

WEEMS, JOSEPH E.

INTERVIEW

9584

138

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

WEEMS, JOSEPH E. INTERVIEW.

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Field Worker's name John F. Daugherty

This report made on (date) January 4, 1938

1. Name Joseph E. Weems

2. Post Office Address Sulphur, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) \_\_\_\_\_

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month May Day 18 Year 1872

5. Place of birth Osage County, Missouri.

6. Name of Father Henry Weems Place of birth Alabama

7. Name of Mother Lavinia Hile Place of birth Maryland

Other information about mother Parents farmed.

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 6

WEEMS, JOSEPH E. INTERVIEW.

9584

Daugherty, John F. - Investigator.  
Indian Pioneer History.  
January 4, 1938.

Interview with Joseph E. Weems.

Salphur, Oklahoma.

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I have lived in Murray County, formerly Tishomingo County, in the Chickasaw Nation since 1884. My father was Henry F. Weems, born in Alabama, December 6, 1844, and my mother was Lavinia Hile Weems, born in Baltimore, Maryland, 1845. There were ten children in our family. Father was a farmer. I was born in Osage County, Missouri, May 18, 1872. We came to the Territory when I was five years old, in 1877, and settled east of Stringtown, in the Choctaw Nation. My earliest recollections are of the wagon loads of pigeons which were hauled past our house on their way to Caddo where they were put aboard trains and shipped to the eastern states to be served on the tables of the residents of these states. These pigeons were caught and shipped by the thousands. The coops in which they were caught were made with doors at the tops which opened backward. Men threw feed inside these coops and tied two or three pigeons in there. The wild pigeons flocked into these coops by the hundreds. They were then put into shipping coops which

WEEMS, JOSEPH E. INTERVIEW.

9584

-2-

carried them to the eastern markets. The wild pigeons were practically extinct before the Government took a hand to try to preserve them.

Father hauled lumber from the saw-mill east of Stringtown to the Katy Railroad at Stringtown, where it was shipped.

In 1884 we moved to the Zep Turner place south of Dougherty in the Chickasaw Nation. When the Santa Fe Railroad was built in 1886, Mr. Turner received \$15.00 for the right-of-way across his land, a distance of about two miles.

Father raised cotton for which he received from 4 to 9 cents per pound. He hauled his cotton to Caddo or Gainesville to market in the fall. He always bought enough supplies at this time to last a year. He bought coffee, sugar, and flour by the barrel. We didn't need many clothes. There was no place to go to wear them except an occasional party, and church once in a while. Everybody wore rough cotton or woolen clothes, and we wore to church or parties the same clothes we wore each day.

In 1889 Father made the run from Purcell, Chickasaw Nation, to the present site of Norman. There he and my

WEEMS, JOSEPH E. INTERVIEW.

9584

-3-

uncle staked a claim. After looking them over they decided the land was no account, so they rode away leaving them unclaimed.

I married Mattie Harrison in 1894. In 1895 I worked with the surveying gang on the D. & N. Railroad which was to be built from Dougherty to Atoka to connect the Santa Fe and Katy lines, and also to ship asphalt over. It was never completed, however. When we got to Lehigh I heard they were to have an Irish wake. Never having attended one, I was very eager to have that experience. This was the Irish method of mourning for their dead. In this instance a child had died. An Irishman, who worked with me on the railroad gang, took me along with him. When we got to the house he told me I had better remain outside the fence, because when they all got drunk they were very rough. However, I wanted to see the whole thing through, so I stepped into the house. In one corner of a room lay the dead child in its coffin. In the center of the room was a table on which stood several empty glasses and a pitcher of whiskey. There was quite a crowd there, and they were all drinking, both men and women. "Slim", the man whom I accompanied there, told me that I must drink with them or they would

WEEMS, JOSEPH E. INTERVIEW.

9584

-4-

be angry. I pretended to drink, and so did "Slim". We didn't want to become intoxicated because we had come to be onlookers and we didn't care to be mixed up in the fights which would inevitably follow. "Slim" told me I had better get outside when they began to get noisy. I tried to get him to come along with me, but he insisted that he could take care of himself. Finally one fellow struck another on the chin and the fight was on. I was watching through the open window, and I saw somebody strike "Slim" on the side of the head. Down he went, and it seemed that they all tried to pile on him at the same time. Poor "Slim"! He just couldn't get up. They kept pounding him down. I couldn't stand it any longer, and started to go to his aid, when two larger boys said they would go in and help him out of his difficulty. They crowded through his assailants and assisted "Slim" to his feet. He began hitting furiously, and men and women fell to the floor as if shot. As he came through the door he hit a fat woman on the jaw, and she fell into the yard, rolling over two or three times. He came to me and said, "Let's get away from here." I was ready. I had seen all of this free-for-all fighting I cared to. The next morning "Slim"

WEEMS, JOSEPH E.- INTERVIEW.

9584

-5-

was a sight to behold. Both eyes were black, and he had several skinned places on his face. The boss, who was Irish, also, certainly did take a hearty laugh when he spied Slim. They never fought with guns, clubs or knives. Their fists were their only weapons, but they certainly did make use of them. I've often thought what a queer way that was of mourning for a loved one who had passed on.