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

LAMBE, GEORGE ELEXANDER INTERVIEW 10265

Field Worker's name Mrs. Nora L. Lorrin, El Reno, Oklahoma.

This report made on (date) March 15, 1938

1. Name Mr. George Elexander Lambe,
2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma.
3. Residence address (or location) Kobbins Addition, R.F.D.
4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month August Day 17 Year 1854
5. Place of birth Tyrone County, Ulster Province, Ireland.

6. Name of Father John Lemmy, (Irish way of ^{spelling} place of birth Ireland)

Other information about father Died in America.

7. Name of Mother Mrs. John Lemmy Place of birth Ireland

Other information about mother Died in America.

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 23.

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Mrs. Nora L, Lorrin,
Investigator,
March 15, 1938.

An Interview with Mr. George E. Lambe,
Robbins Addition,
El Reno, Oklahoma.

Mr. George Elexander Lambe was born in Tyrone County, Ulster Province, Ireland, August 17th, 1854. His father, John Lammy, (the name lambe is spelled lammy and is so pronounced in Ireland) was born in Ireland in 1820, the oldest of eleven children, and he and one of his sisters came to the United States in 1879 coming to Illinois and he went to work for a farmer in Illinois and stayed with him for six years. He then came to western Kansas to Comanche County. He proved up a rough claim out there. Everybody was leaving and everybody was starving. The land was thought to be no good which was more or less a fact. He was around that part of the country for very nearly two years. He left Comanche County and came to No-Man's-Land, in 1887. There was no law in that country and it was rough and tough and people came in there who had to get away from the law for even the Federal officers had no jurisdiction there then. Anyone could go in there

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and squat on a piece of ground, no one had any right to object, for it was a No-Man's-Land in fact as well as name.

While George Lambe was living in No-Man's-Land, he lived in the edge of Beaver City. He put up two small shacks. He had come from Illinois to Kansas in a covered wagon and he also made the trip from Kansas to No-Man's-Land in a covered wagon.

They sent representatives to Washington to try to get their land thrown open to settlement, so it could be considered a part of the United States but it was not opened until the Organic Act made it a part of Oklahoma Territory in 1890. The big cattlemen fought the issue hard, as they did not want any of the Oklahoma land opened to settlement. Mr. Lambe came to Fort Reno via covered wagon before the Opening on April 22, 1889. He drove to Fort Reno and then to a location on .. + is now Grand Avenue of El Reno and lined up with others along there. There were many more trees along the river at that time than there are today, but the rest of the country round about, including the site of El Reno, was

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just bare and empty prairie. There was grass along the river and in the draws high enough and thick enough to hide a horse in. Anyone found getting into the country before noon on the day of the Opening was taken out and not permitted to run at all, that is, if they were caught.

There was a line of men, women, girls, and kids lined up from the South Canadian River to a place north of Hennessey. A cannon was fired at Fort Reno for the starter. Mr. Lambe and a man of the name of Breadwood, afterward a representative from Beaver County, made the Run together. Both got claims. Mr. Lambe got a claim three or four miles east and a mile south of El Reno. He never filed on it. He returned to Beaver City for a short time after the Run. There was an editor at Beaver City of the name of Brown and a Presbyterian minister of the name of Overstreet. The latter had a son who became a doctor and practiced in Kingfisher. Mr. Lambe's claim that he took in the Run did not just suit him and he traded it for another that was located adjoining El Reno on the southeast at the end of Cavanaugh Street. He gave the other fellow \$76.00 to boot for it. When they made the trade neither

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of them had filed on their respective places and it was two months after the run. He had his teams and a plow and he went to plowing for everybody. He plowed the first furrow for Major Foreman and he plowed the first plowing on the Kickok's farm that later became the Kickok addition. He plowed also in the Jensen's addition.

He was plowing on the Hickock property when the three men in a spring wagon came and told him that they were going to start a town on Foreman's farm. The men at the head of the project were Rogers and MacDonald. One of these men asked Mr. Lambe if he would quit plowing and go with them to help with laying out the townsite. They had a tent and Mr. Lambe also had a tent. He had been making from \$6.00 to \$7.00 a day but decided to go with them, so went to Darlington and bought some cedar posts and brought them back to the prospective townsite and cut them into stakes while they were surveying the townsite and he had his working location about where the Austine Hotel is now located in the 200 block East Woodson Street. Mr. Lambe and the men with him advertised the sale of the lots extensively and they were put up for sale during the last

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days of May in 1889, about a month after the Opening. They offered to sell the corner lots for \$75.00 and the inside lots for \$50.00 apiece and all they could give in lieu of a title was a bond for a lot or a sort of promise to give you a deed if they ever did get a legal title to the property. The Government was not in on the proposition and Major Foreman had not proved up on his claim. The law stated that the land was opened to homestead only and in order to prove up and get the title to your claim you had to convince Uncle Sam that that was what you wanted the land for. Major Foreman, by starting his townsite before he had proved up on his claim and getting his title to it, automatically disqualified his claim on the land. While they were still surveying the ground and Mr. Lambe was making stakes, a woman and her two daughters moved into a tent nearby and cooked for the others of the working crew but in Mr. Lambe's own words, "I had me own tent and grub box and cooking utensils and done me own cookin'."

Rogers and Leal Evans ran a sort of a commissary store out at Fort Reno. They were out there a lot and spent a lot of time and money playing up to those officers working for

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a stand-in with the officers who were stationed out there. They were not doing right and the whole thing was pretty raw. Mr. Lambe went out there sometimes and they would give him a good meal. Neal Evans afterward moved to El Reno. Mr. Lambe was in El Reno the day they started to sell the lots; he had a barrel of water that he had provided for the people to drink. Rogers and the other men had promised Mr. Lambe the very best lots in town to pay him for the work that he had done for them. They did not pay him a cent in money. The tents or headquarters from which the sales were made were about where the jail is now or a little east of it. All the officers and most everybody else was in from Fort Reno the day of the sale. They named most of the streets after officers at the Fort. Bickford was named for an overland freighter who supplied the wood for the Fort and did other freighting for the Government. Wade was named after Colonel J. F. Wade, Commander at Fort Reno. London was also named for an officer at Fort Reno. Choctaw Avenue had another name at the start but when the Choctaw Railroad came through here

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the name of the street was changed to Choctaw Avenue. Foreman Street was named for Major John A. Foreman, the man whose claim formed the original townsite. Foster Street was named after a quartermaster of the Fifth Cavalry stationed at Fort Reno. Macomb Street was named for Lieutenant Macomb, troop B, Fifth Cavalry. Williams Street was named for W. G. Williams who used to run a ranch west of Minco and was called "Caddo Bill". Penn Street was named for a Lieutenant Penn, also stationed at the Fort. Rogers Street was named after one of the organizers of the townsite, Dr. R. C. Rogers, who was afterwards mayor of El Reno. Rock Island Street got its name from the Rock Island Railroad and the lots on either side of it were given as bonuses to the railroad in order to get it to come through El Reno. There are many more of the streets in El Reno that are named for Fort Reno people.

The Rock Island Railroad survey came through Pond Creek and ran through Reno City and on down straight through what is now Rock Island Street but the survey afterwards changed so that it missed Reno City. On the morning of the

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sale the whole Fort was there and monopolized the whole thing. The officers went into the tent and picked three or four of what they considered would be the best lots. It was just guess work, of course. Most people thought that Choctaw Avenue would turn out to be the main street and the officers chose many lots on this street. In all the survey Mr. Lambe had his own opinion as to which lots would be the most valuable and which streets would be best. Mr. Lambe got worried, as Mr. Rogers had promised him some of the best lots in town for his wages, and he went to Rogers and asked him to let him choose his lots before all the best ones had been taken. Rogers put him off, saying that he was too busy just then and told him to come back later. Mr. Lambe called again and they just kept making excuses and asking him to wait until he knew that they did not intend to keep their agreement with him. Finally, he went out of the tent intent on doing something about it. He talked with a friend, a Mr. Brown, who was from Beaver City and afterward postmaster of Oklahoma City, and asked Mr. Brown what he thought about it. Mr. Brown answered that it was a fraud and stated that the Government ought

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to handle it. Mr. Lambe knew that they were stalling and he and Mr. Brown and some other men from Beaver City took some stakes and went and staked some lots on their own account without their say-so.

Mr. Lambe staked two lots where the First National Bank now stands at 100 South Bickford Street. Mr. Brown staked two lots on the same street, but in the 100 block North Bickford Street on the east side of the street, just across the street northeast of Mr. Lambe's lots. There was no one on these lots and they had not been sold. Joe Perrin took two lots, also, just across the street north of his lots. The word was carried to the tent headquarters that George Lambe headed a bunch of "jumpers", so the selling stopped. About everybody and all of the officers came to where Mr. Lambe was on the lots which he had staked, and asked him what he was doing? Mr. Lambe told them that he did not want to cause any trouble but that these lots had been promised to him in payment for work which he had done in helping to lay out the townsite. They kept putting him off although he told them that these claims were not being taken legally and ^{that} one of these days the Government would

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take hold and throw the land open as Major Foreman had not proved up on his claim. These men were very angry and, all armed with six guns, were a rather formidable looking lot. Jack Stilwell, United States Marshal, was there and they asked him to put Mr. Lambe off the lots. Mr. Lambe told the marshal that the things they were doing were not legal and that he did not want anything that was not by rights his, but that he had as good a right to ask for protection as they had to try to put him off. He told them that he was on the lots first and the matter could be settled later in the courts and then if the court decided in their favor he would get off. Stillwell told the angry crowd of officers and gamblers that what Mr. Lambe said sounded reasonable and they were to let Mr. Lambe alone and that to protect Mr. Lambe was the only thing that Mr. Stillwell could do. So the officers, Rogers and MacDonald, went to their tent, and had a little meeting and decided to give Mr. Lambe and the men with him the lots they had staked, which they did, and gave Mr. Lambe and the men with him bonds for these claims. The man who

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was sent to compromise with Mr. Lambe and his companions was called "Curley haired McDonald" but he was no relation to the other McDonald. He was a kind of a lawyer; he got into a row later out in Blaine County and got killed. "Curly-haired McDonald" told Mr. Lambe what Rogers and the others were willing to do and they went to the tent and got their bonds. When this happened Major Foreman was gone. When he came back and they told him about it Major Foreman was good and mad and he said that Mr. Lambe and the men with him would have to give those lots back to him. Mr. Lambe and the others refused to give them back and then they tried to trade Major Foreman out of his lots but he would not trade. He held onto them and there was really nothing they could get for them. By that time there were tents up all over town. Mr. Lambe had some lumber on his lots and had a foundation for a house started and they came and carried the lumber into the street in an attempt to take his lots by force. Major Foreman and his crowd of officers and gamblers were armed; not all the guns were in sight but they were there just the same. Major Foreman and his men were trying to bluff or scare Mr. Lambe out,

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Jack Stillwell, the United States Marshal, was there. Mr. Lambe again explained matters to him and told him that the officers had given him a bond for the lots. Mr. Lambe told the Marshal that he did not think that the bonds were worth anything, but he was first on those lots, they owed the lots to him and that he wasn't going to get off. Mr. Lambe had a shot gun that he had loaned to a friend to take on a hunting trip and the man came back to town while the row was going on and he walked up to Mr. Lambe and handed the loaded shot gun to him. Major Foreman and Mr. Rogers threw up their hands and told Mr. Lambe that they did not want his lots, saying, "You can have them". Mr. Lambe hadn't even thought of using the gun. However, the gun spoke a language all its own which they evidently understood and Mr. Lambe wasn't bothered any more about the lots.

Reno City had about fifteen hundred or two thousand people in it and Mr. Lambe had to go either to Fort Reno or to Reno City to get his supplies before they got the stores going in El Reno. Reno City was about a mile north

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of the North Canadian River on the east side of the road. Mrs. J. E. Kelso of 811 South Hoff Street now owns the farm on which Reno City used to stand. Mr. Lambe went to Kingfisher and filed on the claim that is now known as the Vance Farm. Reno City had it in for El Reno people and they contested Major Foreman's filing and also the Jensen filing. A man of the name of Major Wass, a soldier of the Civil War, contested the Jensen claim and Angus McClain contested Major Foreman's claim. The Rock Island Railroad was coming south and was north of Concho quite a way and they changed the route and instead of coming through Reno City they angled off west of Concho and missed Reno City by a mile. A mile west of Reno City there was Indian land (Cheyenne and Arapaho) and Reno City could not build to the west or move west to get to the railroad. The railroad angled back east after crossing the river and came into El Reno at the north end of what is now Reno Avenue which leaves El Reno at the south end of Rock Island Street. Major Foreman and the others had a scheme that caused the Rock Island to come to El Reno

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giving them all the lots on either side of Rock Island Street, also a large cash bonus to get them to come to El. Reno. Reno City foolishly refused to donate anything, thinking that because the route was already surveyed they would not go to the expense of a re-survey.

Jensen turned his land over to a man of the name of Thompson, a saddle maker at the Fort. He filed on a strip of land on the west side of Choctaw Street. He was called Jimmie Thompson. He did not understand the homestead laws and he did not want to stay on his land or live on it. So he built a dugout and got a man of the name of Brady to live on it for him. This was a case of holding the claim down by proxy. Mr. Brady also worked at the Fort; he was as honest as the sun but he would take a drink.

Thompson sold eighty acres of his land to the Townsite company for \$1,000.00. Gamblers stood in with the Townsite company and they got the old man, Thompson, drunk and took his \$1,000.00 away from him. They seemed about to get his eighty acres that he had still away from him, also, when Brady filed a contest against Thompson in order to save the eighty acres for the old man.

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Mr. Lambe was a witness to the contest filing and went with Mr. Brady to Kingfisher when he filed the contest. On the way coming home, Brady told Mr. Lambe, "I am not going to drink a drop of whiskey until this contest is all settled." Had he kept his word, he might have lived many years longer than he did. The gamblers knew his weakness and they sent some men to his dugout with a bottle of whiskey with instructions to be very friendly and talk him into taking a drink. These gamblers acted real friendly, appearing to be the best of good fellows. Mr. Brady finally took a drink, then another and another and the gamblers kept talking to him, gradually beginning to quarrel with him. Mr. Brady was Irish and hot tempered and they finally got him fighting mad as was their intention in the first place and he knocked one of them down. A short time later a Marshal of the name of Charley Beers, Jacobs, Stanley and Thompson and some other people came to arrest Brady and take him prisoner for knocking the fellow down, which was just a subterfuge, of course. They had Winchesters and Brady saw them coming

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and knew what was up. He saddled his horse, aiming to go to the Fort and get away from them. They told him to surrender, but Brady paid no attention to them. They had no right to do it but two or three of them shot him down. Mr. Lambe and Tom Jensen got to him before he died and Mr. Lambe went to Fort Reno for the doctor. The doctor came and got there while Brady was still alive but ^{Brady} was shot in the stomach and he died before morning the day that he was shot. There was no dependable law in Oklahoma, especially in El Reno. Beers was one of the officers and he was one of the ones who did the shooting. They had to send to Oklahoma City for an officer and while waiting for the Oklahoma City authorities the police guarded the streets so that the men could not get away. The officers came in the morning; they took Charley Beers prisoner and Mr. Lambe went to him and told him that he had been appointed with some others to take him to Oklahoma City. Chalmers, Scales and "Curley haired McDonald" were with Mr. Lambe. Jacobs, Beers, and Stanley were the guilty men and they went peaceably enough. There was an old rooming house in Oklahoma

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City where the prisoners were kept in lieu of a jail. This was a tough place. The men were all armed, however. Stanley pulled out his gun and handed it over to Mr. Lambe. Mr. Lambe was not deputized, just appointed for the job. They sent to Kansas City for a United States Marshal for the trial and this man Jensen was a witness and "Curley haired McDonald" also. The prisoners were bound over for trial under bond and the trial was to be held in Wichita, Kansas. Shirley Chapman, a newspaper man from El Reno, a man of the name of Gunn, and Pat Connelly, a little Irishman, who was one of the men who took the whiskey to Brady in the first place but was not in on the plot, were among the witnesses. The men who were on trial brought a lot of influence to bear on the case. They went up there dressed in all their finery and had their wives and families with them or some one acting in that capacity and brought lawyers up from Texas for the defense. They were all tried together. The prosecution's main witness was the man Jensen, who bore down pretty hard on them in the trial in Oklahoma City but

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had changed his tune when the trial came up in Wichita, Kansas, and was mighty easy on them in Wichita. The trial resulted in a hung jury; there was another trial and they came clear. They made two trips to Wichita. Mr. Lanbe was living at the time on the farm east of El Reno, now known as the "Vance" farm. The shooting occurred in the latter part of 1889 as there was snow on the ground when Brady was shot. Mr. Lambe had moved to his farm and had built a small box house on it. This is now used as a wash house by the Vances. In the meantime, he had sold his two lots to a man of the name of Jolimka, receiving \$200.00 for them. He used this money to build the house he was living in when all this happened. He lived in this house for ten years. The contest on the Foreman place was still pending in court. Jensen lost his place but by compromising with Wass was given a part of his land and he put it in the name of his brother-in-law, whose name was McCrocket. Foreman's contest was still going on but he in some way got a final receipt. They contested his patent and he lost everything. They decided the whole thing was a fraud, that the land was

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Government land and declared the whole thing open to settlement as a Government townsite and they sent Commissioners from Washington to over-see it. The people who had stayed with their property and made improvements on their lots were given deeds to them by the Government.

The next morning there were two or three thousand people here in El Reno, staking and jumping lots. If there were no improvements on a lot and the prior owner was absent he simply lost his property. It was Saturday and people staked lots all day Sunday. They gave Major Foreman a portion of his land, the northeast part of it. The Presbyterian Church is standing on some of the land that he got; Major Foreman gave this ground to the Presbyterian Church.

Reno City saw that she was beaten, for El Reno had the railroad and was a Government town. Reno City started to build another town nearer to the railroad and north, calling it El Reno, and tried very hard to get the post office but this plan did not work. A good many of the people left Reno City and went to other places and some of them came to El Reno, among them, Wass and McClain. Reno City had a very

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large hotel, considered a very fine building by early day standards. After Reno City was doomed this hotel was moved to El Reno and a temporary bridge had to be built across the river in order to get it across. This hotel was about three months making the trip and it was moved to the corner of Rock Island and Wade Streets and it stood for years on the southwest corner where the Magnolia Filling Station is at 300 South Rock Island.

The Caddo Hotel was run by a woman and the building was torn down and moved away in 1916 or '17. Everything went along pretty smoothly but for about two years the deeds were pretty shaky and because of that fact, Oklahoma City got a two years head start on El Reno in growth. People would come to El Reno to buy lots, intending to settle here and then would find out about the shaky titles to the land. They would then go on over to Oklahoma City where things were more secure, if possibly less exciting. Mr. Lambe stayed with El Reno because of his farm. He put out a very nice peach orchard and raised some wonderful peaches. He sold the place to a man of the name of Hobbs, receiving

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\$4,500.00 for it in 1898 or '99. His father and an uncle lived near Wellington, Kansas, and Mr. Lambe went there and bought two hundred acres of land but he had the Oklahoma fever. In 1902 he sold his land and visited with his relations in Illinois where he first came when he came to the United States.

He went back to Wellington and later he went to the World's Fair, held at St. Louis, Missouri, in 1904. He was there for about six months. The present "Elks Building" in El Reno was the "Oklahoma Building" at the St. Louis World's Fair. Mr. Lambe had his picture taken on the steps of the Oklahoma building with Governor Ferguson and his wife. Governor Ferguson's wife was the editor of a paper at Watonga and they were living at Watonga when Ferguson was elected Governor of Oklahoma.

In January, 1905, Mr. Lambe came back to El Reno and bought the building where the Davis Electric Company is now located at 109 South Bickford. He also bought the store on the south of it. These buildings were only built about eighty feet long: he took them on out to the alley and put

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steel ceilings in them and these improvements cost about \$20,000.00. Mr. Lambe lived there in the upper part of the corner building for about fifteen years, renting office rooms up-stairs and in the downstairs part there was a pool hall, a movie and the Bechton and Wheeler Clothing Company. A few of the persons who had offices in his building were Dr. Catto, Dr. Dever, and Judge Lowe.

When they were building the City Hall Mr. Lambe had all the City Dads up in his building. Mr. Lambe sold this business building and went into the oil business. He went out west of Calumet and got six or seven thousand acres of oil leases and tried to drill an oil well at Calumet and sank \$5,000.00 out there. He dug the well three thousand six hundred feet deep, couldn't go any deeper, and got no oil. He went into the oil business deeper and deeper, finally "going broke." In the meantime, between building and buying on the installment plan, he had about fifteen or sixteen houses built when the panic came. The railroad men could not pay their rent, he could not meet the installments on his property and lost it all. He then

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bought the place where he is now living. Mr. Lambe has never been married.