

THOMAS, W. H.

INTERVIEW

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

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Field Worker's name John E. Daugherty

This report made on (date) January 3, 1938 1938

1. Name W. H. Thomas

2. Post Office Address Sulphur, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) Route 2.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month August Day 4 Year 1867

5. Place of birth _____

6. Name of Father F. R. Thomas Place of birth Georgia

Other information about father Farmer

7. Name of Mother Sallie Beaver Place of birth Texas

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

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Daugherty, John F. - Investigator.
Indian Pioneer History. # S-149
January 3, 1938.

Interview with W. H. Thomas.
Sulphur, Oklahoma.

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Life of a Cowboy in the Early Days.

My parents were F. R. Thomas, born in Georgia, and Sallie Beaver Thomas, born in Texas. Father was a farmer. There were thirteen children in our family. I was born in Texas, August 4, 1867.

I moved to the Indian Territory with my parents in 1887. We stopped at Purcell for about a month, finally locating at Alex on the Washita River in ~~old~~ Pontotoc County, Chickasaw Nation. There was a post office there, the mail being brought from Pauls Valley on a horse every other day. We traded at Old Fred's Trail Store, where Chickasha now stands. The Comanche-Chickasaw line was four miles west of this old store. There was nothing between Chickasha and Anadarko except Indian tepees, and not many of these.

I got a job as a cowboy with Dillard Fant. He had the Government issue contract from Red River to the pres-

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ent site of Enid. We trailed ten thousand yearlings each year from the Gulf of Mexico to the Indian Territory. I worked from Alex to Anadarko. Mr. Fant always rode in a buckboard, not liking to ride horses. He didn't allow the boys to make the cattle trot for they lost pounds of fat when they trotted. We tried to keep them from becoming excited about anything and kept them moving slowly. They were very hard to pen; when we wanted to pen them to ship, we had what we called the lead cow. We would stake her until we got the bunch we wished to put in the pen cut out, and rounded up, then one of the boys would untie the lead cow and start on a gallop with her toward the pen. The others would follow and thus we soon had them all in the pen. It was very difficult to drive them into a pen without the lead cow.

I remember one night in November we were driving a herd of 2250 cattle to Enid to ship. We bedded them down about where Hennessey now stands. The sun was shining brightly when we stopped and it was as pleasant as a day in spring. I always worked on the shift that went on at midnight. A short time after dark the wind shifted to the north and it was not long before it was blowing a gale.

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The cattle began to drift. The boys who were working came and asked us to help hold them. Cattle always try to run from a storm and when a balmy breeze is blowing they try to go toward it. Those are two times when it is very difficult to drive a herd of cattle. We finally got them under control, but they refused to lie down. At last the first crew told us we could go to bed because they felt sure they could hold the herd.

We had a tarpaulin on which we spread our blankets and put our feet toward the wind, and then pulled part of the tarpaulin over us. Two cowboys slept together in the winter. This kept us warmer than if we slept singly. When we were awakened at midnight I was almost smothered. The tarpaulin was over our heads. When we scrambled out, we found that we were covered with a blanket of snow. We went on duty. The cattle were still milling. Finally we drove them into a canyon where they were protected from the north wind, built a big brush fire south of them and soon they were all lying down. Fire will always stop cattle if they are trying to get away. These were Circle Dot and Half Moon cattle.

We had three hundred fifty saddle horses in our camp. Nearly every night the Comanche Indians stole horses from

our camp. They always took horses belonging to the boys, but seldom took the Company's horses. They could tell, on the darkest nights, which horses belonged to the company. They held these horses for rewards, nearly always asking \$2.00 or \$3.00 for the return of each horse. One day as I was riding toward Kingfisher I happened to ride into a bunch of Kiowas with some of our horses. I decided that I would recover the horses, but I didn't know exactly how to go about it. I saw one Indian sawing wood near his tepee. I rode over to him and said: "John, I want to stay in your tepee tonight". He looked at me a moment, then turned back to his sawing without saying a word. I was beginning to think I would have to look elsewhere for lodging when he said: "Wahoo boy" (meaning cowboy) "want to stay in sit-down - get down". He told me where to put my horse and got me some corn for him. I stood around watching him saw wood until supper time. He got a gallon bucket of water, went into the tepee, fixed the fire. He stood several sticks of wood lengthwise letting them touch at the top, pulled the flus on top of the tepee with a string to draw the smoke up and there wasn't a bit of smoke in the tepee. It went through the hole at the top of the tepee, just as if it were

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a chimney. He crossed his feet and sat down by the fire. He mumbled something to his daughters. They handed him some potatoes which he boiled. He sat there and held the bucket over the fire while the potatoes boiled. Then he fried some slices of bacon. Their food was issued by the Government. We ate, he and I, and then we went outside the tepee and the wife and daughters cooked and ate their supper. There was an old squaw there who had a badly scarred face. The daughters wore cotton dresses and spoke English very well. I asked them how the woman's face became so terribly disfigured. They replied that she suffered much with headaches and she pricked her head and face with the prongs of a fork, believing that eased the pain from her headaches.

We went to bed early. The beds were made of dogwood sticks fitted between two poles for railings. They were about a foot deep. Blankets and quilts were spread over these. I slept in there with the old Indian, his wife, the old squaw, a young man, his wife and baby. The tepee was full of sleepers when we all got to bed. But I was very weary and soon fell asleep. I ate breakfast with them the next morning. I said: "John, did you bring those horses here?" He answered that he did not, but he knew who did.

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I told him to ask the Indian what he wanted for them. He went to another tepee and they talked for some time; when he returned he said the man wanted \$3.00 each for these horses

I said: "That's too much, he can just keep the horses". Soon he went again to the Indian. This time when he returned he said I could have the horses for \$2.00. I told him I couldn't pay that, but I would give him \$1.00 apiece for them. The Indian finally consented, but I had nothing to pay him with, only a check, so I told him I would go to Kingfisher and return for the horses that afternoon. This I did. When I paid \$1.00 for each one he turned them over to me, and I returned to camp with them.)

A boy of the name of Blake and ten other cowboys, who worked for Mr. Houston, were in the Comanche country. About noon one day they were several miles from their camp. They happened on to a Comanche camp. One of the boys suggested they eat with the Indians. When they rode up to the camp one of the Indians said: "Get down, Wahoo boys". The boys got off their horses. An old Indian handed them some bread, made something like pan cakes, but fried in tallow. The Comanches wouldn't eat hog meat nor lard. There was a pot of meat boiling over a fire. They walked over to this and

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began pulling pieces of it out with their knives. They ate all they wanted, believing it to be beef. One of them found a dog's claw on a piece he was about to eat. He ate no more, but slipped the claw into his pocket. He let the others eat until they were satisfied, then they got on their horses and rode away. They began to talk about the good beef they had just eaten, when this boy asked them if they realized that what they had eaten was dog instead of beef. They laughed at him, thinking he was joking. He convinced them, however, when he produced the dog claw which he had slipped into his pocket. The others became sick immediately, and soon got rid of the dog meat. They didn't care to eat with the Indians again.

My brother-in-law rode a pony express in Texas from San Angelo west one hundred miles. He changed horses every twenty miles. It took ten hours to make the run. He was killed on the first National Bank lot in Tecumseh, at the opening of the townsite. He had gotten off his horse and was driving a stake on this lot when a man's horse struck him, knocking him about twenty-five feet. The crowd was so excited that several ran over him before a soldier picked up his body. He was dead when taken into

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a nearby tent.

El Reno, Fort Reno, and Reno City were all located within a radius of six miles when the Rock Island Railroad was put through in the '90s. There was a bitter fight between the three towns for the county seat. El Reno won and thus became one of the principal cities of Oklahoma.

I married Mittie, the daughter of R. M. Rountree at Tuttle, in 1902. Mr. Rountree was a big cattleman in the early days. We are the parents of nine children.

Carl Giles worked for me two years on the Johnson Ranch at New Castle.