

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

KENNY, A. M. INTERVIEW

1388

Field Worker's name Robert W. Small

This report made on (date) November 17th, 1937

1. Name A. M. Kenny

2. Post Office Address Blackwell, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 712 N. 1st Street,

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month November Day 12 Year 1853

5. Place of birth Ohio

6. Name of Father G. W. Kenny Place of birth Indiana

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Minerva Branch Kenny 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 twelve.

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1888

Robert W. Small
Field Worker
November 17th, 1937

A. M. Kenny was born in Ohio, November 12th, 1853, and came to Hunnewell, Kansas, in the early part of 1881.

In May, 1881, Mr. Kenny began working for Mr. T. Horsely, a cattleman of that period, whose ranch comprised 25,000 to 30,000 acres of land extending from the Kansas state line on the north to the Chikaskia River in Oklahoma Territory on the south.

In May, 1881, Mr. Kenny helped drive 300 head of cattle from Shoe Fly creek to a section of country southeast of Kiowa, Kansas, in Oklahoma Territory where he remained with the cattle till the following November when they were driven back to the Horsely Ranch.

Mr. Kenny states that a wagon with an ox team hauled the provisions and camp equipment that accompanied the cattle and cowboys on the trip to the country near Kiowa, and that after the herd was located on their grazing grounds he and his cow pony were the substitutes used for a wire fence to enclose the herd. He rode the lines daily from May till November and held the cattle on the premises designated as

- 2 -

their grazing grounds.

Mr. Kenny states that the Cattlemen's Association maintained their headquarters at Caldwell, Kansas, and the Cherokee Government or Chief of the Cherokee Nation sent a man to Caldwell, and stationed him there to make contracts or issue permits to cattlemen who wished to obtain permission to use the grasslands of the Cherokee Strip for grazing purposes, and that permits were so issued upon the payment of the fee charged for such grazing purposes, which Mr. Kenny says was 15 cents per head for yearling cattle and 25 cents per head for older cattle.

Mr. Kenny states that about 1885, the owners of the various ranches began to fence their ranches with wire fences. The cowboys would hold the herds on their respective premises by riding the boundary lines constantly. Each ranch had its own brand, that was placed upon its stock, and most all cowboys knew every rancher's brand in the country and often assisted each other in returning stray cattle to their proper herd. Mr. Kenny worked for the Horsely Ranch for four years and then went to work for W. B. Helm on his ranch which lay on the south side of the Chikaskia River and comprised a section of country about seven miles in

- 3 -

width, east and west and about ten miles in length, north and south. The Chikaskia River, lying between the Horsely and Helm ranches, was the principal source of supply for water for the ranch stock of both ranches and neither ranch was permitted to fence or control all the river bed or water of that stream.

Mr. Kenny says that most of the larger ranches having 2,000 head of cattle or more would build dugouts for their camphouses and keep a cook employed to prepare meals for all hands working at the ranch as well as any visitors or strangers that called. On the largest ranches additional dugouts were constructed for the benefit of the cowboys, who happened to be working several miles away from the main camp at night or meal time.

Mr. Kenny says that the ranches kept a wagon for the exclusive purpose of hauling provisions for the ranch and that these wagons usually were drawn by a four-mule team, as the roads or trails were often bad in places, and it was sometimes necessary to drive across the prairies where no road or trail existed and sometimes over rough and difficult routes with a loaded wagon.

He says that their food at the ranch camps con-

- 4 -

sisted of flour, bacon, coffee, sugar, beef, beans, canned corn and tomatoes, evaporated fruit, etc.; that plenty of substantial food was usually kept on hand at all times.

The cowboys would take a few days off from work occasionally and go to Caldwell or some other town and spend a good part or all of their earnings in every kind of amusement the town afforded.

Mr. Kenny says that a general roundup was held about once each year, usually in June, when the cattle had shed sufficiently that their brands could be easily distinguished. In preparation for these roundups the Cattlemen's Association would select some person as Captain at the roundup in each district; this captain would supervise the work of the roundup in every particular, and his commands were obeyed to the last letter by everyone. Mr. Kenny says that each cowboy took four extra horses with him and that they were used for day work and one for night work or cattle-cutting work; usually, the night work horse being also used as a cutting horse. It took a year or longer to train a horse for night work with cattle and they were very valuable animals when trained for purposes of night work and cutting cattle.

- 5 -

Keeping the cattle together or on their own grazing lands after night was often a difficult matter, if the night horse was not well trained, but a good horse would round cattle in that were straying over the lines and put them back in the herd regardless of the darkness of the night. He did not pass by any cattle, but of his own accord would turn out of his path and bring them back into the herd. Likewise in cutting cattle from the big herds at roundups, when the cowboy rode into the herd to cut out a single animal the horse knew by a pull of the rein when he had reached the proper animal to be cut out and the cowboy had little else to do as the horse took the animal out in quick fashion.

Mr. Kenny says that at the general roundups a man known as a horse-wrangler was furnished to take care of all the cowboys' extra horses during the day time, but at night the latter had to hobble their own horses, and the next morning they had to round up and turn them over to the wrangler who looked after them throughout the day time, for all the cowboys and he often had quite a herd of horses to look after.

- 6 -

Almost every rancher in the country, or other persons owning any cattle anywhere near these roundups would all attend, in order that they might claim or repossess any stray cattle found in the roundups of the different districts that belonged to them or had their respective brand upon them; These roundups were held in each of the districts, as outlined by the Cattlemen's Association, once each year.

He says the cowboys usually slept in tents during the summer months or warm weather and in the dugout camp houses in winter or severely cold weather.

When a storm came up in the night time all hands at the camp had to saddle a horse and ride to the herds of cattle to hold them in the pastures of their respective grazing lands, as the cattle were inclined to drift with the storm and if not held in a herd they would scatter to the four winds and would be difficult to gather up again. He has seen the lightning knock riders from their horses and has helped resuscitate them on different occasions; and he has seen as many as ten or twelve head of steers killed by electric currents when they were drifted against a wire fence which transmitted the current from some place along the fence where the lightning had struck it.

- 7 -

Each cowboy was supplied with a book containing a list of all the different ranches and their brands that were placed upon stock.

Mr. W. B. Helm was one of the twelve Directors of the Cattlemen's Association, at Caldwell, Kansas. The association paid an annual rental of \$200,000.00 to the Cherokee Nation for the grass lands.

The Association kept a man stationed at Kansas City, Missouri, Chicago, Illinois, and St. Louis, Missouri, to inspect the cattle shipped in from Oklahoma Territory to any of those market points; this inspector occasionally found cars of mixed brands which usually was evidence of fraud or theft on the part of the shipper and resulted in the owner of each brand of stock so shipped being given credit for the amount that such stock sold for. These inspectors at the principal stock markets were very essential, because they prevented much cattle theft in the early days by their close inspection of all cattle shipped to these markets.

Sometimes cattle thieves would steal cattle and burn the brand on the cattle out with a larger brand.

In 1892 the ranch fences were removed and the cattle

- 8 -

that were marketable were shipped to market and the remainder removed to other grazing lands, all in preparation for the opening to settlement of the Cherokee Outlet.

Mr. Kenny's work for several years in the neighborhood of the Nez Perce Indian Reservation brought him in to occasional contact with the Nez Percés. He became rather familiar with their habits and customs as a tribe.

He says the Nez Perce tribesmen were intelligent and more industrious than those of many other tribes and that he never knew of their going out on begging expeditions among the white people of Kansas or elsewhere, as some tribes did. He also says that he never knew of them becoming intoxicated or causing disturbances of any kind.

He was personally acquainted with Yellow Bull, who was Chief of the Nez Percés until his death. Yellow Bull could talk good English and was a very intelligent Indian. The Nez Perce Tribe died off in great numbers on their reservation; they claimed climatic conditions were responsible for their great loss and finally appealed to the Government to allow them to be removed to their northern haunts, which was done, and Mr. Kenny says that he has had occasion to pass through their

- 9 -

Reservation north of Pocatello, in Idaho, and that they seem much more prosperous in every way in that country.

When the Nez Percés left their Reservation in this country, they left 80 new wagons which the Government had furnished them and Mr. Kenny says that when the Tonkawa Tribe came in to take up their abode on the abandoned lands of the Nez Percés, the Tonkawa Agent had the men take the wagons to pieces to store them a way for future use.

During this time, which was in 1885, Mr. Kenny was held up on account of high water for three days and he spent most of that leisure time around the Agency on the Chikaskia River, where the Indians were working on the wagons. He says he had quite a bit of conversation with a Tonkawa interpreter. This was a white man about twenty-five years of age and he told Mr. Kenny that the Indians had killed his parents and taken him and his baby sister into their camp and kept them; that he lived for thirteen years and never heard a word of English spoken; that his sister grew to womanhood and married a chief of the Tonkawas; that he had married an Indian woman; that he spent thirty-two days translating the Tonkawa language into English. Mr. Kenny says that the interpreter's wife died within a few years and that he left the Tribe and never returned again.

- 10--

An old lady, fair and white, except for her face which she paints, still lives in this community with the Tonkawa Tribe; she cannot speak or understand the English Language; she is said to be the widow of two former chiefs of the Tonkawa Tribe.

Mr. Kenny was also personally acquainted with Captain Payne and relates that Mr. Payne gave him a quarter section of land north of the present site of Breman, writing out the filing papers himself and giving them to Mr. Kenny. He says that Mr. Payne had a surveyor to survey lands for anyone joining the colony and desiring a homestead. Mr. Payne's colony at Rock Falls, on the Chikaskia River, had about 300 people living in tents. Only one frame building was constructed and that was for the printing press where a paper was printed. This building was burned by the soldiers, and it is said the soldiers threw the printing press into the Chikaskia River and took the colonists out, as well as Captain Payne. The colony lived at Rock Falls only a few months before the soldiers took them out; no attempt at farming was made according to Mr. Kenny's statement, but each of the colonists was eager to get a home in the Oklahoma country and were a loyal and respectable class of people. Captain Payne had made two previous attempts

- 11 -

to settle a colony near the present site of Oklahoma City on the North Canadian River, but each attempt was frustrated by the soldiers.

In the opening of the Cheyenne and Arapaho country to settlement, Mr. Kenny located a quarter section seventeen miles west of Hennesey, but found the land and every adjacent quarter section had nicely finished stakes driven on them with names of other men on them. Before he had left that section that man came in with wagons and teams loaded with timber for building their houses on the claims. He got no land there.

In the opening of the Cherokee Outlet he made the race from near Hunnewell, Kansas, and staked the N.E. $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 14, Twp. 27 N. Range 2 west. He built a small half dug-out and moved on the claim in November, 1895; he had several head of stock and hauled straw each Tuesday and Friday for the stock from Kansas; he kept up this hauling for two years regularly during the winter season.

Mr. Kenny had twelve men with him in the race for claims. They relied upon his knowledge of the country to take them to a good section in the quickest possible time; his wife followed in a wagon with provisions for twelve extra

- 12 -

men; they all reached a good section of country and obtained claims, although Mr. Kenny's horse gave out a half mile short of the spot he had in mind, but he drove his stake where he stopped and obtained a fine farm.

He later had nine contestants on his claim but got rid of all very easily except one that had filed by mail which cost him \$225.00 to satisfy, including attorney's fee.

Mr. Kenny still owns eighty acres of the old claim, although he does not live upon it.

He is a pleasant gentleman to meet; his conversation easy and explicit; the pioneer spirit and hospitality of the old days are still predominant characteristics.