

WALTERS, COLONEL ELSWORTH. THIRD INTERVIEW 13230

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

WALTERS, COLONEL ELSWORTH. THIRD INTERVIEW. 13230

Field Worker's name Charles H. Holt

This report made on (date) March 10 1933

1. Name Colonel Elsworth Walters

2. Post Office Address Skedee, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month August Day 21 Year 1865

5. Place of birth Illinois

6. Name of Father A. Walters Place of birth New York

7. Name of Mother Irene Huckins Place of birth Illinois

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 _____

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Charles H. Holt
Investigator
March 10, 1938.

Interview with Colonel Elsworth Walters
Skedee, Oklahoma.

My parents had settled on a claim in Illinois, built their barn first and were living in it while the house was under construction. I was born in this stable in 1865.

My father was working for the Government in the construction of Fort Leavenworth before the Civil War, and when the War was declared the Government kept him on the construction work instead of sending him in line.

After the close of the Civil War Father was sent in to the Territory by the Government to teach the Cherokee Indians how to farm. To be exact, the date of his entrance into the Territory was April 5, 1866, when I was eight months old.

Father had a very close friend, Colonel Elsworth, who was killed in the Civil War, while attempting to take a flag off the top of a hotel at Pittsburg Landing. I was named for this friend.

In those days one had to have a permit from the Government to come into the Indian country, and the permit issued

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my family was among the first, if not the first, permit issued by the Government to white people to live in the Territory. The permit is still in the possession of our family. Father, in moving to just east of Choteau where he was to be stationed to teach the Cherokees to farm, was moved in by the soldiers. The Government had built a cabin for our family to live in and this is where I grew to manhood.

My early schooling was given to me by my parents as there were no white people in the vicinity except soldiers. My playmates were Indians and my parents had a hard time getting me to speak the English language. I went on many hunts, campings and dances with the Indians, sometimes would be gone for weeks. I learned to speak several Indian languages and even today find it very helpful to me.

My roaming and association with the Indians soon gave me a great knowledge of their customs and habits, also I learned the surrounding country for a great distance in every direction. With this knowledge I began at the age of fourteen years acting as guide and interpreter for officers trailing criminals into the Territory from other states.

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However this work was not solicited by me or my father. It came about this way. Three officers were trailing four men who had robbed a bank in Iowa and they had tracked the robbers to near our cabin when the track was lost where a herd of horses had been driven over the trail, blotting out the foot prints of the robbers' horses. The officers came to our cabin for information and Father informed the officers that the country on south was much rougher than what they had already come through. The officers asked Father to go with them on the trail of the outlaws.

Father told them that he did not know the country any great distance and that he could not be of much assistance as a guide, but that I knew the country and could go with them if they would like for me to. The officers seemed a little slow in deciding to take me but asked me if I would like to go, and if so they would give me \$1.00 per day. I said, "Sure I'll go," and went at once to saddle my horse, thinking what a break I was getting to earn some money, which opportunity I seldom had. My .44 saddle rifle was strapped on the saddle and the picking up of the lost trail of the robbers was started.

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A part of one shoe of one of the robbers' horses had been broken off, the officers told me and after making inspection in different directions from where the trail was lost it was picked up again and was quite easy to follow. After traveling several miles we were not far from an Indian camp or village so we stopped at this village to see if the Indians had seen the outlaws and ^{how} long before us the robbers were. When we rode up to the camp the Indians greeted me and after my inquiry and description of the robbers I was told that they were seen in the late afternoon before going south, and had gone around the south point of a distant hill. The officers, after asking me what the Indians had told me, seemed to be quite pleased as they could not talk to the Indians.

Continuing the trail as the Indians had directed for some fifteen or twenty miles we found ourselves near another Indian village. We stopped and inquired and a young Indian in his early twenties had just got in from a hunt from about twenty-five miles below and said he had seen four men of that description, the day before, set up camp in a certain canyon.

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This country was rough and there were many such canyons in those parts, making it hard for the Indian to give directions as to where the robbers were. The officers told me to ask the Indian if he would go with us and show them the location of the robbers and to tell him that they would pay him \$2.00. The Indian was overjoyed at the chance to make some money as he very seldom had such a chance. He rounded up a fresh pony, as his regular pony was tired out from the hunt he had just returned from, and, leading the way, soon galloped to near where he had seen the robbers camped.

Our party of five dismounted and, going on foot, the Indian and the three officers slipped to the head of the canyon where the Indian showed them in the distance the robbers and their camp. Returning to their horses a decision had to be reached as to how to capture the robbers without loss of life. It was late in the afternoon and it was agreed upon to wait until the robbers went to sleep. After dark one officer slipped down the brink of the canyon just above the robbers', watched there for some time and found they were preparing to go to sleep after which he returned to where the horses and the rest of our party were.

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The plan for the capture was for one officer to go in front and , if possible get directly on the robbers before making a sound. The robbers were in very plain view from the side of the canyon. There being four robbers, and five in our party, the officer in the lead had no certain man to cover, but the other two officers, the Indian and I were given a designated robber to cover.

Advancing slowly in Indian fashion on the robbers we got up within a few feet and the order was given to surrender and the robbers were captured without firing a shot. I did not realize the danger I was in until I got home on the third day. I showed the officers the nearest trail and route to take to get out of the Territory near Coffeyville where they had entered.

After this man chase I went on many more trips as guide and interpreter and charged \$5.00 per day for my services.

The soldiers on duty on the north border of the Territory had quite a task keeping people from Kansas from coming in and cutting cedar posts in those days.

In the early eighties a mail route was established from Coffeyville to Choteau and Father got the job of carrier.

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Quite often I would make these trips for my father, in fact, by 1884 I would make all the mail carrying trips if I did not find a job with the officers as guide and interpreter.

One day upon arrival at Coffeyville with the mail bags I was handed a large envelope addressed to me. Opening it I found it to be my appointment as United States Marshal, with instructions and everything for my immediate entrance into the service. There was a stack of warrants included one of which read "dead or alive".

Upon my return to Choteau I showed the envelope full of papers to my father. I was only nineteen years old and Father told me if I did not want to serve to return the papers, but if I would like the job to go at once and sign all the papers, which I did.

I was a United States Marshal at the age of nineteen years and have held a similar commission to the present date. I captured many of the early day desperados, being in many gun battles. I was never hit with a bullet, but have had some very narrow escapes from the bullets of the outlaws. My commission as United States Marshal when I

was nineteen years old was unsolicited, but I found out later that the Indian Commissioners had prompted my appointment.

My first auctioneering experience began when the Indians in the early day would take ponies to Coffeyville to be auctioned off. On one occasion the Indians around Choteau had twenty-two ponies they were taking to Coffeyville, and wanted me to act as their auctioneer, which I did and one of the ponies brought \$25.00. This was a big price and it pleased the Indians very much. I did not begin then professionally as an auctioneer but just occasionally would auction ponies for the Indians.

Later, I began auctioneering and to date my total sales have reached almost \$200,000,000.00, having sold coal, asphalt and oil lands at auction for the Government. I am still active as an auctioneer.