

VROOMAN, J. H.

INTERVIEW

10147

427

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

VROOMAN, J. H.

INTERVIEW

10147

Field Worker's name Robert W. Small

This report made on (date) March 2, 1938

193

1. Name J. H. Vrooman

2. Post Office Address Tonkawa, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 402 North 11th Street

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month November Day 15 Year 1867

5. Place of birth Ohio

6. Name of Father J. M. Vrooman Place of birth Ohio

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Amelia Cook Vrooman Place of birth England

Other information about mother Came to America alone at the age of
18 years.

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 _____

VROOMAN, J. H.

INTERVIEW

10147

429

Investigator, Robert W. Small
March 2, 1938

Interview with J. H. Vrooman,
Tonkawa, Oklahoma.

I was born November 15, 1867, in Ohio, and at the age of thirteen came with my father's family who settled in Dickinson County, Kansas.

In the spring of 1892 I got on the train and went to Kingfisher and the next morning I hired a livery team, two horses with buggy, and a driver to take me to Watonga. We stayed overnight and the next morning we drove on to "G" County, nowuster County, a distance of about thirty miles from Watonga, where I selected a homestead tract situated three miles west of the present site of Thomas. I returned to Kingfisher and filed on the land selected. I paid the man \$10.00 for his time and the use of the livery rig for the trip, out of which he paid his share of hotel bills and for horse feed.

I set to work on the new claim and broke out fifteen acres of the sod land and built a dugout to live in. I didn't have to dig any well for a neighbor dug one on my

-2-)

land by mistake and I used it. I had a wagon and team but no cows, chickens or hogs.

I did most of my trading at Kingfisher, which was a distance of about sixty miles from my homestead. As I was then a single man I was not able easily to keep very large supplies of provisions. I lived on a little fat bacon, flour, meal, coffee, sugar, sorghum, and occasionally butter and a few other items.

When I selected my homestead - also selected one for my uncle who was a Civil War veteran and he filed on it and soon moved out onto the claim.

In the fall of 1893 I planted fifteen acres to wheat which was the only crop I did that year or the following year of 1894 and the wheat made a very fair yield. The years following I planted mostly corn and kauffir which made a fair turnout for a year or two and then not much better for a number of years.

In 1893 my uncle and I bought a second-hand sawmill which we put up at Rogers, later moving it to Burnett's Creek and again to another location. We sawed lumber from cottonwood, oak, cedar and walnut timber; mostly cotton-

VROOMAN, J. H.

INTERVIEW

10147

-3-

tonwood as that was a growth native to most every section of country along the streams of western Oklahoma. Oak was not so plentiful but there was some very nice timber of that kind in different places. Cedar grew in abundance in some of the rough sections where canyons were numerous. A few large walnut trees were found along the larger streams and some excellent lumber was made from them. The cottonwood and oak lumber was used by the people to build houses, barns, sheds, etc. The cedar lumber was used for flooring in some of the little frame dwellings, but not all. The walnut lumber was sold at different places, and occasionally it would be used about some improvement on some homestead.

We employed four men in addition to my uncle and me and we operated the sawmill almost constantly. We paid the hands \$1.25 per day except the Sawyer whom we paid \$2.00 per day.

Prior to my work in the sawmill business I bought a second-hand thresher; a horse-power machine, which I used for two seasons in threshing wheat and kaifir over the country, never going farther than ten miles from my home to thresh. I used twelve head of horses on the thresher

VROOMAN, J. H.

INTERVIEW

10147

-4-

crew and we threshed from one hundred to two hundred bushels of grain a day. I paid my help \$1.00 a day for single hands and \$2.00 per day where they furnished a team. It was sometimes difficult to get the thresher into some of the rougher sections of country as roads were very dim trails and often there was no road at all.

When some part of the threshing machine broke or got out of repair we usually held a caucus of the workers and after each one had offered his best suggestions for repairing the broken part we decided whose plan was the better and proceeded to mend it accordingly. A quantity of wire, bolts, nuts, etc., were usually carried along to enable us to make speedy adjustment, though occasionally a trip would have to be made to some distant point to buy some new part that was beyond our inability to repair.

In 1898 I built a two-room house on my claim from native lumber I had sawed, then I carried and moved into the new home.

The eastern part of " " county was a herd law district while the western part was free range; I had to fence my pastures for stock as did my neighbors and others in the

WROOMAN, J. H.

INTERVIEW

10147

-5-

herd law district, but our crops or cultivated lands were not fenced as a rule.

In 1893 a school district was laid out but we had no school house for some time and then it was a dugout that was made. The people of my neighborhood attended Sunday school and church at Seven Oaks, a neighboring district that had a school house.

People of this section had moved in slowly through the first few years and they came from various states and places; their customs and manners were somewhat varied but they all came to know one another and adapted themselves to the customs that were being established in the country in a very agreeable way. Most of the early settlers were poor people but intent on seeking a home where they might have an opportunity to enjoy a little freedom that they had not been accustomed to as tenant farmers in other states. They lived chiefly on what they produced on their lands and from wild game in the country which consisted of lots of prairie chicken and rabbits, a few wild turkeys and occasionally a deer or antelope. When the yields of grain and vegetables were light their living

-6-

was more meager. They had but little money to buy anything with and they traded and managed in various ways to secure anything that they could use as food.

beans, potatoes, onions, cabbage, turnips, etc., were grown and carefully harvested or canned for food. Nothing was allowed to waste or deteriorate but it was preserved.

Many would have dried apples or peaches shipped to them by relatives who lived in the older states where such fruit was raised in abundance and was very cheap.

Through the years the country gradually filled up with an occupant on every quarter-section of land and as it developed, towns and villages sprang up over the country. Roads were placed on section lines and worked; railroads were built into most every section; good schools were established; better stock was raised; more modern machinery was used in farming, and in every way advancement was made.

In 1907, it sold for \$3,000.00, since which time it has been valued at several thousand more.