

GUNTER, WILSON.

INTERVIEW

13662

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LEGEND & STORY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

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Field worker's name Theodore B. Hamilton

This report made on (date) April 21, 1938

1. This legend was secured from (name) Wilson Gunter

Address McAlester

This person is (male or female) White, Negro, Indian,

If Indian, give tribe _____

2. Origin and history of legend or story _____

3. Write out the legend or story as completely as possible. Use blank sheets and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 3

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Theodore R. Hamilton,
Investigator.
April 21, 1938.

Interview with Wilson Gunter.
McAlester, Oklahoma.

Whiskey was an illegal product in the Indian Territory during the early days and its scarcity only made it more desirable to the Indians and others who craved it.

Often when the peddlers were caught and put in the jail at Fort Smith, they would come out of the jail without a cent but would immediately set out to work up more whiskey business. One method a whiskey peddler used ^{was} to go to a bakery and beg a loaf of bread. With this loaf he would approach some person on the street and, showing the bread, would ask for a nickel or a dime to buy some meat to go with the bread. After having mooched a quarter he would purchase a half pint of alcohol and slip across the toll bridge on the Poteau River, into the Territory, about the time the guards were changed. This helped in preventing a search of his person. Once across the river he would put the alcohol into a pint bottle and finish filling it with clear water. This made a full pint of "alcohol" which was

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sold to the negroes who worked in the Poteau River bottoms. This procedure would be kept up until the whiskey peddler was firmly established in the business once more.

Whenever a dance was given in the Territory you would always find a peddler somewhere close by. He usually came on horseback with his keg or bottles of whiskey in a saddle-bag, covered by a blanket. A short distance from the dance the peddler would unlead and spread his blanket on the ground and put the whiskey on it. He also had a couple of partners in the deal who stationed themselves some distance from him both in front and in the rear to afford protection from the law. Near the blanket a "bull's-eye" lantern was lighted but no light shone on the peddler who often to give additional protection to himself, would place a mask over his face.

When a whiskey peddler was ready to do business he would send word to the dance hall and soon his whiskey would all be sold to the dance hall patrons and gathering up his blanket and other things the whiskey peddler would carry them to a different location and after hiding them would return, with his lockets, to the dance where the peddler would proceed to enjoy himself as much as any of the others there.

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Horse stealing was also a common crime in the Territory and if you missed a horse you might as well kiss a \$5.00 bill good-bye if you suspected an Indian of the crime. The Indians had a method of their own and a person did not dare to refuse to pay them, though they knew the Indian had stolen the horse. If an Indian was connected with the crime he would usually drop by the owner's house a day or two after the horse had disappeared and ask if anyone had seen anything of a missing horse. The man of the house would of course reply that he had not but that he also had a horse that was gone and would offer to pay \$5.00 for its return. The Indian would promise to keep a lookout for this man's horse and in another day or so would come in with the horse and collect his \$5.00.