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BOUSE, JOSEPH W. INTERVIEW.

Field Worker: Arnold N. Aronson

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BIOGRAPHY OF Joseph W. Bouse  
101 1/2 West Grand  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

BORN September 21st, 1856  
Huntington, (county?) Pennsylvania.

Father Henry Bouse. Mother: Julian Bouse

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MY TRIP AND EXPERIENCE IN THE OPENING OF OKLAHOMA

I, Joseph W. Bouse, was one of thirteen children. Nine of which were boys and four girls. All children lived to see their 21st birthday and older. In the winter of 1888 and '89, I was spending my winter in Florida. It was the custom for people to spend the winter in Florida, and return north about the first of April, which was my intention. But when President Cleveland issued the proclamation to open Oklahoma for settlement on the 22nd day of April at 12 o'clock high noon; I decided to remain in Florida until the 19th of April. Instead of going back to Philadelphia, I decided to purchase a ticket to Purcell, Indian Territory, and take in the opening.

There was a young man there in Florida by the name of Lee Mizell, who wanted to go with me. I knew he was a full blooded Florida Cracker, and never been out of the state, I said all right Lee, I will be glad to have you. That was my first mistake. I will speak of him

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later, we arrived in Purcell on the evening of the 21st, day of April, 1889. This was a small trading town on the railroad running north and south through the land to be opened. Also on the South Canadian River, the river to be the south border line of Oklahoma, proper, consisting of about five counties, to be opened on the 22nd. There we found hundreds of people getting ready for the race next day. No accommodations left, you had to accommodate yourself as best you could. We made out very well during that night; everything was wide open, and on the move all night. People were planning how they were going to cross the river, and where they were going to head for.

The river was low, and one could cross most anywhere on horse or on foot, but wagons and buggies had to find a crossing on account of the quick sand. There was where the horsemen had the advantage. Soldiers were patrolling the river for miles to keep the Sooners out, every once in a while they would bring someone out, turn them loose with orders not to try it again.

The cowboys had been in this country for years, and

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were training their horses and knew how to ride them. Covered wagons, farm horses, buck boards, buggies and every kind of conveyance had no chance beating these cowboys.

As the hour drew near we decided to start the race by going on the first train. Leaving there was five full trains standing ready to go, they commenced loading early and by the time to start, they were loaded from cow catcher to last platform, and on the roof, steamed up and when the firing started, whistles blowing the race was on.

As luck would have it we were on the first train out, it left at once, everything went well for about 20 miles, then we came to a grade and the train slowed down, on the grade, people began to drop off, and running and driving stakes. I said to my man Friday, "This is our chance." It was the finest looking prairie country I ever saw, covered with green grass, three to four inches high, as far as I could see to the east it was the same, and up grade sufficient to make good drainage. As we dropped off, I made the landing all right but Friday

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hit the ground and went into the bar pit head over heels, spilled his pack, but not hurt, when we got started I said to him, "No upland prairie for me, I want a farm with bottom land, timber and water." We each had a pack to carry, but we went on the run, up grade I soon found Friday loosing ground.

I kept going, knowing when I reached the top of the grade, the view east would show timber and it did. The tall timber was where I headed for. It was further back I judge at least one-half mile, where I left Friday. I was ahead of them all. But to my joy, I could see a line of timber, indicating a stream, as in this country, all streams are lined with timber, it was a long ways off, and my speed was slowing down, I kept going, when I got close enough, so I could see into the bottom, there lay about the size of a 160 acres of the finest land possible. I ran right into the center of it, stuck my umbrella in the ground, threw my raincoat over it, and called it my stake and home. Not a person was in sight yet. It was now 1:45 P.M. I turned and looked in all directions.

The first ones in sight was two men on horseback,

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coming from the east. They rode to what I learned after was the southwest corner of my claim. They got down and commenced looking for something. I walked to them. I said what you fellows doing here. The spokesman said, "You see that tree way yonder into the east. There is a government monument, a rock marking the corner of the section, we figure there is one closer and if we find it, and it is on the north of where we stand that bottom is yours, but if it is on the south of us, it is mine. We saw you come in, it was on my side." They said, "If the claim isn't yours we will take it. We found the rock within 100 yards from where we stood, it was on my side. They said, "The claim is yours." They took the one on the south and the one on the southwest. That was my first success in the race. The Government had surveyed this country, and set up a monument made out of native stone every mile. On each side of the stone was marked the range, township, and section, we could tell at once the number of our quarter section.

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The next move I made was to walk back to my stake, just then other people began to show up, some horsemen first, then people on foot, my friend Friday had not showed up yet, I made up my mind that he must have staked some land too and stopped to eat lunch. I then picked up my lunch, shot gun and then with my side arms, started to look up my other corners, also to see if there was anyone else on my claim, not a one did I find or see, I went to the north line then to the east line then to the south line.

Just then Friday showed up, "Oh", he said, "he didn't want a claim." He did not stake one. "No", he said, "it looks like they are all staked." The next move was to pitch camp right here is the place. There is plenty of wood and water, we built a big fire and got ready to spend the night. When the smoke began to rise other settlers saw it, and here they came. We had a fine camp fire supper, and the evening up to midnight was spent getting acquainted with our neighbors, I was congratulated on getting the finest quarter section in the bottom, and more than that, one of the men bid me \$300.00 for my



right. I told him nothing doing, it was what I started out to get, and I was going to make a home on it. We had a splendid night of it, even if the wolves did keep some of the boys from sleeping part of the night, I got a big kick out of shooting these wolves, as I was a crack shot in my younger days.

We found this to be a big game country, deer, turkeys, by the thousand, prairie chickens, and plenty of fish. The wild game was a great help to the settlers the first year, for their meat supply. The wild game had a real home here for us. Very few Indians were permitted to live in this forbiddin country. The cattlemen on the different ranches and what few of Captain Psyne's Boomers was here at different times were the only one to disturb the game. Except during the fall and winter. The Kansas people would get up a party of hunters and make a raid in this country. They would kill and slaughter the game by the wagon load and then haul it home in Kansas. I have seen turkeys here by the thousands. They would go out on the prairie to feed, fine feeding on

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grasshoppers and other insects. They went to the canyons for water and rustle in the timber. I stood on a hill and counted three different flocks at the same time. There were over 300 in one flock, and when they all got together, these Boomers of Captain Payne would shoot these birds with buck shot. This scene was equal to Custer's fight, except there were no dead left on the field of those that had been hit by buck shot.

This Oklahoma proper was occupied for several years prior to the opening by cattlemen, ranches with thousands of cattle, they had a grazing permit but no one so far knows where they got it. This was the finest country for cattlemen to hold their herds until they were fat, then drive them north to the market, Caldwell, Kansas. This point was a great shipping place. They were loaded on trains there and shipped further northeast.

The cowmen left Oklahoma with much regret. It was an ideal cattle country, with plenty of water and good grass, with good creeks and plenty protection for the cattle in the draws, and canyons along the creeks, no wonder they

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regreted to leave this ideal country with free grass, no fences, a deep carpet of grass that grew from four to five inches all over it. Captain David L. Payne and his Boomers and Captain Couch spent many years trying to settle Oklahoma. Then a bill passed Congress in 1889 opening it for settlement, on April 22nd, of that year, President Cleveland signed that bill, the Homestead Laws was to apply. And all the people entering Oklahoma with a view of selecting locations before that time would be considered sojourners, and have no right to Homestead any of the land. It was decided to let the people gather at the border around Oklahoma. The first man on the land was the one to Homestead it, scouting the country by soldiers all the time to keep the Sooners out.

Captain Payne did not live to see this dream of life, that Oklahoma was to belong settled by Homesteaders, instead of cattlemen. He died in Wellington, Kansas, November 25, 1884. William L. Couch of Douglass, Kansas then took up the Boomer cause, which he continued until April, 1889, when the biggest race in the world was ever pulled off for a prize of a 160 acres of the best land in

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the U. S. A. Captain Couch staked a claim on the 22nd day of April, 1889, joining Oklahoma City townsite on the west, and later became mayor of the City. His right to the claim was contested by one named Adams. Later they got into an argument, Adams took a shot at Couch at long range, hit him in the knee. Captain Couch died of the wound.

MORNING OF APRIL 23rd, 1889

We got out early and had breakfast, such as it was, of lunch, we had carried with us in the run. Each man had his plans for the day. Some went to their claims, to look them over and make plans to start improvements. Some made plans to head for the land office at Guthrie, Oklahoma to file on their quarter section. It was about 40 miles to Guthrie, Friday and I was making arrangements to head to the railroad to get supplies, as we expected to make camp right here till we could do otherwise. Just then we saw four horsemen riding for our camp from the north. They rode up, said, howdy. The spokesman asked whose flag is that up yonder on this claim. I spoke up and said that is mine. You and I appear to be both on the same claim. How's

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that stranger?. He says how did you come in. I said I came on the first train from Purcell. "Hell, I crossed a head of that train on the fastest cowhorse in the race. I was here long before you could get here a foot off that train, was I not boys." His friends on horseback replied, "Yes Sir, that is a fact, every word he has told you is true." These other crooked theives took up for their pal. I replied, "I had been all around the claim soon after I got there, and saw no sign of a flag or any person on the claim." He said, "I can't help that, the claim is mine and I want you to get off of it today. I replied, "If that is true as you say, your men vouch is a fact, as I am not looking for an argument or contest, I presume this claim is rightly yours."

They whirled their horses and said get off today. The first thing my friend Friday said was, "Bouse, you don't want any claim in this country, let them have it, lets go to the city." (Now Oklahoma City). That was the kind of a partner I had. I said, "All right, Lee, I am not satisfied with that fellow's put up story. We will go by my .

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and see if we can find where he staked, that I failed to see it on my rounds the day before." When we got to my stake, it was easy to see his on the north side of the claim. It was two feet high and had a white flag, 18 inches square floating, anyone could see that they staked after I had. I knew right then that he was lying to me. Day I to Friday, "We will go by their on the next claim north, and we will see more about this" Lee says, "You will get in a fight and let them alone. What would you do with a claim way out here." I said "We are going to camp anyway." Friday said, "Well you saw they all had winchester rifles across their saddles in front of them and each carried a six shooter too, they are tough hombres." I said tough or not tough, I am going there to camp and shoot it out, I am a crack shot and I will have them laying across this stake of mine,"

We crossed the creek went about a quarter of mile north, walked in to their camp, but only three were there as the one, who claimed my stake rode away to

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Guthrie land office. The spokesman says, "Howdy, you are the man we were talking to this morning on the claim down the creek." I says, "Yes sir, I am." He says, "Stranger you are a dam fool." "Well, I said, " I knew there was something wrong but did not think about it that way." "Yes sir, that talk Bill made to you down there was all damm lies, and we indorsed it. He aimed to stake that claim, but he got too far north, and staked this one, he did not discover his mistake till four o'clock. Then he went and pulled up his stake, carried it across the creek and drove it on your claim, I can show you the hole. I said, "Where is he." "Oh, he is gone to Guthrie to file. He is on one of the best cowhorses in this territory. He will make it in there today and file tomorrow. Now I want to tell you young man, we have been talking it over and we have decided not to have any thing to do with his part in the first place. We know every word you told was true. If you want to go ahead an file a contest, we will be your witness." We will go ahead an file a contest. "We will give you our names and addresses and anytime you call on us we

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will be with you Mr. Bouse. They further said this man is a crok of the deepest dye, and we are not going to stand for him to take advantage of a man like you."

I took their names and addresses and have them somewhere to this day. They invited us to stay and eat with them, and you know we did not refuse them. These three fellows had a good heart even though they were considered dangerous outlaws, they still in their heart had some good in them.

We left their camp and headed for Oklahoma City about 15 miles, with full intention of going to Guthrie later, and file a contest, we got to the railroad late that afternoon, no train going north, we layed over till next morning, slept in a box car all night.

I later got interested in the city and never went ahead and filed a contest. But I did and have kept track of some of the doing of the claim. (Mr. Bouse later stated that the claim referred to, was in Township 11 North, Range 2 West.) What that man Bill got for it, I never learned. But he did do very little improvement, he soon sold it. The man that got it made a fine place of it. When the oil



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game came along he sold it. The man that sold it, the lease alone for \$100.00 per acre, later sold royalty, I have been told for \$100.00 per acre. I presume I was influenced by good Friday, as it was my full intention to file a contest. This is my success and failure so far.

On April 24, 1889, we got out early that morning, a freight train came along about 8 A.M. We got on with a lot of others traveling the same way, we got in to Oklahoma City about 9 A.M. About 1/2 block south of what is now Reno Avenue. The first thing I observed was a bunch of men measuring off lots, on the southside of Reno Avenue. They had a rope or rather a lariat with a knot tied in it 30 feet from the end. They were about 1/2 block west of the railroad, going west, making the lots 30 feet front on Reno, the man in charge I learned later was George W. Patrick. He would measure off a lot for the man that had a stake on it, the man would give him one dollar, and he gave them back a receipt for the dollar, and that was his title to the lot, I said to

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Friday, there is our chance as I had caught on to what was going on at once.

"We will move up a head, if we get a chance we will stake one," I said. We went about one-half block came to a tent a woman standing in front. I spoke to her ask where she hailed from, she said from Pennsylvania. "God," say I, "I am from there also," She said "put down your baggage in and be at home with us. My husband is back there where they are measuring off lots. I am looking for a chance to stake one too. She told us that we might find one further ahead. I said here is a old wagon trail, next to you. That looks good to me. So in went my umbrella, right in the middle of the trail. In about 10 minutes the party measuring was up to us, they located the lady in the street and gave me the lower lot, now Reno and Broadway. The lady began to cry and said we have been here since day before yesterday, now we are in the middle of the street. This man here only ten minutes and has a corner lot. Her husband was standing by. Not knowing what to say, I realized the

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situation. I said to the lady, you give him dollar take the receipt and the lot is yours, I will go further up the line and see if I can find another one. I went one, two three lots a head and stuck my umbrella in the fourth. Had a receipt in about five minutes. I lived there four years sold it, got a good price, and returned to Florida, and spent the money. The Salvation Army building now stands on the lot. I want to state further how it come the jogs are in the Reno Street. This street is a section line as well as a township line. There was a monument rock at the junction of Reno and Railroad and of course one  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile west, now Walker and Reno, Patrick measured 50 feet south to make 100 foot street at the railroad. He sent his flag man west to Walker Street, directing him to measurer 50 feet south and set up his flag, when done the survey started with 30 foot rope, he was busy writing receipts and filling his pocket with silver dollars, low and behold when he got through to Walker Street this flagman had the flag on the rock.

The first thing George Patrick had to do was unload his pocket of silver dollars, he then discovered the people on the north side of Reno street had layed only 25 foot lots.

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Now he said we have to survey this all over again anyway, and I will gain enough extra lots, at one dollar a lot, to pay for making the survey. He started back along the line telling the citizens what had happened, and what he intended doing. He started in everything went fine until he came to a woman who had staked two lots making 60 feet by rope measurement. She told Patrick whose hog ate the cabbage, she said you see that bulldog tied to that trunk. I staked and got title to 60 feet right here. There is not power enough this side of hell to take me off, much less give me 50 feet nothing doing. In that block that extra 10 feet has made and cost plenty of trouble.

That was just the beginning of trouble to move the street ahead two lots, to make the street correspond with the other side of the street. Every man that had a corner lot would not stand to be moved to an inside lot.

So Patrick said if that is the way you are going

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to have it, I will go ahead with the 25 foot rope, and take the extra lots wherever they come. The jogs are there today and I presume will be there until doomsday.

I am 81 years old and I still own several acres of land in Oklahoma county and I still follow my carpenter work.

I certify this sketch to be true and only true facts herein. I have never given anyone my life story besides Mr. Arnson, a pleasant young man was introduced to me by Mr. Beveridge, Oklahoma City Building permit superintendent, a life long friend. Mr. Aronson is a lucky man to get this from me.