

GREGORY, JOHN

INTERVIEW

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W. T. Holland,
Interviewer.
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An Interview With John Gregory,
Old timer, of 104 North Wheeling,
Tulsa, Oklahoma.

I might be termed an "old timer", as I came here during the "run" into the Strip. I started at noon on September 16, 1893.

Prior to this, however, we had registered at the Land Office at Enid. We had to do this in order to be eligible to make the run and stake claims. My objective was a farm in Kay County. A number of us neighbors in Kansas were together and had to stand in line to register at Enid. I remember this mighty well, too. The line was at least one-half mile long, probably longer, for I had to stay in line twenty-four hours, one whole day and night, before my time came.

We then returned to Kansas to make ready for the run. I can't estimate how many were on the state line. We had camped at Honeywell, Kansas, west of Arkansas City, in fact were there about two weeks before the great day. There were people as far as you could see in both directions. Single men with their horses, men with their families, and every kind of conveyance in use in that day, from the old prairie schooner to two wheeled carts, horses, and mules.

Mine was a pony. We and lots of others were training our mounts so we would be ready, and the horses toughened to start the race, for race it was. There were quite a few who had blooded horses, thoroughbreds, but the old timers told us who had ponies that our chances were as good or better, to take it easy and we would get thru. Those on fine horses, especially where they had to go great distances just didn't make it as we saw some of these blooded horses which had fallen by the way, as we went on. Our company tried to stick together, hoping to be able to stake claims adjoining or at least in the same section of the country.

We had gone due south, probably fifteen miles, when I saw what I thought a good location, broad level acres, and no claim staker, so I got down and drove my stake. The land had been surveyed by the Government of course and markers set up, but these were numbered in Roman numerals, and while I had studied these some in school, at this time it was all Greek. I looked across the country and saw some men, and went to them telling them of my claims and its location, so my friend rode with me back to my claim, and on arrival got down and examined the marker and found that I had staked a claim in the middle of the road. The real

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acres were already claimed. Well, I had to get busy and in a hurry. To make it short, I found a claim not far off and this time drove my stake in the claim proper and not in the road. This was near Nardin, Kay County.

I went to work and got some lumber together and put up a twelve by fourteen foot shack and "batched" awhile, long enough to certify my claim then returned to Kansas. I brought my family down in 1894. I had some money, so I moved the shack back and built a nice one and a half story dwelling and otherwise improved the place, eventually fencing eighty acres of it. I owned this place and lived on it for ten years; but most of them were lean ones. This was due to the dry weather. This sod to do well needed rain to rot the sod so it could be pulverized. One thing, too, that made it bad for awhile, the first year, was due to the burning off of the land. This was done by the Government prior to the run. This, of course, destroyed a lot of feed. 1896 was the worst year. No crop, money all gone, and provisions too. We went down to our last measure of flour, no meat, beans and no credit or work. If I could have secured work, it would have helped some; in fact, it would have been our salvation. I had exhausted every means I knew of.

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One day I saw a man approaching on horseback and when he came closer, I recognized him as an old friend I had known in Kansas. He was looking for a hand to help on his place a few miles away. I ran into the house and told my wife of our good luck, and went immediately to work for this friend. This helped me over the most difficult time of my life. I sold this place after living there ten years and moved to Tonkawa where I went into the harness business, making and selling harness. I had been there a year or two when my brother-in-law, who lived in Tulsa, wrote me that he had a friend here who wanted to trade me some town lots for my business in Tonkawa. I looked over it and thought it a good deal and we traded. I still own some of this property on which I built business houses. These afford an income sufficient to provide for my wants, and is now worth many times my original one hundred and sixty acres in Kay County.

I have been more or less active in politics here, but cast my first vote for James A. Garfield. I was Superintendent of Streets here for five years.

I was born in Pennsylvania, November 17, 1858.

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My parents moved about a good deal. We lived in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Iowa, Illinois and Kansas, then I came to Oklahoma.