

GOMER, JOHN

INTERVIEW

#7937

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

Field Worker's name Wylie Thornton

This report made on (date) October 23, 1937 1937

1. Name John H. Gomer

2. Post Office Address Tahlequah, Oklahoma. Rt. 2-Box 7

3. Residence address (or location) About two miles south

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month June Day 23 Year 1878

5. Place of birth Middle, Tennessee, Franklin County

Came to Chickasha, Indian Territory, 1901 in September.

6. Name of Father Martin Dick Gomer Place of birth Middle Tenn.

Other information about father Lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma

7. Name of Mother Susan Gomer Place of birth Middle, Tenn.

Other information about mother Died in Beaver County in 1907.

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 .

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I was born on June 23, 1878, in the little city of Middle, Tennessee, in Franklin County.

My father left Tennessee in the Fall of 1901 with his family, headed for the Indian country, and after many hardships on the road we reached Chickasha, a small and thriving little Indian village, full of cowboys and with cattle running wild everywhere.

I could see new people every few days on the streets, looking for locations, and new buildings growing up over night.

This town was a "sight." You see the boundary line of the Indian Territory was just two miles west of this town and just across the line were located the whiskey saloons.

The biggest one was the John-Tucker Saloon.

Whiskey was hauled by wagons from Wichita Falls, Texas, and sold to the people at \$1.00 per quart. It was good, Government bottled and bond stuff.

After I had been here for awhile and had contracted and built many dwellings in Chickasha, I was persuaded to come to Anadarko to build some homes and small business houses.

I have started small business houses and before I could put

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the roof on, the owner would move in the equipment for a bar and he would be selling liquor and beer in the room while I was working on the roof.

Before the different payments to the Indians, the white people would begin for weeks in advance to prepare to cheat these Indians out of their money. One way they cheated them was to erect small stands up and down the streets to sell the Indians cold drinks, candy and eats etc., and they would arrange to have beds in behind the regular front of the stores and when an Indian would come along and want to buy a lunch they would prepare his lunch and also sell him another drink and pretty soon he would be too drunk to go along, and then they would offer him a bed to lie down. When he was sound asleep they would get his roll.

Another thing they did was to short-change the Indians when they wanted to pay for their drinks or meals.

Going back to Chickasha in 1901, I have seen wagons bog up right on the main street of Chickasha. Once I remember a man named John Thompson get stuck in the deep mud on the Main Chickasaw Avenue, right in the middle of the main street and he had his team on their knees trying to pull a hack out

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of this mud and finally the team pulled the tongue out of the hack and that hack stood there for two or three weeks before that man got it out of the street.

I remember that I found this new country a very rich and fertile land, especially the low lands. I do believe that those Indians had the richest valley lands on the face of the earth and when it came to the Washita River bottoms, I have seen flowers there as big as the bottom of a tub.

I left Chickasha once to go two miles west to build a chicken house on Scott Jones' place and I had to go right by Dave Hill's place and I went by where Mr. Hill was gathering corn in his field and I noticed he had two very large spans of mules hitched to his wagon in that corn and I hollered and asked Mr. Hill "Hey!" What's the idea of two teams on this job?"

He said "Can't you see why? I have to have the first team to pull those large sunflower stalks down first and the next team to pull the load."

We thought if our corn didn't make over sixty bushels per acre that we had a crop failure and cotton the same way. One bale to the acre was a small yield.

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I remember Mr. John Hilton told me one day that if I would come to his place and gather the corn myself out of the field he would give me a load of corn for my milk cow; we lived in town. I got a wagon and went down to his farm and when I got there, he said "Mr. Gomer, just open the field gate and begin pulling on the first five rows against the fence and get a good full load."

I pulled about a hundred and fifty yards on those five rows and I had all I could trample in with the side boards raised and not a single nubbin in the whole load. I had to use an ax to chop the ears up before my cow could eat the corn.

The thing that stopped those cattle men from grazing their big herds of cattle on those Indian lands was credited to the squaw-men.

Squaw-men were white men who were married to Indian girls. These squaw-men had education enough to take up for the rights belonging to those Indians by the law and it was these men who first demanded that Indian land rights be respected as the rights of Indians against intruders.

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I remember John Norton, who was a very independent cattle-man and who had been doing about as he pleased in that country about his cattle. A white man was married to an Indian woman over near Lawton and he put out notices reading, "Please keep cattle off of this allotment or I will use force to make you comply."

John Norton drove up to a gate near this man's place with a large herd of cattle and noticed this sign by the gate, and just ordered his cow-hands to tear the sign down and open the gate and run the cattle right on through this place. About this time this squaw-man came up with a winchester and announced that he would not allow any cattle driven over this land and they had better drive their cattle around this place, and Norton told the squaw-man that he had been going over this route for a great number of years and that he would not go to the trouble of going away around, and that this was a straight route to the destination of his cattle and when his cow-hands refused to open the gate with such threat before them, John Norton said, "Well I'll open this d- gate, come on boys, push them cattle through here;" and as he got down off of his horse

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this squaw-man shot him dead and said to the cowboys,
"Now anybody else who wants to open my gate, just try it."

This Squaw-man was arrested for this murder, but after several hung-jury trials in Federal Courts he came clear.

This case started things rolling, until open grazing for the white man's cattle ceased and ever after that the white men paid for or leased the Indians' land.

I have never forgotten the customs of those early Indians; for instance, they fully believed in freedom of everything just as they believed in this open range and open grazing land.

When we first came into this Indian country and would prepare a meal where an Indian could see or could find out that we were eating, the Indian would walk up and sit down without saying a word and would begin to reach for the food and eat. Once we had just been here a few days and we got dinner ready and began to eat and some Indians came along and saw us eating and they came in and began to eat too, and the women ran away screaming, howling "Robbers! Robbers! High-jackers!" I noticed the Indians were just

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as unconcerned and were jabbering and talking and laughing.

I soon learned that this was their custom and finally when I caught the Indians eating I would run in and try to get all the food I could carry off and eat.

I want to tell you about the prairie dog towns in those days.

About half way between El Reno and Chickasha, there used to be a very up-to-date, little city of prairie dogs. This city was known all over the country for its size. It covered an even one¹/₄ section of land of six hundred and forty acres. Every ten feet square there was a prairie dog mound, and the prairie dogs would all get up right on top of this sharp mound and sit straight up on their hind feet and bark, and on account of this great number they could be heard for a great distance.

It has been figured out pretty certainly that these prairie dog towns are built only where water is found near the surface, from a depth of ten to twenty-five feet or thereabouts because they do have to dig down until they strike water.

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Another remarkable thing about these cities is the fact that rattlesnakes live with the prairie dogs and so do hoot owls.

How the prairie dogs, rattlesnakes and hoot owls all get along together is something unknown until this day.

Wolves used to come into the city of Chickasha and eat the scraps of food that housewives would throw out of their back doors during the day.