

INDEX CARDS:

Opening Cherokee Strip
Living Conditions
Caldwell, Kansas

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

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3Field Worker's name Mary D. DorwardThis report made on (date) May 17 - 18 19371. Name John Gregory2. Post Office Address Tulsa, Oklahoma3. Residence address (or location) 102 North Wheeling Avenue4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month November 17 Day _____ Year 18565. Place of birth Clairfield County, Pennsylvania

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 8.

Mary D. Derward, Field Worker
Indian-Pioneer History S-149
May 17, 1937

HOMESTEADING IN INDIAN TERRITORY
Interview with John Gregory
102 North Wheeling, Tulsa, Oklahoma

I homesteaded a claim in Kay County, six miles north of where the town of Nardin now is. I made the run when the Cherokee Strip opened in 1893, together with my three brothers-in-law, H.R., J.F., and W.W. Cline, all of us from Hannibal, Missouri.

WE PREPARE TO MAKE THE RUN

We came in a covered wagon from Hannibal to Hunnewell, Kansas, just over the border from the Strip. The trip took us six ^{weeks} camping on the way and at Hunnewell until the opening. Before we could make the run we had to register at Hunnewell, where we waited in line all one day, all night, and until noon the next day before getting registered. No one wanted to sleep, so we lay all night in the dust and dirt, sang songs, told stories to one another, preachers preached sermons, anything to entertain ourselves.

To make the actual run we each bought us a pony there at the border. I paid \$30.00 for mine. While waiting there we were charged terrific prices for everything we used; a dollar for a bale of rye straw, five cents a bucket for water for our horses.

WE MAKE THE RUN

The day of the run, September 16, 1893, was a hot dry day.

When at noon the gun was fired we started our ponies across the line. Most of the men raced their ponies at break-neck speed, some of the ponies dropping dead before the men reached a place to stake a claim. I figured if I took it a little easy my pony would go farther, so I didn't race quite so hard. I finally reached a place that looked pretty good to me, it had a cottonwood tree where I thought I would build my house, so I drove my stake. The others in my party had also found claims to stake not far from mine. Then I started to look around for boundary markers, only to find after consulting with my neighbors that I had driven my stake in the middle of what was to be the road. That meant that I had lost out and, feeling pretty discouraged, I was about ready to go back home. But there was a man with us, Lem Musgrove, who had led our party on the run and, since he himself was ineligible for a claim, had, as he said, staked one for an old soldier. With a little persuasion on my part I found him willing to part with his claim for one of my thoroughbred horses (I had two) so I stayed and prepared to settle.

FIRST SETTLEMENT

I had to stay right there on the claim in order to hold it; slept on the ground with rattlesnakes and prairie dogs, they seem to go together. I built a one-room house on my claim. I first built

the frame of planks, roof and all of the same material, then covered the roof and side walls as far as the windows with sod which I had plowed up and cut in three-foot lengths, and I want to tell you that roof never once leaked a drop of rain. Later on I bought another one-room shack and moved it on skids up to the first one, making us a two-room house. Then I dug a well and got a good water supply. In the spring I went back and brought my wife and four children out, arriving with them in April of '94. Our household goods we had shipped by freight to Hunnewell, bringing it from there by wagon.

I worked hard clearing the land and getting it in shape for crops, but it was virgin soil, had never been plowed or fertilized, and the weather was hot and dry, so that it was about three years before the soil was seasoned and would bear a crop.

HARD TIMES

By this time we began to see pretty hard times. The six hundred dollars I had brought with me had been used up. There was no work of any kind to be had, and no credit. Our food had given out and we had got down to where we had nothing left but a little flour and salt. My wife made a kind of bread which she baked in a skillet, using a little dry flour to keep it from sticking because she had no grease to use. We would break off a chunk and that was all we had to eat. Our fuel had all given out. I used to go as far as twelve miles to get green elm (and anyone who knows anything about wood knows what stuff that is to use for fuel) but even that had given out. All we had to burn was cow chips picked up off the

prairie, and what a smell that made.

But somehow I could never quite give up. I couldn't help feeling that something would turn up. I wouldn't even write home for help. I kept feeling that things would change. Well, we got down to that last bit of flour. We had brought a cow with us but she was dry, so we didn't even have any milk, and were actually at the point of starvation. I was out walking up and down the road trying to figure out some way to get food when here came Lem Musgrove, the fellow who had led us in the run. He had a ranch not far away, wanted a well dug for his stock, and wanted me to dig it for him.

Don't tell me there isn't a Providence. I actually shed tears of joy. He left provisions for my family, saying, "You old s@-and-so, why didn't you let me know?"

AFFAIRS IMPROVE

Well, that seemed to be a turning point for me. From then on I began to prosper. I got a good crop of wheat that year and right along, my land yielding forty bushels to the acre, and I got thirty cents a bushel for it, a good price for those days. Mother helped out by baking bread for the bachelors for extra money and after a time I had enough to build a four-room story-and-a-half house. I did most of the work myself and I recall that it was November when I put up the flue and how cold it was to mix the mortar. But I carried the bricks and built the chimney myself and got it a

little bit crooked.

TRADING

We had to go to Caldwell, Kansas, to do our trading. There was a little store and postoffice called Clare a mile west of us, but it was small and carried a very small stock.

Caldwell was only eighteen miles away, but the roads were bad and there was no railroad and it took us a day and a night to make the trip both ways. That meant that we couldn't make it very often so we had to buy in large quantities. One of us would take his wagon and would buy for several families in the neighborhood.

SCHOOL AND CHURCH

We lived on the farm three years before there was a school for our children. Then the neighbors got together and built a little one-room frame ^{school house} a mile and a half from our place, where school was held for only three months in the year. There wasn't much uniformity of textbooks for the children used just whatever they happened to have at home, but it was better than nothing at all.

After the school was built we got together again and put up a church on land donated by Sam Adams. The preachers alternated between Christian and Methodist.

POLITICS

I always took quite an active interest in local politics, but

I never took any part in trying to get statehood. I was a member of the school board and was a delegate to every Democratic convention around there. I remember once going to a convention at Ponca City when every hotel was so filled up I couldn't get a room any place so I slept in a feed store, the owner of which broke out a bale of hay for me to sleep on.

PIONEER CHILDREN

I reared a family of six children on that farm, and through all the hard times, hunger, and hardships of all kinds, I never once heard a whimper about the food or anything else. They were no cry-babies. They were always ready and willing to help with the work about the farm. I remember once I was compelled to leave on a matter of business for a few days right in the middle of the plowing season. Their uncle W.W. Cline's farm had been "jumped" and I was called to the Government Land Office at Enid to testify. When I got back, my oldest daughter and my son had plowed twenty acres.

They didn't have much in the way of luxuries or pleasures but what they had they enjoyed. About their only recreation was in the form of literary societies and picnics. The literary society was made up of the young people of the community for twenty miles around and would meet each week in the different school houses in turn.

WE LEAVE THE FARM

We stayed on the farm twelve years and proved my claim. But we wanted better schools for the children - we had six by that time, twins coming after we were in Indian Territory - so I sold the farm for five thousand dollars spot cash and moved to Tonkawa. We stayed there two years and then came on to Tulsa. I had traded a harness shop which I had in Tonkawa for four hundred and twenty-five feet frontage in Tulsa, giving the man three hundred dollars to boot. My Tulsa property was distributed thus:

a hundred and fifty feet on Boulder at Seventh,

Two hundred feet on Detroit at Fifth,

seventy-five feet on Elgin at about Seventh,

costing me altogether about \$1,600.00.

Tulsa was a fair-sized town by that time, but there were no paved streets and only board side-walks. I was the first street commissioner elected in Tulsa, served five years, and was elected constable two terms

KEEPSAKES

I still have the freight receipt for my household goods shipped out from Hannibal to Hunnewell, dated 1894;
have a chattel mortgage issued on cattle, dated September, 1900;
copy of Odd Fellows Herald, dated September 8, 1881;
berry dish, wedding present, 1881
glass rollingpin, wedding present;

little jug ; about one inch high, carved by myself from buffalo
horn;

horn from female buffalo;

four-inch cannonball from Civil War, weighs eight pounds;

sickle at least a hundred years old.

I am an Odd Fellow, Elk, Pioneer Oklahoman , tilled the virgin
soil, and belong to the Boston Avenue Methodist church.