

Field Worker: Merrill A. Nelson  
April 3, 1937

BIOGRAPHY OF: Mr. George Wilmoth  
524 S. Grand Ave., Enid, Okla.

BORN: August 30, 1866 in Elkins  
County, West Virginia

PARENTS: Benjamin Wilmoth, W. Virginia  
(Southern soldier, moved to  
Iowa, then to Kansas among the  
Indians.)  
Alicinda Taylor, Pocahontas, W. Va.

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We grew up among the "odoc tribe in eastern Kansas. My father had been a soldier on the southern side and came from West Virginia also. I remember seeing the Indians when a boy. My mother said that father would sometimes lay in a wagon with a gun all night long to keep the Indians from stealing their meat and clothing. The children used to play on the buffalo hides that father had got on hunts in western Oklahoma.

I left home at the age of 18 and went to Texas where I soon got a job on the railroad near Paris. I was married in July 1, 1892. On Nov. 16 1892 I moved to Terrell, Indian Territory on the Red River. I was now Section Foreman. That was the end of the Rock Island line at that time. The next year we built the line on into Fort Worth.

The next summer the World Fair was in Chicago. I told my wife, who had a small baby, that I was going to go to the Fair. On the way up north, I heard a great deal about the opening of the Cherokee strip. I had not planned to stop at all in that part of the state, but due to the excitement, I changed my plan and stopped at Hennessey to make the run. I slept in a tent the first night, Sept. 15, 1893. The line was about four miles north

from Hennessey. We boarded a train, riding on a cattle <sup>78</sup>car and started up the line. When we got to Enid, we decided that there were too many people there, so I figured I could not get a claim in the townsite, and I stayed on the train.

When we were almost to Kremlin, we saw another train coming from the north which would soon pass the one we were on. I decided that it was time to move if we were going to try to get a homestead. There were two other men whom I had met at North Enid, with me. In those days the trains did not usually stop at Enid. Mike Holland and William Butler, the men with me, jumped off and tumbled head over heels. I jumped and landed in a pile of sand. We started west. After we had gone about a half mile, Mike Holland said, "I guess this is good enough for me," and staked his claim. About a mile farther on there was a beautiful valley. We crossed a low draw which later we learned would hold water during the rainy season. Later I built a pond there. I staked my claim there, and my friend staked his claim a mile farther west.

I know almost nothing about farming or selecting land but fortunately picked out one of the best farms in that district. It is ten miles north of Enid, right on the highway.

The next day I went to North Enid. There was a man there who had a pair of mules. "Staked a claim yet?" I asked him. "No," he replied, "I am going to stay with this pile of lumber." For five dollars I bought enough lumber to build a shack and he promised to help me build it. There was no contest on my claim. I put up a sign reading "This claim taken by George Wilmoth".

Mike Hollan did well with his place. The other man, <sup>711-</sup>William Butler, was killed in an accident in Chicago a short while after this but his brother still owns his claim.

After making a few improvements I went back to Texas. I was anxious to get back to my wife and baby.

"How was the Fair," my wife and friends asked. "I did not go," I replied.

"Where have you been?"

"Oh, I went up to the Cherokee trip and staked a claim."

"You can't tell us that!" they laughed, even my wife did not believe me at first. Finally they were convinced.

One of the rules for homesteading was that your family had to live on the place within six months after it was filed. We decided to live on the place fourteen months and then pay the government one dollar and fifty cents per acre in payment for the land. We could have lived on it five years and would not have had to pay anything for the land. I took my wife up there and then returned to my work in the south. She stayed there alone most of the time during the fourteen months. Her nearest neighbor was a half-mile away, a Mrs. Cowles. That first winter Mrs. Wilmoth got her hands and feet frozen while caring for the stock. We had five head of horses and three cows. She was terribly lonesome. I came back in March and ploughed some more of the land and made a good crop of oats that first year. We had the only wagon in that neighborhood and my wife took the women of the neighborhood to the Ladies Aid society and to Church. The Church we held

in the depot. It was the same depot that I had slept in<sup>80</sup> several nights when I first came to this country. We did our trading at North Enid at first. There was quite a string of stores along where the highway goes through north Enid now. There was a great deal of gambling, many saloons and rough men.

Enid was staked out by the government and was not the town that North Enid was. North Enid was a railroad site. I remember one fight of those early days when Latterson, the land office receiver and the Marshall killed each other on the Enid Square.

At the end of fourteen months I proved up and paid the money for my place, sold my stock and moved my wife back where I was working. I have rented my place ever since. The crops were always good on that place. We raised large quantities of wheat and alfalfa. I worked at various places along the railroad until 1898. In that year I moved back to Enid as Section Foreman so I could be near my farm. In 1906 I became Road Master from Enid to Maurika, also from Alva to Anthony, which positions I held until I retired in 1930.

My present renters have an unusual record. They came to the place in 1903 and have rented it from me ever since-- thirty-three years. I have made considerable improvements on this place. My first house was built 12X24. We still have parts of the same house, having added to it, also the original roof. The place has never been shingled in forty-four years.

North Enid has now dwindled until they have even taken

I have seen many changes in railroads and railroad work. They used to use hand pumps and to assist the workers or sections. Now they use motors. They have changed the road-bed from sixty to a hundred pound rail. I have seen three depots at Knid. The first depot was a frame wooden structure 20x60 feet. This was outgrown and a second larger wooden one was built. The second depot was replaced by the present fire-proof structure. I have seen cars change from all-wood coaches to all-steel and the coaches is better now, and safer.

I have a little eight-acre lake at Knid, near the depot. It is the largest lake in the county. I will also give my home in Knid. In which we have lived for thirty-five years. The depot is within view of my house.

As it happened, very long later, in 1877, I did go to Chicago to the World's Fair, and my wife went with me. On my stopping on a homestead in Oklahoma I gained a farm and had the trip to the Fair as well.

(Note: Mr. B. F. Finkle, 115 1/2 Market St. adds the following to the Patterson murder incident: Patterson went into a saloon. The Marshal went in to arrest him. Patterson jumped up and started shooting. Both shot and both killed the other.)