

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

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GREER, CHARLIE.

INTERVIEW.

10408.

Field Worker's name Anna R. Barry.This report made on (date) March 29, 1938. 1938

1. Name Charlie Greer.
2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma.
3. Residence address (or location) 121 North Admire Street.
4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month January Day 16 Year 1868.
5. Place of birth Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania.

6. Name of Father John Greer. Place of birth New York.

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Lucy Jones Greer. Place of birth Pennsylvania.

Other information about mother _____

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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Anna R. Barry,
Journalist,
March 29, 1938.

An Interview With Charlie Greer,
121 North Admire Street, El Reno.

My first experience in pioneering was in Kansas. I was just a small boy when my parents moved from the state of Pennsylvania to the plains of Kansas. We had a fine, comfortable home near the Susquehanna River in Lackawanna County. In fact, we were only a little over a mile from the river, and would often go swimming in the stream during the heat of summer. I was perhaps ten or twelve when we moved to Kansas, and I remember what a long tiresome trip it was. We traveled in a covered wagon so you can imagine how long and how slow was our journey. We arrived there in the late spring, and thought we had never seen more beautiful country than the lovely green plains, but before the hot winds of midsummer had finished with us, we wished quite heartily that we had never left our home in the East. I can still feel the heat of those dry winds. Even the nights were swelteringly hot, but we soon became accustomed to the weather and grew to like the state of our adoption. We really had a very good farm, and prospered there.

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When I was twenty-one, I decided to investigate the land conditions in Oklahoma. I had heard talk all winter long of its being opened to settlement, and thought if it was as good as everyone seemed to think, I would like to have a farm or homestead there. We had read in the papers for about a year of Payne and his followers trying to colonize Oklahoma, and their subsequent rebuffs, until we had all become curious to know more about the territory, that to us seemed full of wild Indians and a land of real adventure.

Early in the month of March, I with two other young buckaroos, loaded up a covered wagon with what supplies we needed to carry us through several weeks, and started on our journey into the home of the Red Man. It was certainly a cold, grey morning when we commenced our trip into the land of opportunity and adventure. We felt very little like heroes or romantic figures as we crawled out of our warm, comfortable beds that morning and stood on the icy floors of our respective rooms. In fact, it wouldn't have taken much persuasion to have caused me to change my mind and remain at home. For several weeks after

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we landed in Oklahoma, we would ride into Oklahoma as far as we were allowed to go. Sometimes we'd get into the interior for miles before we were spotted by some soldier and told to point our mounts the other way and "Git", which we always did, only to return at some other point. Our only reason for going into the Territory previous to the Opening, was to look over the lay of the land, and spot a good acreage, so when the country was opened we'd know where to go. As it came about, however, when the land was opened for settlement we were so far from where we had entered the territory previously that we had to take something else. We all landed on good farming land, and were well satisfied with our find.

I'll never forget an experience we underwent during our reconnaissance of the territory. We had been riding before daylight so as to get well into the forbidden country, before being spotted and stopped by scouts, when we heard a faint shout far to our right. We stopped and listened a moment, and again we heard a faint, "Hello". We decided we'd best investigate so veered off in the direction of the voice. It still lacked perhaps an hour

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before dawn, but the stars were so bright, and the night so clear, it was possible to make out objects here and there, although we couldn't tell what they were in so uncertain a light. When we had gone about a hundred rods or so, we stopped and called out to our unknown and unseen fellow voyager. He answered us and, this time, he seemed quite near. "Where are you and what is your trouble?" We shouted. "Be careful how you approach" he replied, "I'm hanging to the edge of a cliff. I slipped off here early in the night, and I'm about to give out. Hurry, but be careful". Naturally our first impulse was to rescue the fellow, but at his further urging us to hurry before he lost his grip, we decided we'd have to do whatever we were going to do, immediately.

How to go about the rescue with the utmost caution and at the same time expeditiously, was our chief concern. We finally hit upon the idea of making a torch whereby we could see just how and where to approach the man. Well, the next thing was to find something out of which to make the torch. That seemed impossible until I thought of some old letters in my pocket. I rolled these into a tight

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taper like affair, lighted one for each of us, and we then separated and proceeded in opposite directions, to come together again when we had completed a circle designed to take in the territory wherein "hung" our man. We could see a darker looking place ahead of us, which we took to be the canyon into which or off of the side of which he had fallen. We listened and heard the sound of water which seemed to be dashing along over something; a waterfall or rapids. I thought, "What a horrible experience to be hanging over so precarious a place for hours". I couldn't help wondering about the man who had come through so harrowing an experience and yet, judging by the sound of his voice, wasn't losing his grip. That took courage and strength of character, in my estimation.

While I had been stumbling along toward the man whose voice called to us at intervals, my friend, Jake, had advanced from another angle and suddenly I was startled to hear him laughing heartily. What a time and place to indulge in mirth, was my natural reaction. But just at this juncture Jake called out to me; "Oh, Charlie, here is

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something you'd never believe if you didn't see it with your own eyes". Then to the man we had come to rescue he said, "Let go and drop, pardner, your feet are only about two feet from the ground. See?" He held his torch so as to light up the ground near the man's feet and, sure enough, there he was, dangling so near the ground that a good stretch might have allowed him to stand on his tip toes and still reach the rim of the bank with the tips of his fingers. The fellow slid to the ground in a heap and started shaking violently, partly due to nervous reaction, and partly from weakness and chill, for the weather was pretty sharp at that hour in the morning. I was never really sure, but I have always been of the opinion that he wept just a little in those first few seconds, while he slumped with bowed head. We were both thoughtful enough of his feelings not to observe him too closely during those few seconds of readjustment.

By this time, it was beginning to grow light, and by the faint glow of dawn, we were enabled to gather some sticks and small branches of trees we found lying about, and soon had a cheerful blaze going. We had some bacon

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and coffee and cold biscuits with us tied to the rear of my saddle, as we hadn't known how long we would remain out, when we started, so came prepared. We scooped out a hole in which to put the coals from our fire so as to fry the bacon, then the man we had "rescued", Sam Groves, went to look for his pony. When he returned some minutes later he told us all about his experience. "I have been trying to get a claim in here for two weeks", he related, "I'm what is known as a Squatter" (later they were called Sooners). The soldiers had chased me almost night and day, but last night I managed to elude them, and was going along great, until I fell off what I thought was a cliff. You see", he continued, "earlier in the evening, before it grew entirely dark, I had been following along the side of a deep canyon at the bottom of which ran a stream of water. I suppose the canyon grew gradually shallower as I went along, but, of course, as it had grown dark, I wasn't aware of the change of depth. I had been riding idly along for some little time, sitting loosely in the saddle about half asleep, when the pony suddenly shied at something he saw in his path. So abrupt was the lurch he

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gave, that I was unbalanced and slid to the ground just on the edge of the canyon. Although I landed right on the edge I would have managed to scramble to safety, had the ground not given way beneath my feet. Naturally, I slid over the edge, and clutched madly for something to hold to, to keep me from slipping into the abyss beneath, so I thought at the time. I finally grabbed onto that little tough sage bush and held on for dear life. At first, I tried to gain a foothold of some kind, to enable me to pull myself back to safety, but in so doing, I seemed to be weakening the bush at its roots, so I stopped that procedure at once. I was hanging as quietly as possible, crying out for help at intervals, when you fellows came along, and I don't think I could have lasted much longer if you hadn't come when you did. Not that the fall would have hurt me any.

After that, we three fellows concluded we'd travel together. We arrived at what is now Canadian County on the evening of the fifteenth, and found a good-sized camp close to Fort Reno, composed almost entirely of homeseekers like ourselves. The day of the Opening, on April 22, 1889,

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I staked a good claim six miles south of El Reno. I was married to Sadie Dover, in 1890. We reared our family of five children in Canadian County and we now expect to stay here until we leave on that last long mile.