

WALKER, JOHN W.

INTERVIEW

#4147

388

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

WALKER, JOHN W. INTERVIEW

4147

Field Worker's name Anna R. Barry

This report made on (date) May 17, 1937

1. Name John W. Walker

2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 230 North L. St.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month April Day 17 Year 1866

5. Place of birth Lee County, Iowa

6. Name of Father J. H. Walker Place of birth Indiana

Other information about father \_\_\_\_\_

7. Name of Mother Rebecca Walker Place of birth Indiana

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 six sheets.

WALKER, JOHN W. INTERVIEW

4147

Barry, Anna  
Field Worker  
May 17, 1937

My father, mother and brother made the run from Kingfisher on April 22, 1889, locating near the little town of Frisco in Canadian County. This town was situated in the valley of the North Canadian River, about two miles northwest of the present day El Reno. At that time I was in Nebraska, but my brother kept writing for me to come and help him on the farm. Later I decided to join him.

A brother-in-law of mine in Nebraska was also moving to El Reno. On May 20, 1891, he chartered a boxcar from the railroad to bring his cattle, horses, farm implements, and a few household goods to the new land. He, of course, was permitted to ride free of charge with his stock. Well, after the car was loaded out and ready to make the journey, I climbed in and hid, thinking how lucky I was to get such a <sup>free</sup> ride to the new country.

For about two hundred miles everything went just fine. Then we pulled into a little station to be side-tracked for a passenger train due to come by in a few minutes. The brakeman caught me and told me to get off the train and do it in a hurry. I did so, but I had a plan. By the time the passenger train pulled in I had bought a ticket for the next station down the

WALKER, JOHN W. INTERVIEW

4147

- 2 -

Line. Then, when the slower freight train came through, I hopped on once more, and this time luckily arrived at El Reno without further difficulty.

When I came to Canadian County everything was new and undeveloped; the plow had just turned small fields of the prairies, and works of improvement were scarcely begun. My folks lived in a tent until they built a small frame house twelve by fourteen feet, which had two small windows and a door. Our furniture consisted of two beds, a small table, a cook stove and two boxes or blocks serving as chairs. We had a good well of water. Our wood came from the banks of the North Canadian River, two miles from our home. People worked hard in those days, getting up at five o'clock in the morning and working until late at night.

We raised wheat, corn, potatoes, turnips, and lots of watermelons. I have hauled many a load of watermelons to El Reno, usually receiving ten cents apiece for the large ones. We raised many chickens, and had a good garden.

I often worked eight hours for \$1.00 and cut and hauled stove wood, for which I received from 75 cents to \$1.00 the load. A sack of flour cost 70 cents then. I would sometimes spend 5 cents for a loaf of bread which

WALKER, JOHN W. INTERVIEW

4147

- 3 -

was my dinner for the day - from daylight until after dark, when I reached home. With the remaining 25 cents I purchased sugar and coffee for house needs.

As the first ten years drew to a close, better yields of wheat were seen, and better prices.

Crop failures in the first few years in Oklahoma were due more to faulty time reckoning and planting than to lack of rain or severity of climate. Few settlers, for example, realized how far south they had come and how much the seasons varied from those they were used to, and, therefore, how differently the crops must be planted and raised.

El Reno became not only a good primary wheat market, it began to develop its flour milling industry as well. And it rapidly became the distribution center for agricultural implements and machinery.

Every pioneer remembers the huge drawing for land that took place in 1901 when people by the thousands flocked into El Reno, the crowd increasing every hour as the time drew nearer. The streets were filled, jammed. A faker of some sort had taken over each street corner - one selling prize-package soap; another, a patent medicine; a third was setting forth the virtues of a patented bridle; and a fourth had for sale, cheaply gotten up maps of Oklahoma, professing to show the most desirable locations for people who intended

WALKER, JOHN W. INTERVIEW

4147

- 4 -

to settle. The so-called hotels were filled to overflowing. Men slept in depots, in stores - anywhere a place could be found in which to unroll the pair of blankets which everyone carried.

Each saloon had its gambling tables, and the clink of glasses and rattle of chips would mingle with the long-drawn-out snores of some Boomer stretched out beneath the table, or huddled in a corner, to snatch a few hours rest. Every day added variety to the excitement and numbers to the waiting multitude, hungry for land and homes.

The first automobile was brought to El Reno in 1900 by T. F. Hensley, an early-day newspaper publisher. How well I remember the first day it appeared! I happened to be in a barber shop when I noticed a crowd gathering outside, yelling at the top of their voices. I ran out into the street. What a sight! A horseless buggy chugging down the street at the breakneck speed of twelve miles an hour, scaring horses, dogs, and human beings. The machine seated four passengers and was the talk of the town. In the evenings when Mr. Hensley would take it out for a drive up and down the city streets, people would come from miles around, bringing their children to see the famous horseless carriage.

WALKER, JOHN W. INTERVIEW

4147

- 5 -

In those early days we supported the principles of square deal and fair play; we had a strict sense of honor in all business affairs. A man's simple word was as good as his bond and no such thing as a note or security was ever required. However, at the time of the big Indian payments, many white men of bad character and evil motives would arrive in El Reno, some of them bringing doped liquor to use on the Indians who had a weakness for strong drink, in order to get the money away from them. Some Indians had never used alcohol and would be intoxicated for the first time in their lives, and go on sprees lasting several days. The young bucks would all spend recklessly. Some bought ponies and saddles, bright blankets, bridles, Winchester rifles and other types of firearms. They would decorate their horses and ride madly over the wild prairies.

There were times during these years -- even while business was bustling in Frisco, our nearest town -- when most of the farmers of the country around had to endure hardships and want. Then it became necessary for the United States Government to send in relief supplies of salt pork, flour and beans. Judge Canon issued these gifts of Uncle Sam to the needy.

WALKER, JOHN W. INTERVIEW

4147

- 6 -

One outstanding event was an Indian scare which I well remember. Most of the citizens of our town were attending a revival meeting when a blacksmith rushed in, breaking into the minister's prayer, shouting that the Indians had broken out. The women and children were quickly rushed into the Canon-Kelker stone building, and cotton-bale breast-works were thrown up around it. The old soldiers organized and patrolled the streets. A man was posted as sentinel in the top of a tree north of the North Canadian River. Of course, the uprising was entirely a false alarm; the rumor started from some trouble with a drunken Indian at Fort Reno.

In later years I bought my brother's claim; then sold it and bought property in El Reno.