

FITCH, WILLIAM HENRY.

INTERVIEW

#9895

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

FITCH, WILLIAM HENRY.

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Field Worker's name Elizabeth L. Duncan.

This report made on (date) January 12, 1938. 1938

1. Name William Henry Fitch.

2. Post Office Address Caldwell, Kansas.

3. Residence address (or location) 100 yards to the Kansas line.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month March Day 28 Year 1869.

5. Place of birth Martinville, Clark County, Illinois.

6. Name of Father Frank Fitch. Place of birth Ohio.

Other information about father Farmer.

7. Name of Mother Sarah Ellen Williams. Place of birth Ohio.

Other information about mother Housekeeper.

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 3.

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Elizabeth L. Duncan,
Journalist,
Jan. 12, 1938.

An Interview With Wm. H. Fitch,
Caldwell, Kansas.

William Henry Fitch was born to Frank and Sarah Ellen Williams Fitch, March 23, 1869, six miles from Martinville, Clark County, Illinois. Here he spent his childhood. He attended grammar school some but did not like school so persuaded his father that he did not need to go to school. He went until he had finished the sixth grade; he learned to read and write. He then stayed at home to help his father do the farming.

At the age of twenty-one William made up his mind he was going to come down in this part as there were rumors that the Strip was to be opened up. He had a brother in Washington County, Kansas, located close to Haddam. He worked one summer for his brother and then one summer in Rock County. He worked different places until the opening of the Strip was finally announced.

Two wagon loads of them came down to Hunnewell, then on to Caldwell to register. After registering they went eight miles west of Caldwell to camp until the day of the opening, which was a week.

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The 16th day of September arrived and the boys were all eager to take homes. At noon on Saturday the people were lined up for miles. The signal was given and off they dashed as fast as they dared to let the horses run with the loaded wagons. When they arrived at Pond Creek the claims they had figured on staking were all ready taken. They then turned back, thinking they could run a chance finding one back up this way. On this side of Salt Fork Abe Peterson took a claim. None were to be found when they came back, so the boys went back up into Kansas, but William's brother did not stay. He came back and found him a place, then went back to Kansas to gather up his belongings to move back on his homestead. When he arrived back it was taken by another fellow so he moved in on some school land.

About the middle of October William's brother wrote him that a homestead close to him had been abandoned by a Nebraska fellow. William came at once to see if he could get it. William waited until the last of October then began breaking sod. The first week of November William went to Enid to file, but he was so far down the line he

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was listed as in the two thousands. The night he went down the men all coiled around the courthouse just like a snake. When morning came the men all uncoiled, but when they began to uncoil they couldn't figure out what was wrong. William told one of the men to hold his place while he investigated. To his surprise he found that some of the captains had sold out during the night and that there were two hundred men less ahead of him in line. William spent two weeks or more, but was far from being filed. He then paid his captain to let him know when he was to file, so William went home.

While he was at home he stayed with his brother. Then on December the 15th he returned to Enid to file, but after he arrived he found that he would be there until the last of December. He filed on the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ 29-29-19. After filing he returned to his homestead. He and Phillip Knece then started out drilling water wells all over the country. While he was doing this his brother moved on the homestead and built a 12 x 14 two room sod house.

William let his brother stay on the homestead for two years. The first summer he spent at Humboldt on a

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ranch, a period of five and one-half months. The second year also he stayed in Kansas; he was earning \$15.00 a month with board and room. During these two years his brother broke out a hundred acres of land and planted wheat and corn. The year of '96 William's place produced wheat at forty bushels to the acre.

The third year William moved onto his place to begin his own farming and his brother moved back to Kansas. William then began to build more to his homestead. As time went by, he built and made improvements. In 1905 he married Glenna Patten. That same year he received his United States Government patent. In 1908 William sold his farm to Mr. Skalnack, then moved to Section 14-27-7.

His neighbors all bought tractors when they first came in. The same way with the cars. William has never owned a car or tractor but he has wonderful teams of horses. He goes to town and everywhere in a buggy.