

JOHNSON, GEORGE

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Form A-(S-149)

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

Field Worker's name Eunice M. Mayer

Report made on (date) August 17 1937

Name George Johnson

Post Office Address Mangum, Oklahoma

Residence address (or location) _____

DATE OF BIRTH: Month _____ Day _____ Year _____

Place of birth Celina, Tennessee

Name of Father _____ Place of birth _____

Other information about father _____

Name of Mother _____ Place of birth _____

Other information about mother _____

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. Write on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached _____.

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Interview with George Johnson
Mangum, Oklahoma

George Johnson, pioneer druggist, first began filling prescriptions in old Greer county in 1892. His first drug stock was located on the south side of the square in 1893 and was combined with stocks of dry goods and groceries.

Mr. Johnson has been associated with Lee Hawkins in his present location on the west side of the square since 1899. Keeping a store, however, was not his first occupation after coming to this section from Texas in 1892.

His first employment was teaching school at the mouth of Spring Creek on the Salt Fork river. Leaving the teaching profession, he set up as a partner with J. C. Gilliland and J. C. Claunch, operating a general merchandise concern.

In those days, Mangum merchants commanded an immense trade territory. Since there were no railroads nor telephones in the country, stocks for the store were hauled by wagons from Vernon and Quanah which were important railway terminals in those days.

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Mail was sometimes delayed for weeks following heavy Spring rains when rivers and creeks would be over their banks. Dr. G. P. Cherry was practicing at Mangum then, and owned a ranch at Haystack.

The first barbed wire fence ever erected in old Greer county caused much excitement. Ranchmen fashioned drift-wood fences, when the occasion demanded, although the open range prevailed.

Cotton farming was almost unknown, since few of the newcomers were familiar with the crop. Lee Hawkins with whom Mr. Johnson had been associated in business for thirty four years, came here in 1898 from Sweet Springs, Missouri.

Mr. Johnson recalls that the first soda fountain in Mangum was installed by a bakery and confectionery here in 1900. Soft drinks prior to that time were not popular among the cowboys and stockmen.

The thing that has most impressed Mr. Johnson about the short grass country is its eccentric weather. He

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recalls that beginning April 6 , 1893, a dust storm blew for seventy-two consecutive hours. Drifts of sand and gravel were to be found ankle deep around all the buildings.

On February 12th, 1894, the thermometer sank to twenty degrees below zero. Stockman sustained losses of thousands of dollar. Cattle were dying as a result of frozen feet.

Despite bad weather conditions and other hardships peculiar to a frontier country, old Greer County was really a fine place to live.

Ticks were the worst enemies of stock in the early days. Arkansas cattle were the ones who were most infected. A quarantine station was set up on the Red River.

Mr. Johnson recalls selling 2,000 pounds of sulphur to Frank Simpson, veteran county stockman, who used the compound to disinfect stock during the tick season.

Mr. Johnson took part in the opening runs in both the Cheyenne and Arapaho strips, in 1892. Mr. Johnson and other citizens including T. P. Clay and Judge

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Beauregard, an attorney, made the run into the Cheyenne and Arapahoe strip.

In September, 1893, Mr. Johnson made the Cherokee run at Woodward. Each man was permitted to stake a claim of 160 acres or one town lot. Mr. Johnson later traded his Cheyenne lot for a mule colt.

Traveling in the early days was laborious and slow. Mr. Johnson recalls a trip he made to Guthrie to attend a meeting of the state board of pharmacy. He went to Quannah by stage coach where he made connection with a Santa Fe train which carried him to Guthrie, the convention city.