

THORNTON, SYLVESTER

INTERVIEW

7784

487

THORNTON, SYLVESTER

INTERVIEW

7784

Form A-(S-149)

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

Field Worker's name Lula Austin

This report made on (date) October 11 193 7

1. Name Sylvester Thornton

2. Post Office Address Burant, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 705 North 3rd

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month August Day Year 1853

5. Place of birth Arkansas

6. Name of Father Nedum A. Thornton Place of birth Tennessee

Other information about father white

7. Name of Mother Jane Low Place of birth Arkansas

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 4

THORNTON, SYLVESTER

INTERVIEW

7784

Lula Austin,
Interviewer,
October 11, 1937.

An Interview with Mr. Sylvester Thornton,
705 N. 3rd., Durant, Oklahoma.

I lived near the Arkansas line during the Civil War. My father went to War and I was the oldest boy and my mother depended on me to help her.

The first year of the Civil War, the soldiers took our two mules and we had to make a crop with one poor horse hitched to a homemade plow stock. I rode the horse and mother laid off the land. The second year the soldiers took our horse and we made a crop with a steer. The third year the Northern Soldiers gave us a four year old mule that was so poor it could hardly walk. We never started our crop until the grass came as we had no feed for the stock. We only planted three acres of cotton and two acres of oats. We did not break the land; we just planted in furrows.

We were between two armies for our neighbor west of us went to the Northern side. My mother's brother, Kyle Low,

THORNTON, SYLVESTER

INTERVIEW

7784

- 2 -

was on the Northern side; he would hide out in the daytime and come out and work his crop at night. The Southerners ^{would} come in and scout around for the Northerners. When they would ask Aunt Lizzie where Ryle was she would say, "Well, he was here last night and worked in the field". They knew where he was but as he never bothered anyone or stole from his neighbors they left him alone. Both sides knew he was hiding out. He was fifteen miles from our house and during the four years of war he never came near us.

We had to hide our food in a hollow log and get it at meal time; we had very little to eat and it was a year after the war before we had flour. It was a dark flour called Cart Wheel flour. We had one barrel the first two years and the third year we had another barrel.

There was an old water mill a few miles from us where we had our meal ground. When the water was low it would take all day to grind a bushel. The first cotton gin I remember seeing was operated by eight steers. Our double shovel was made out of wood.

THORNTON, SYLVESTER INTERVIEW 7784

- 3 -

I would sit with my mother at night after we had worked all day. She would spin and weave and I would card the batts.

The soldiers would charge a house, tearing down the rail fence and take all the food and clothing. We would later find clothes in the woods. I had no pants so mother sewed a tail to my shirt and that was what I wore. I was eight years old when I had my first shoes. It took twelve months to tan the leather; they used red oak bark, they would peel it off and make ooze. There was an old woman named Riddle and a man named Bennett who made shoes in our neighborhood. The pegs were made from maple trees.

I helped to survey the Indian Territory. The township lines were run out before we commenced. The crew I was in was surveying the sections. There were twenty men in every camp. Many grafters were here during the survey, getting the lay of the good land. I worked with the surveying crew for three years and six months.

THORNTON, SILVESTER

INTERVIEW 7784.

- 4 -

When I moved to Durant in 1889, I built a one room picket house, 14x16, and made my furniture which consisted of a bed, table and chairs made from pine lumber. It was the fall of the year when I moved here. I bought five hundred pounds of hog meat from John O'Riley for .05 cents a pound and only gave him my word to work for him in the spring for \$1.00 a day to pay him. This I did and I worked for him many years after that.

I was on my way to Arkansas with a bunch of horses to sell and arrived in Goodland at the time they were making a large payment to the Indians. I sold all the horses at a good profit. I paid \$15.00 for one little pony which I traded in Bennington for a mare, selling the mare to an Indian in Goodland for \$125.00.