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ALTUM, L. W.

INTERVIEW

#8439

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FIELD WORKER ROBERT W. SMALL
Indian -Pioneer History S-149
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INTERVIEW WITH L. W. ALTUM
204 South 7th St.
Tuskahoma, Oklahoma
born December 25, 1867, Illinois.

Father's name-E. L. Altum
Mother's name-Rebecca McDonald Altum.

In 1878, the parents of L. W. Altum moved from Illinois to Butler County, Kansas. At that time L. W. was a lad of eleven years.

In 1886, he left Kiowa, Kansas, with a wagon and team and started across the northwestern part of Oklahoma to Fort Supply, thence on to Lipscomb, Texas. When for the first time he saw the lands of Oklahoma. On this trip he crossed the Cimarron River at the Old Chimney crossing, west of the present site of Waynoka, and crossed Beaver Creek at Fort Supply and Wolf Creek at the Buzzard Roost crossing west of Fort Supply and near the old stage ranch where they changed horses on the stage line. There were no towns or villages on the trail he traveled but he saw lots of cattle on the endless prairies along the way.

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From early in 1889, to 1894 Mr. Altum hunted game in western Oklahoma from a point near the present site of Oklahoma City to the Texas line. In 1889, he killed deer, turkey and prairie chicken near the present site of Oklahoma City.

There were many hunters in the country and most of the time Mr. Altum had two men with him who also hunted. The three traveled in a wagon drawn by a span of mules and had a tent to camp in and all the cooking utensils necessary.

During the spring and summer months they sold the game they killed each day to a man who had contracted with them to pay a certain price for all the game which they obtained and this man came himself or sent a man to their camp each evening to receive what they had killed. This game was put on ice and shipped to the markets of the east, principally to New York City. In the winter season they did not sell under contract as a rule but hauled their game to a marketing point which was Canadian, Texas, the first few years and later to Waynoka. They

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only took their game to market when they had a fair sized load, as it was usually some distance to travel and required about two days for the trip.

Much hunting was done in the country about twenty-five miles south of the present site of waynoka. there were several creeks/^{in this} section of country which abounded in game and predatory and fur-bearing animals all of which these three men hunted and trapped.

in their first experiences in this section of country Mr. Altum and his two companions became confused about the location of their camp after they had wandered here and there through wooded sections and up and down the different creeks for several hours. they soon learned that they could find the exact location of their camp from most any part of the country by a high hill or knoll on the summit of which the Indians had erected a pile of stone that was visible for miles in all directions. they knew the location of their camp from this high hill with the pile of stone on its summit and could soon go directly to their camp from any section of the country.

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Mr. Altum received around \$2.00 each for small deer and as much as \$4.00 for a large buck; prairie chickens were sold under contract for 15 cents each and quail for \$1.50 per dozen. He says that during the winter months in the black jack timber country the prairie chickens were plentiful because they went there to feed on the acorns from the black jack trees. Mr. Altum has found as many as eighteen acorns in the craw of a prairie chicken when it was being dressed. He later sold prairie chicken at their marketing point for thirty cents each and some times would sell other game for much above their contract price in the winter time. Mr. Altum first used a Richards 10 gauge shot gun; a little later he bought an L. C. Smith 10 gauge gun and still later, he used a winchester repeating shot gun of 10 gauge type.

Mr. Altum also had a 40-60 calibre marlin rifle and a 38-70 winchester rifle. He bought shot in twenty-five pound bags for \$1.25 and powder in 5 pound lots for \$1.00 per pound and primers

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for about 15 cents per 100. He re-loaded his shot gun shells himself and thus got his ammunition at the lowest possible cost.

He had a Siberian blood hound-a large dog, that was very strong and active and a good fighter; at one time a Loper wolf chased the dog around in a circle near him in the woods until the dog caught sight of Mr. Altum, when he turned and stood his ground and a fierce fight ensued in which the dog came out victor, killing the wolf.

Mr. Altum also had a fine well trained bird dog that was worth much money to him in hunting.

The cattle-men had standing rewards of \$2.50 for each coyote scalp and \$20.00 for each Loper wolf scalp but the skins of coyote and Loper wolves had no market value at all at that time. Musk rats were very plentiful in places but their fur was unsalable at that time.

In the winter time at night Mr. Altum would hunt with his dogs for skunk and coon, both of which

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were rather plentiful. Skunk hides were sold at thirty cents each and coon hides for forty cents apiece. There was a beaver dam across Beaver Creek at one place which was raided by hunters who drained the dam and killed nearly fifteen hundred beavers. Mr. Altum caught some of the beavers in traps and killed them and sold their pelts for \$8.00 apiece.

Mr. Altum has killed as many as ninety-four prairie chickens in one day and an average days kill of quail and prairie chickens was about three dozen of each.

About three out of every five shots resulted in a kill, but he has killed as many as fifty quail without missing a shot.

Deer were hunted after night-fall with success by using a light fastened on a contraption worn on a man's head. This contraption had a piece of bright tin made into a reflector which threw out a light that stunned the deer or caused it to look in amazement for a few moments and then the deer would slowly proceed toward the light until it reached the distance

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at which the hunter desired to shoot. If a deer heard a noise or if any object moved between the deer and this light, the deer would get scared and run away. These hunters killed several deer in a single night by use of this light.

One very cold winter when the creeks were frozen over in a section that had much wet marshy land where moss grew in immense quantities in the water and where "Tulia" ponds abounded, they killed an unusual amount of game of all kinds because the ice prevented the easy escape of game from the hunter. Under ordinary conditions these "Tulia" ponds afforded refuge for many different kinds of game.

At one of their camp grounds an Indian was noticed on different occasions. He would come up in sight and after a few minutes would go away. One day he came a little closer and Mr. Altum called to him to come over and eat; he grunted and came on to the camp and ate a hearty meal, after which he

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made Mr. Altum understand that he invited him to come to his Indian camp and that he would show him much game country.

Mr. Altum went and as promised he was taken into a section that had much game in it and he killed lots of game that day but was not permitted to extend the hunt. He learned that the Indian was a scout, having a Government horse and wearing a uniform. A number of the Indians, who were Cheyennes, lived at that place in their tepees.

Mr. Altum camped near Meridian Lake on the boundary line of Texas and Oklahoma; at times, water became scarce in that vicinity and he would kill many prairie chickens that came in great numbers to the lake for water. The lake covered four or five acres of land and had been a watering place for game animals and fowls from the earliest periods.

He lived chiefly on bacon and beans and sour dough biscuits during the years he hunted wild game. He says it was the greatest time of his life and regrets that he cannot find a place now where he could stalk deer.

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Mr. Altum with his father made the run at the opening of the Cherokee Strip.

Starting from the line west of Arkansas City, Kansas, they made the race in a spring wagon and when they reached a point several miles south of the Kansas line, discovered a prairie fire coming toward them. They stopped their team and set the grass on fire and after it had burned a sufficient space they drove their team and wagon onto the burned-over part to escape the onrushing fire and after the fire passed them, they proceeded southward again and when about two miles from present site of Autwine they saw an old man running about over the prairie looking for his wife who had been separated from him when the fire came upon them. This old man asked Mr. Altum to help him find his wife. Mr. Altum went down to a creek nearby but the creek was dry and he started out through what had been a green brier thicket and ran onto the body of the old man's wife, burned almost beyond recognition. He called to

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the old man who came hurriedly and in a few minutes many men had gathered on the scene and Mr. Altum, knowing that he could be of no further service, got into his wagon and drove on across the creek that was dry and out upon the prairie, where they observed no one in sight. While they were discussing the advisability of driving their claim stake on the land upon which they stood, they observed a man not far distant who got off his horse and put his stake down and since Mr. Altum's father said that he did not want to enter into any contest or squabble over the land, although they had set foot on the claim first they drove away and failed to get a claim.

(About five minutes before "high noon" when the signal gun was to be fired the men who had been standing in line holding their horses decided they would all mount and be ready to dash away when the gun was fired. A man from Massachusetts who was

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riding a fine looking horse had let his horse get from under control and it dashed off across the prairie a little way with him and a soldier shot the rider, killing him. When the multitude heard the report of the gun they all thought it was the signal gun and they all started in a mad race. The soldiers were powerless to stop the great throng although the line started a few minutes before the actual time for the run.