



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

**GRIGGS, JAMES A.**

**INTERVIEW.**

**10480.**

Field Worker's name Linnaeus B. Rank.

This report made on (date) April 8, 1938. 1938

1. Name James A. Griggs.

2. Post Office Address Gage, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) \_\_\_\_\_

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month October Day \_\_\_\_\_ Year 1869.

5. Place of birth Indiana.

6. Name of Father \_\_\_\_\_ Place of birth \_\_\_\_\_

Other information about father \_\_\_\_\_

7. Name of Mother \_\_\_\_\_ Place of birth \_\_\_\_\_

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 10.

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Linnaeus B. Ranck,  
Investigator,  
April 8, 1938.

An Interview With James A. Griggs,  
Gage, Oklahoma.

Mr. Griggs is a native of Indiana, born in that state in the year of 1869. About 1870 his parents moved to the locality of Hastings, Nebraska. The family lived in that section only a few years and returned to the East because of the threatening hostile Indians of the western plains. When the Strip was to open for settlement in the spring of 1893, Mr. Griggs was working on a cattle ranch in Kansas. His employer, who had been over the Strip country, encouraged Griggs to run for a claim in the Outlet. His employer had formerly ranched in Texas but had sold out there and relocated in Kansas during the '80's. When this cowman moved his cattle from Texas to his Kansas ranch, Griggs said they cut through the Strip from the west end and then through old Fort Supply. Before entering the outlet, however, with the cattle, representatives went ahead to Fort Supply and arranged for a detachment of soldiers from the fort to return and pilot the herd through the Indian country.

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for it happened that the outfit was on the trail through at a time when the Indians of Western Oklahoma were menacing all cowmen and their stock. Bands of Cheyennes, especially were prowling the western part of their reservation and the western part of the Strip committing some rash depredations now and then against the cowmen and all white people in the country which the Indians covered.

With the aid of the Kansas cowman, Griggs and another employee on the same ranch fitted up an outfit to go to the Strip line and make the run for a claim each. The ranchman gave them a buggy and a team of ponies for the drive to the Strip line. The young men each took a good saddle horse with him to ride in the actual run. Griggs' horse was a splendid sorrel Oregon range animal just being broken. Fitted out with provision, bedding, their Winchesters and .45's, the two men struck out for Arkansas City where it was their plan to register for the Run. They camped about Arkansas City for a few days after they arrived and registered and on the day immediately preceding the opening date they left and went west to Caldwell, Kansas, hoping to get away from the teeming milling mob of people

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waiting about Arkansas City and its vicinity. They camped on the border near Caldwell the evening before the day of the actual opening. They found fewer people waiting about the Caldwell section of the line but thousands were there too and cavalry troops, a strong force of them, were patrolling the border day and night.

On the day of the Run the people crowded for positions on the line for the signal approached. Many men were mounted on seasoned race horses. Just west of Griggs' position, but comparatively close, a man from New Hampshire was mounted on a restless, spirited thoroughbred animal. A number of other mounted men were abreast of this particular horse and rider just a few minutes immediately preceding the time for the signal to advance. The restless horse charged over the line several times, apparently in spite of his rider's most earnest efforts to hold him back. On each such occasion a cavalry trooper dashed to the charging animal and escorted it back to its proper position and sternly admonished the New Hampshire man to control his mount. Again the animal bolted across and the soldier caught it and told the rider that

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if such a premature break over the line occurred again he would shoot him. It was only a minute or two till time for the signal when this happened. Scarcely had the trooper put the horse and its rider in place and released his hold on the unruly animal when the horse charged over the line again. Thereupon, the soldier leveled his carbine at the offending rider and shot him from his mount. It all happened so suddenly and with such precision and lack of ceremony that most of the waiting throng mistook the flash of the cavalryman's carbine for the signal to go and a great segment of the line dashed away in the run.

Griggs and his partner started for the vicinity of Blackwell in a lively gallop. These two men wanted land along some stream for their employer had told them "the upper land is not worth taking". Not a great many miles into the Strip they began to observe Sooners in the low lands and defiladed areas. Upon reaching the locality where they had it in mind to stake claims, they found all of the bottom land already occupied by Sooners; at least

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Griggs was convinced they were Sooners inasmuch as many apparently had driven in in heavy wagons loaded with equipment such as plows, and some even were already drawing furrows along the creek bottoms. On the way in and upon arriving at the north bank of the Salt Fork River they happened to approach it where the north bank was so high they could not ride down it with their saddle horses. To meet such an exigency the men lead their horses up to the edge of the river bank one by one and a sufficient number of men get together and pushed the horses over the bank one at a time. The men then scrambled down, mounted and rode on across the river. Disappointed and disgusted, Griggs camped along a creek in the Blackwell locality over night and the next day explored further for such a claim as he desired. It was not to be had without a mountain of trouble, so on Monday morning following the Opening on the previous Saturday, he started back to Arkansas City on his Oregon saddle horse. Not far out on the prairies from where Mr. Griggs had camped he began to observe dead horses lying here and there and in the course of his ride back to Arkansas City

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he thinks that he saw no less than fifty dead animals, casualties of the mad rush for claims the Saturday immediately preceding.

On the way back to Arkansas City, too, he experienced after a fashion the excitement and fun of a shooting affray. He had not ridden far that Monday morning till he heard a bullet whiz by him in the air. He stopped but could not determine from which direction it had come nor could he see anybody whom he could charge with having fired it. Soon another bullet whizzed within about twenty feet from him and ricocheted off the ground. Then it was that he observed four men in a spring wagon more than a quarter of a mile from him, one man standing up with a Winchester in hand who, in an instant, fired in Griggs' direction again. Griggs couldn't understand what was up, so hurriedly dismounted, and from behind his saddle horse he began firing at the men with his own rifle and he declared, too, that he shot to hit his mark. The men in the spring wagon were driving a span of wiry mules and when Mr. Griggs began to return their Winchester fire and to come closer to them with every shot, they lashed their mules



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into a dashing gallop and soon disappeared out of sight over a ridge. It is the belief of Griggs that the men were shooting at him purely for the fun of it and purposely missed him. On the other hand Mr. Griggs did not think of the affair in that light at first and in returning the rifle fire he shot with full and deliberate intent to kill. In any event he had the advantage of these men for he was mounted on a horse speedy enough to have made his getaway safely should they have assailed him in earnest.

In 1901 when settlers were rushing into this part of Oklahoma Territory for homesteads, Griggs came too and filed on a claim about nine miles north of Gage. Sunday School service was held at the claim dwelling of Mr. Griggs in 1902; as Griggs, then a single young man, had one of the largest and most commodious claim shacks in the community. It was then the neighborhood custom to have Sunday School at the home of first one settler and then another in the neighborhood and Mr. Griggs could accommodate such a gathering better in his shack than some of the other settlers could.

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For a year or more during the early days in the country Mr. Griggs worked as night clerk in the once famous Cattle King Hotel in Woodward. While employed there he relates the following occurrence involving a famous early day Oklahoman.

Not so very many years had passed since the tragic and fatal shooting affray had occurred in Woodward in which Temple Houston, Jack Love and Ed Jennings were the principals and Ed Jennings was the victim. Al Jennings, Ed's brother, greatly resented the shooting of his brother Ed, though Al was not in Woodward at the time Ed Jennings was killed. As a matter of fact about this time Al was having serious troubles elsewhere and was behind steel bars for a while for some of his own alleged depredations. It is claimed that he vowed to kill Houston at the first opportunity, thus avenging the fatal shooting of his brother Ed. About or during the time Griggs worked at the Cattle King Hotel in Woodward Al Jennings was liberated and allegedly sent word to Woodward that he was coming to kill Temple Houston. When this word reached Woodward the distinguished Temple Houston was in the Texas Panhandle attending court.

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Friends of Temple Houston's in Woodward wired him of Al's threat and purported coming and it is claimed that Mr. Houston thereupon immediately returned to Woodward. Griggs went with the hotel bus to the depot the night that Houston returned to Woodward on the train. Houston rode in the Cattle King Hotel bus from the depot up town in company with Mr. Griggs and others who had come in on the train and who were going to the Woodward Hotel for the night. It was thought that Al Jennings was in Woodward at the time and was on the lookout for Mr. Houston and under such an impression himself Temple Houston was well fortified to meet Jennings. Houston appeared well braced with intoxicants and on the way to town he drew from under his frock-tailed coat the largest six-shooter that Griggs had ever seen and as the bus rolled on Temple sat composed in the rig with gun in hand and eyes flashing. The bus stopped first at the Central Hotel at which place several passengers were stopping for the night and then it was going on to take Houston on to his home and to return to the Cattle King Hotel. When the rig reached Central Hotel Griggs and every other passenger was more

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than ready to get out regardless and they did clear the bus for they feared that to ride the regular course might involve them in a serious shooting scrape. Temple was taken on to his residence safely and nothing was seen of his enemy, Al Jennings.

After Statehood and the establishment of Ellis County Mr. Griggs became the new county's first undersheriff. The county seat then for Ellis County was old Grand and it continued to be until by two county elections which followed many months later the county seat was placed at the town of Arnett.