules to the skin and pulled the hide from the carcass. Mr. Robertson helped freight these hides back to Caldwell, Kansas, the nearest shipping point. These skins were stretched full length and width on the ground where they froze; the freighters stacked these hides on their wagons just as high as they would stay on.

On one other of Mr. Robertson's freighting trips, they ran out of supplies; he met Dick Curzian at the Pond Creek Ranch, or stage stand then. Curzian told them to stop at the ranch of his father, and help themselves

to what they needed. This ranch was located three miles west of Medford. When they arrived at the Curzian Ranch, they found a quarter of beef and feed for their teams. They got their supper and fed their teams and started on the same night for Caldwell. After disposing of the hides, they loaded that same night for a return trip for

Ewing and Titus, owners of a ranch located at Red Rock ten miles south and east of Enid, leaving Caldwell the next morning. During their trip back, they were caught in a snow storm that blinded the horses, forcing the freighters to walk before their teams and feel out the way.

Upon arriving at the ranch at Red Rock they found the house, barn and corrals, divided by a creek; the house on the south side, the barn and corrals on the north. The creek was frozen over, and when they came, eight cow punchers helped unhitch the teams and unload the corn from the wagons. They prepared for the freighters a fine supper and they stayed there all night. At six the next morning they were called to breakfast, and when they started back to Caldwell, they gave them forty pounds of lard to help them on their way back.

~~Upon the return freighting trip, ten wagons were load-~~
ed out for Camp Russell with corn and hay for the soldiers. They were allowed four dollars a day for each wagon and also corn and hay for the horses. Camp Russell was located at about eight or ten miles northeast of the present location of Guthrie on the Cimarron River. Upon reaching the Cimarron River, they found the river partly frozen,

not solid enough to support the teams and wagon, but they managed to get one team across. They cut long branches from trees and lashed them together, and put the hay upon these branches, fastened a rope to it, and skidded it across to the opposite bank of the river, and unloaded to send back for more. Along toward the last, they decided to try to drive a team and wagon loaded across, but the team broke through and Mr. Robertson tried to unhitch them before they went clear through. In doing so, he was thrown into the icy water twice before getting the horses loosened from the wagon, but was successful in getting the team unfastened and across, but they had to skid the hay on the branches as before, leaving the wagon in the river. Upon getting across, Mr. Robertson took off his wet clothes and wrung most of the water out, put them back on while wet, and continued on his journey.

Mr. Robertson then reported to the quartermaster, the quartermaster reported to the captain, and the captain instructed the sergeant to take six mules, hitch them to each wagon (there were three wagons in this train, making eighteen mules in all) and go on to Camp Russell. Mr. Robertson then collected for the corn and hay from the

quartermaster and the quartermaster asked Mr. Robertson if he wasn't wet, and he said "Yes," so the quartermaster said, "You change into some of mine till you're dry." The quartermaster instructed the men as in place of the freighters to unload the camp and get from the wagons.

Mr. Robertson and his companions were allowed twelve days to make the round trip, but they got back in Caldwell on the eighth day and tried to hide out the remaining four days, but Mr. Robertson was seen on the streets by the quartermaster at Caldwell, who asked him where he got back. He told him they had just arrived. The quartermaster said he lied, that they had been notified from Camp Russell that they had been back on the eighth day, and that he was to hide out the time had merchandise to be loaded out and sent to Fort Reno by the Van Brothers. The Van Brothers were among the traders west of Fort Reno and they dealt with the Cheyenne Indians. Mr. Robertson's freighting companions were Bruce Landon and John Messer. This was the last trip in 1885.

In the spring of 1886, on the 10th of May, Mr. Robertson and the Walter Brothers loaded out for Anadarko with lumber to build the Government school. This train consisted of six wagons and twelve horses, and the wagons were

coupled, two and two with each unit of two being drawn by four horses, two horses leading and two horses near the wagon. The first night was spent just outside of Caldwell. During the night, there came a hard rain, and the four horses could not pull the two wagons on account of the mud, so twelve head of horses were hitched to the unit, and the unit was pulled till they could just see the other wagons, and this was done with all six wagons till the third day out, when they camped on Wild Horse Flat. During the night there the coyotes carried away two new bridles. The freighters found the bridles the next morning a mile away with the reins completely eaten away. Ten days south from Caldwell, they were at Government Springs, the present site of Enid. They had to tear up some fence to build a fire to cook their meals, but a rain came up and put out the fire and they had to wait till it subsided before they could finish their meal. After leaving here, they went up Caddo Hill and Caddo Springs, and they decided to pull to the side of the trail to rest the horses. In doing so, one of the wagon wheels dropped to the axle in the mud, and pulling to the right just a little too much, they snapped the axle completely off. They then returned to Caddo Springs and

borrowed a running gear from the Cheyenne Chieftain, and promised him fifty cents a day for the use of it. The old squaw stood out beside the tent and laughed and asked him where his lazy squaw was because Mr. Robertson had to lift the wagon from the running gears. They transferred the lumber and left the broken wagon there and continued on toward the North Canadian. They found conditions worse, for the waters were higher here than they had been in the North Canadian. Mr. Robertson had had enough, so he decided not to wait. Walter Brothers offered him fifty cents on the dollar, and he promptly sold out. They promised to pay him when they delivered the goods to Anadarko, and received their pay. Mr. Robertson returned the running gear to the Indian Chieftain at Caddo School, and paid him \$1.50 for its use. He camped at Caddo all night, and while he was sitting at the camp fire late in the evening, a young fellow dashed up and asked if he might spend the night with him. Upon inquiry, he found that this man's name was Jacobs, and that he was on his way to Texas. Along the way he had picked up a young man to ride with him. They had made camp to spend the night, and while Mr. Jacobs was asleep, this young man

had stolen and made away with one horse and one of Mr. Jacob's coats. He had six hundred dollars in one coat, but through mistake, the thief took the wrong coat and Mr. Jacobs kept his six hundred dollars; but he was afraid this young man might make an effort to secure this coat and he did not want to stay alone, as he was sure this boy had meant to get the six hundred dollars also. Mr. Robertson helped Mr. Jacobs get back to Caldwell.

After arriving in Caldwell, Mr. Jacobs secured another horse and started for Texas to bring back ten head of Spanish mules. Mr. Robertson helped to break these mules to the stage. Ike Williams was the stage owner and bought the mules. He ran the stage from Caldwell to Pond Creek Stand, changing horses here and continued on to Government Springs. The trip to Anadarko with lumber was Mr. Robertson's last freighting job.

On September 1, 1886, Mr. Robertson bought a hardware store and ran this until the opening of the Cherokee Strip. He then made the run in the opening of the Strip on September 16, 1893, with Dr. Scribner in a spring wagon. Mr. Scribner staked his claim two miles north and one east of Medford, and Mr. Robertson, just south of the Medford town-site, the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ 22-27N-5W, Grant County, Oklahoma, on Saturday;

Mrs. Robertson came on the next day, Sunday, after Mr. Robertson made the run. They set around the Rock Island depot all day Sunday till Monday and then returned to Caldwell. Returning from Kansas Wednesday, he brought with him eight horses, one plow, and posts and wire, and enough lumber to build a box house, 15 x 15, and covered it with shingles. They soon broke out the sod, also dug a well, this water being located with a peach tree limb. They did not live here permanently, going back and forth into Kansas, but settled here to stay March 1, 1894. In 1894 and 1895, they planted wheat but it did not yield much. In 1896, they planted forty acres of wheat which made twenty-five bushels to the acre. During 1897, they planted wheat, and this year they had a bumper crop. Between farming, he ran a hardware store which he transferred from Caldwell to Medford. In 1896, he moved the hardware store from the east side of the railroad track to the west side. He eventually sold the hardware store and spent all his time on the farm until he was elected County Commissioner, serving Grant County for eleven years, after which he retired to spend all his time on the farm.

Mr. Robertson was one of the charter members of the Christian Church in Medford.