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

Field Worker's name Elizabeth L. Duncan

This report made on (date) October 20, 1937

1. Name Charles Louis Bickerdike

2. Post Office Address Medford, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) Five blocks west of 1st Natl. Bank

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month May Day 20 Year 1869

5. Place of birth Griggsville, Pike County, Illinois

6. Name of Father William Bickerdike Place of birth Leeds, Yorkshire, England.

Other information about father Farmer

7. Name of Mother Mary Ann Dusenbury Place of birth Ohio

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 11.

Interview with Charles Louis Bickerdike  
Medford, Oklahoma

Journalist - Elizabeth L. Duncan  
Indian-Pioneer History, S-149  
October 20, 1937

Charles Louis Bickerdike was born in Griggsville, Pike County, Illinois, May 20, 1869. His parents left Griggsville when he was one year old and moved to Pana, Illinois, one mile and a half from town. Charles attended school when his parents did not have to keep the children from school to work. They did not have the studies outlined according to grades then as they do now. Whatever the child wanted to study he was permitted to study that subject. So Charles studied English, mathematics, and bookkeeping. After he had finished the eighth grade, he then attended the Gem City Business College at Quincy, Illinois, for two winters. He entered the college at the age of twenty years.

After Charles had finished his business course, he then started out farming for himself, yet he stayed at home with his parents.

In Anthony, Kansas, Charles had an uncle who was a very progressive "go-getter." He believed young

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men should take Horace Greeley's advice, "Go West and Grow Up with the Country." Very frequently this uncle would send an Anthony paper back to his relatives in Illinois.

One evening when Charles was looking over the mail that had arrived that afternoon, he tore the wrapper from an Anthony paper and casually glanced over its contents. On the front page, with big head lines, was an outline of the proposed opening of the Cherokee Strip.

The farther he read, the more interested he became. The next day he put his saddle on his riding horse and went over to see his partner, Will Cohenhour.

Charles and Will had been school mates and had grown up together in the same neighborhood. Both had finished school and were farming for themselves. Charles handed the paper to Will and said, "Read this article and tell me what you think of it."

Will started to read, Charles watched the expression on his face as his eyes moved quickly from line to line. Before Will had finished the last sentence, Charlie knew what his answer would be, but when Will jumped up

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and let out a yell as near as he could imitate a wild Indian, it was not necessary to ask for his answer.

Talk about your busy cranberry merchants. These two boys hardly ate or slept until they had loaded their livestock, machinery, feed, and even a lot of lumber into a freight car and started for Anthony, Kansas.

They arrived in Anthony and unloaded their things and began their wait, but soon they learned it was not to open on the proposed date. They then rented a farm near Bluff City, four miles north of the Oklahoma line, and lived there a year and a half. The lumber that they had brought down they used to build a shack.

Charles and Will and three other men made two trips down into the Territory to look the land over. They were amazed at seeing such a great deal of rolling prairie, nothing but prairie as far as they could see and the cattle roamed the range.

Charles and Will came down as soon as they could to stand in line one day and then waited for the time to arrive. Charles was riding a cow pony. The

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soldiers were riding up and down on their horses keeping the people back from entering the Territory.

At twelve noon, September 16, 1893, the signal was given and such yelling and shouting, but yet they were a good natured mob. The wind was blowing and it was pretty warm and dusty.

Luck seemed to be with Will for he staked a claim without trouble, but Charles got one that four other men claimed and he tried to find another one but he was very unfortunate.

Charles went back to find the others. They went back to Miller's place and stayed all night and then five of the men from around Bluff City started out early the next morning in a wagon to Enid. The boys stood in line for two days after they got their numbers. The dust was a foot deep just where the people had stomped it loose while waiting. After filing, the boys went back to Kansas and Will bought all of Charles' things; the little shack they had built in Kansas was moved down on Will's place. Charles stayed with Will.

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Will stayed with the homestead one month; then he bargained with Charles that he would sell out to him because he wanted to go home. So in October, Charles became the proud owner of the SE $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 26, Township 29, Range 6; he had four horses, the harness and farming implements. Charles dug five wells before he located one that had fairly good water. He also put up enough fence to keep the horses in, also began to break sod.

When Will first left the place, Charles thought he was very foolish to leave the place, but Charles soon thought Will was very well off and a lucky man too, for the place was infested with prairie dogs and fleas.

Charles began to break sod for other people. He got a dollar an acre.

The first crop was eaten up by the prairie dogs.

The first school was built on the southeast corner of Charles' place. It was a sod house and Charles helped to build it. It was the Enterprise School, District 16. This district was in "L" County, which is now Grant County. Besides the school, the community used it for Church and Sunday School.

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Charles was the first Sunday School Superintendent. He also conducted a singing school and many of the old timers recall the glorious occasions when everybody in the neighborhood came to those evening singing circles.

Charles stayed on the place five years and it seemed that the prairie dogs took most of the crops.

In 1898, Charles moved into Wakita and started a drug and furniture store. His partner was H. B. Whitmore. Neither one was a pharmacist, so they hired Hugh Allen of Keichi, Kansas, to look after the prescriptions.

Some time later, Mr. Whitmore withdrew from the firm and Charles bought the other half interest. He said at that time there was only one married man living in the town of Wakita; there was a bachelor, Clyde McCulloch, who managed the lumber yard; J. S. Shelbourne, a grocery man; Fred Shore, who with his mother managed the Shore Hotel and livery barn; the Allen brothers, who were the town's butchers; Jimmy Smith, the Santa Fe agent; Dr. Miller, the practicing physician, and mayor; Du Bois, the hardware merchant.

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But soon these prosperous business men went one by one to the altar and Charles Louis Bickerdike followed suit.

The Wakita Herald, owned by P. H. Loomis, was located across the street. He had a daughter by the name of Alice, who wrote the town's news items, set type, folded papers and did all the other jobs.

Mr. Loomis, Alice's father, was one of the first school teachers in L County, which is now Grant County. He received the highest grades of anyone taking the county teachers examinations. His first salary was twenty dollars a month and after cashing his warrant he had exactly fourteen dollars left to put in his pockets. But it did not take so much to live on in those days and besides he soon quit teaching and took up the practice of law, besides editing the Wakita paper.

On August 5, 1900, Charles married Alice Loomis.

Charles was in the drug store business for three years, he then sold out to Hugh Allen and also sold his claim for \$2,000.00 to Buford Miller. While living in Wakita, Charles conducted a singing school.

After selling out, they bought 160 acres of land near Sand Creek. There were some improvements on the

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place but Charles added more to it.

In 1901, the first rural telephone was built from Sand Creek to Wakita. H. McMann, a storekeeper; John Lantz, a farmer; Charles Bickerdike, a farmer; Bart Myers, a farmer; Mr. Silverthorn, a farmer, were the five men who sponsored it.

The people thought it was wonderful that a person could talk to his neighbor.

Charles farmed his land steadily and he also had a singing school. They met four times a week and had wonderful times. There was a man by the name of John Moore who attended these schools. He is a singing evangelist. He worked himself up to where he was in charge of one of the largest choirs in Los Angeles. He was also asked to conduct the largest choir in Europe when they had a World's Fair there, but he refused.

In 1912, Charles left the farm and moved to Cherokee, Oklahoma, where he went into the Koch Medicine business. They lived there for two years. In 1914, he moved back to Sand Creek where they lived six months

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and cleared out forty acres of trees and planted corn. He had a pretty good crop. In the Fall of 1914, they went to Oregon. Mrs. Bickerdike did not like it out in Oregon so they stayed but one year. Charles was still with the Koch Medicine wagon.

In 1915, they came back and went back on the farm where he again conducted a singing school, also continued with his Koch Medicine wagon, and doing his farming, too.

Charles ran for County Treasurer. One of his friends said if they did not want to be bothered with that Medicine Man, they had better vote for him. He was elected.

In 1926, he sold the farm and moved to town and began serving four years in the County Treasury. He served a second term. After completing his second term, he began to raise chickens. He had four hundred Leghorn chickens in his back yard at Medford.

Mrs. Bickerdike is one of the most energetic women in town, whether in church or civic work. She has taken an active part in the Grant County Women's Christian

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Temperance Union.

In 1936, Mr. and Mrs. Bickerdike spent the winter months in southern Texas where they could pick oranges from trees in their backyard. They are now residents of Bedford.