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ABERNATHY, JOHN N.

INTERVIEW

9846

50

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

ABERNATHY, JOHN N.

INTERVIEW

9846

Field Worker's name Amelia F. Harris.

This report made on (date) January 28, 1938

1714 North May Avenue, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

1. Name John N. Abernathy,
2. Post Office Address Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
3. Residence address (or location) 523 Northwest 5th Street.
4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month July Day 8 Year 1857
5. Place of birth Rush County, Indiana.

6. Name of Father Tasse Abernathy Place of birth Indiana

7. Name of Mother Mary Abernathy, Place of birth Maryland

Other information about mother Dead:

Other information about father, Never came to Oklahoma.

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 7

ABERNATHY, JOHN N.

INTERVIEW

9846

Amelia Harris,
Journalist,
January 28, 1938.

An Interview with Mr. John N. Abernathy,
523 Northwest 5th Street,
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

When I was twenty-eight years old I came from Mattoon, Illinois, to Dodge City, Kansas. I had heard so many alluring stories of the West that I came out to make a fortune.

I loafed around Dodge City for ten days, then I met Herbert Peck who offered me a job as sheep herder on his ranch near Jetmore, Kansas. This was a new business to me but I told Mr. Peck that I would try it. He drove a fine span of bay horses to a hack which he had loaded with groceries and I got into the hack and we drove twenty miles north of Dodge City; it took us from noon until nine o'clock that night to get to his ranch.

Mr. Peck had a bunk house 16 x 24 and beds were built three high, one above the other, around this room and there was a long dining table in the center of the room with a big range at one end. Mr. Peck assigned me

ABERNATHY, JOHN N.

INTERVIEW

9846

-2-

my bunk and the next morning I was assigned to my duty.

Mr. Peck had several thousand head of sheep and fifteen hands and a cook and also fifteen shepherd dogs. There were never more than two thousand sheep in a bunch with two dogs and two men to each bunch. I was called a tenderfoot. Mr. Peck sheared the sheep and shipped them to Eastern market.

The Blanket Indians often came to Dodge City to trade and a few would pass by our ranch and would stop and watch the sheep; we would offer them a sheep but they would shake their heads and pass on.

I stayed here for four years and I saved my wages except \$40.00 that I paid for a horse and saddle. I rode my horse over the old Chisholm Trail from Dodge City to Oklahoma City about August 10th, 1899, and heard of many claims for sale but rode around over the country before buying.

I bought a claim eight miles west of the Santa Fe depot on what is Reno Street now, from a man named Miller who was from Texas and who had filed on the claim. This

ABERNATHY, JOHN N.

INTERVIEW

9846

-3-

man and his son, about seventeen years old, were camping in his wagon, but they had commenced to build a log house. They had the walls up and were starting on the roof when I rode up and asked if this man wanted to sell. He said, "Yes", and said that he would take \$300.00. We walked over the ground and I liked the land and the location so I told this man that I would give him \$300.00, providing the land office would let him relinquish the claim and I could file on it.

This man wanted the money put up, as we were both afraid of each other in the deal. One of his neighbors, Johnny Baker, who was over there, had an honest face so I said, "All right, I'll put the money up with Mr. Baker, I believe he is honest". Miller finally agreed to this and drove me in his wagon thirty-five miles to Kingfisher where the land office was.

We had just trails to travel over so we didn't "make" it in one day and had to camp out that night. We had cooked supper and were sitting around the campfire talking when wolves began to howl and to come up close to camp;

ABERNATHY, JOHN N.

INTERVIEW

9846

-4-

the worst they frightened all of us but Miller's boy was frightened and climbed up into the wagon and tied the wagon sheet down tight. We three slept in the wagon and were ready at daybreak to move on. We drove into Kingfisher and this man relinquished his claim and I put my filing on record and got my papers.

Miller was anxious to get back to get his money and start for Texas so we got back to the claim about two o'clock that night and the next morning we went over to Baker's and Miller got his money and left.

I bought a team of mules and a wagon and hauled lumber, doors, and windows to finish my log house, as I wanted a warm place to bring my wife to. I then cut timber to build a crib, hen house and for fence posts for pastures.

My claim took in a part of the old Council Grove. The Government segregated this land for the timber and they had wood choppers here all summer cutting and hauling wood to Fort Reno until the Choctaw Railroad was built through, then coal was shipped in and the Government sold the land.

ABERNATHY, JOHN N.

INTERVIEW

9846

-5-

I took a job of freighting all kinds of material from Oklahoma City to Tecumseh, which was then the county seat of Pottawatomie County. I well remember the fight between Shawnee and Tecumseh for the county seat in which Shawnee won.

Frank Baker and Ted Foster took the contract to extend the Choctaw Railroad from Oklahoma City to El Reno; this railroad went across my farm. Baker appointed me as Road Overseer and after the railroad was completed I built a store building close to the track at Council Grove and on my land. I put in a general merchandise store and I was appointed the first Postmaster, first Ticket Agent, and also Justice of the Peace. The post office and depot were in the front part of my store and my wife and I were very busy people those days.

There was a big spring in Council Grove and the Kiowas and Comanches would come to the grove and camp for a month at a time. They did a lot of pony trading and dancing at night, too, and they bought quantities of groceries from me for nine years. I couldn't speak

ABERNATHY, JOHN N.

INTERVIEW

9846

-6-

much of their language but could understand enough to wait on them. When I first began selling to them they would buy sugar by the dollar's worth and if I put in too much sugar and would take out some, they would shake their heads and walk out and wouldn't take it. I soon learned to guess pretty close and if it was too much I would just let it go, as I didn't dare to take anything out of any measure I sold them, but if they thought I was giving them something, that was all right. I never had any trouble with the Indians and I bought many pelts of wild animals from them.

I was Postmaster, Station Agent, and ran my store for twelve years then I sold out and moved into the city, where we rented until I could buy our present home where we have lived for thirty-five years. When we first moved to this house there was not a house west of us and Frank Gault's pasture came up to the place where Dewey Street is now. We called it a road then and it went west of our house. Frank Gault fed white-faced cattle here.

ABERNATHY, JOHN N.

INTERVIEW

9846

-7-

We kept our farm for twenty years then traded it for a brick building at 206 West 2nd, valued at \$2,500.00.

Henry Sauls was Mayor of Oklahoma City then and he appointed me as Inspector at the Asphalt Plant located at Santa Fe and Chickasaw Streets, where they manufactured asphalt for paving purposes. I worked for the city for two years, then I was elected County Commissioner for two years then succeeded myself for two more years. I then went into the real estate business and I sold my building at 206 West 2nd Street for which I had traded my farm to W. R. Ramsey for \$60,000.00; therefore, my Oklahoma homestead made my wife and me independent.