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INTERVIEW

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Form A-(S-149)

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

Field Worker's name Grace Kelley,

This report made on (date) December 27, 1937

1. Name Thomas A. Anderson,
2. Post Office Address Henryetta, Oklahoma.
3. Residence address (or location) Upstairs in the Morgan Building.
4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month _____ Day _____ Year 1867
5. Place of birth Coffee County, Tennessee.

Name of Father Joseph Anderson Place of birth Jonesboro,
Tennessee.

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Sina Anderson Place of birth Tennessee,
Coffee County.

Other information about mother Anderson by birth and marriage.

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 Thirteen.

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Grace Kelley,
Investigator.
December 27, 1937.

Interview with Thomas A. Anderson,
Henryetta, Oklahoma, Morgan Building.

In August, 1893, Tom Hardin now of Tulsa; Charles E. Phillips now of Okmulgee; Abe and Wayne Hodgens; my brother, J. W. Anderson and I started to the Cherokee Strip to look the country over as we had heard thrilling stories about how fertile the ground was and what good farms it would make. We were in a wagon so that we could camp on the way. When we got to Purcell the South Canadian was "up" and the bridge had washed out so that we couldn't cross.

Our Route in the Territory.

We crossed Red River at Willis ferry; it was owned by Holmes Willis but was run by a white person. Part of our trip was on the Chisholm Trail but as we were looking for a location we didn't follow it all the time. We crossed the Washita River twelve miles east of Ardmore at Rock Crossing; the Thomas Post Office was about a mile from the crossing but it had another name then that I don't remember.

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From there we went to Sulphur which had one store, no post office that I know about, and about thirty tents.

From there we went to Wynnewood which had about five hundred population and a bank, which was unusual.

Then to Pauls Valley we went; it was a little older than Wynnewood but didn't have as many people. Sam Paul was living there; he was the man whom the town was named for.

Paoli was the next town north and it did not have over two hundred people.

Wayne had about five hundred people and an elevator. They bought grain as there were quite a few oats raised in that part of the country. From there we went to Purcell and couldn't cross the South Canadian River so we camped a while and made trips in different directions, looking around.

One of the "In the Meantime Trips"

While we were waiting for the South Canadian River to run down we went to the Table Mountain which was about

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thirty miles away. We crossed the Washita River on a wooden toll bridge and paid 50¢ to a white man who was in charge of the bridge. It rained continually. The river was up and all we could see was water but we didn't have any to drink or use for coffee. We had to buy drinking water from the tollkeeper for 10¢ a keg.

First Steam Plow I Saw.

On the way back to Purcell we passed through the Williams farm. There were two big Williams farms, one was above Purcell and the other was below. Two brothers owned them. This farm was near the place where Maysville is now. They were plowing with a two gang plow, six in the gang or twelve all together. The Williamses were the largest farmers except Shannon who owned a big farm at Wayne. That land was put mostly to oats and corn but not much cotton and just a little wheat.

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Then we went to Johnson on the Canadian about thirty-five miles from Purcell where there was a ford crossing that was about a mile wide so we decided to turn back.

From there we went to McGee which was about two miles northwest of where Stratford is. They had a gin there and two or three stores, also a post office. There were about four hundred people living there. We came on and camped exactly where Stratford is now, on a little creek.

We went through Hart and camped at Roff, on a big ranch owned by Joe and John Roff. The town was named for Joe. Alva was down the creek. A big spring heads the Big Blue River not over a mile from the town, almost right in it.

The country looked so good to us that we decided to come back in the Fall. It looked better to me than any land I had seen and still does.

The grass was waist high and sometimes we would get fooled for the sod would cover rocks but usually we could

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tell by the different weeds. Some weeds will grow on good land, others on sandy land, and others on poor land. A good farmer should notice such things. Then we talked to the people living around the different places about the amounts of different crops to the acre.

On the return trip to Texas we took a pretty straight course as we were through looking around. We camped at Mill Creek, went through Emet on the north side of the Twelve Mile Prairie. Robber's Roost was on the south side of the prairie. Everybody knew about the Twelve Mile Prairie. It was close to Madill. Then to Colbert's Station; when the railroad came through, Colbert's Station was established two miles northeast of the ferry. The house that the Colberts lived in is still standing. The stage coaches had gone by that time but there were a few mail hacks. McGee and Johnson both had hack lines.

That Fall Wayne Hodgens, Charlie Phillips and we two Andersons came back and built three houses seven miles east

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of Hoff on the Pauls Valley and Stonewall road. Wayne Hodgens and Charlie Phillips each built a 14'x14' box house right on the road. The lumber was hauled thirty-five miles from Wynnewood. The three houses were built in a V shape, theirs on the road and our 10'x12' log house a quarter of a mile north of the road.

After the houses were built we went back home to Texas; it took four days to make the trip one way. Then we moved our things to the new homes. There were four wagons; we owned two of them. We had mule teams, one horse and I had an extra pony. I stayed at the house to take care of things for about two weeks while the others went back for the families as there had been no room for them in the wagons on the moving trip.

We landed at Chimney Hill at those houses on December 22, 1893. On the 25th of December, Christmas Day, I went to Hoff and mailed some letters. I never saw so much shooting in my life. Lots of men wore six-guns and everyone was having a good time. That was where I

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met Robert Capps now of Dewar; he and his uncle had a big shot gun each and had been hunting.

There were four stores: one owned by Joe Roff, one by John Sauls, one by John Short and the largest one was owned by Cain and Company from Gainesville. Bill Dodson was the manager of it. Jess Walding had a drug store, and there was a post office.

We got an Indian Territory lease from W. R. Neal on two thousand acres for twelve years. We were to put improvements on the land to pay him for the lease. We knew that we wouldn't stay for the whole twelve years but we put in as good and substantial improvements as if we were going to stay all our lives.

Bud Ledbetter and Bob Nester were about the only visitors I had while the other boys were going after the women. Bud and Bob stopped at the house and wanted to know if I was going to settle up the country. I said that we had a good part of it, about two thousand acres

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between us. Bud Ledbetter said that the wire fences were ruining the whole country and asked me how he would get to Joe Thomas' place. Joe Thomas was a well-to-do part Indian.

1894 was a dry year so we didn't make much but the next year was good. In 1895, we made sixty bushels of corn to the acre, sixty-eight bushels of oats and a half of a bale to the acre of cotton on cultivated land. We sowed cotton broadcast on sod and harrowed it in. The rotting sod kept the weeds down so there was just cotton. We'd just see some white cotton and pick as far as we could reach, then move on. It wasn't much harder than when planted in rows. We got a quarter of a bale to the acre on that.

Seven Trips to Texas in Two Years.

Most of our groceries were hauled from Sherman and the corn for the first planting and feed for the first year were brought from Texas. It took us two years to get really established in the Territory.

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Some people say that McAlester was the first person of the Indian Territory to become a millionaire. He made his money in the cattle business. But another was made rich by the cattle before he was. His name was Sob Love of Marietta. He looked like a white man but must have had an Indian wife. Joe Thomas was his grandson and had a ranch on the Big Blue River about two miles south of my place close to Roff. He would have passed for a full-blood Indian. Sob Love had a brother living at Purcell who was also a big cattleman.

One of the Colbert boys, I can't remember his given name, was the private secretary for Theodore Roosevelt in the Spanish American War.

I went through Ada on the twenty-sixth day of December, 1893. Jeff Reed, a white man, had a store there and the post office was in it. There were no residents except the farmers who lived around in that

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country. The closest house was where the cement plant is now and Rit Irving, the father of Joe Irving, lived in it.

Mail Route.

The mail was taken from Stonewall to Pauls Valley and Jeff Reed's store was about the middle of the run.

Schools.

In 1894 there was a called meeting of all the neighbors to start a school. Some of them donated work and the ones, who had it, donated money to buy lumber. Others hauled it from Wynnewood. The first school to be built in there was called the Neal School and was located one mile west of where Fitzhugh is now.

The next school to be built was on the Big Blue River, two miles south of us, and was called the Blue School. My brother, J. W. Anderson, taught school there.

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Everyone who had children in the school had to pay a certain amount every month which was used as wages for the teacher.

People were most agreeable, they tried to get along with each other. All were poor and trying to get ahead, that is, they were trying to improve themselves both financially and mentally. Some of the parents had pretty good educations and wanted their children to have educations. Others, who didn't have educations, thought that their children would be more able to make a living with educations than without. Of course, there were some children in those days who didn't get any schooling at all but that was when the family lived away off and it was too far for the children to go to school in bad weather.

Dawes Commission.

Grafters came in here and tried to buy up as many leases as possible. I sold my lease to a grafter for \$600.00. He got an Indian to allot the land, providing the Indian would let the white person collect .

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the rent for four years. The rent was for a third of the corn, a fourth of the cotton and a third of the oats. The Indian stayed where he was living. Sometimes they allotted their children on these other places. Some of the Indians got possession of their allotted ground right away but others waited the four years.

Mississippi Choctaws.

In 1898 or 1899 (after the Dawes Treaty) large numbers of Choctaw Indians came from Mississippi and camped at Roff. Some of them came on the trains and lived in little cabins on the edges of town. The town was full of them. Some of them spoke reasonably good English but others talked the same language as the Choctaws who were already living there. They wore the kind of clothing that we wore.

Churches.

It wasn't long after people came in there until they started having Sunday School and church, mostly Methodist

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and Baptist. The meetings were held in the little school house.

Mr. Hacker organized the first Presbyterian Church in there and Mr. Solomon organized the Free Will Baptist Church.

We had a circuit rider preacher, Methodist, who came once a month to preach for us. We'd take a collection and everyone would put in whatever they could, or donate something that the preacher could use - corn or whatever he could live on.

The preacher usually came on horseback but he had a hack that he used sometimes.