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CONWAY, WILLIAM M.
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INTERVIEW

#8483

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

Field Worker's name Ethel B. Tackitt

This report made on (date) September 9, 1937

Lone Wolf, Kiowa County, Oklahoma.

1. Name William M. Conway
2. Post Office Address Granite, Greer County, Oklahoma.
3. Residence address (or location) South of Granite on Highway No. 9
4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month November Day 25 Year 1866
5. Place of birth Near Fort Smith, Arkansas.

6. Name of Father Wm. ^{Mrs.} Marion Conway Place of birth Kentucky

Other information about father Union Soldier in Civil War

7. Name of Mother Lizzie Louis Conway Place of birth Missouri

Other information about mother A member of a Confederate family.

Father and brother in Confederate army during the Civil War.

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 .

Mr. William M. Conaway, of Granite, Greer County, Oklahoma, tells the story of his life in Oklahoma since 1877.
Ethel B. Tackitt, Interviewer.

I was born near Fort Smith, Arkansas, November 25, 1866. My Father, William Marion Conaway, was a native of Kentucky but came to Arkansas as a young man and lived at Fort Smith, where he served as a water hauler for the United States troops which were stationed there the first three years of the Civil War. After that time he served as a Soldier until the close of the War.

My mother was Lizzie Louis Conaway, and she and her people were strong for the Confederacy. Her father and oldest brother both served with the Confederate Army.

When I was quite a baby my parents moved to Tarrant County, Texas, and father worked as a cow-hand on the Taylor Ranch. He also worked on the Willowby Ranch near Fort Worth.

In 1876, Nathan Davis, Tom Loop and Mr. Roberts threw three thousand head of beef cattle together and started them from the range in Texas to Dodge City, Kansas, for shipping to market. My father was one of the cow-hands and Nathan Davis was foreman. I was ten years old, but I have heard

father and many of the other cow-boys tell the story and have had the location pointed out to me.

They drove the herd of three thousand head of beef cattle across Red River into Old Greer County at Doan's Crossing, drifting them north at the rate of six or eight miles per day. This was done by having a man ride ahead whose duty it was to look out the best route, with water and grass. This man had the trail looked out several days ahead. A cowboy rode at the head of the herd on either side and kept the leaders, or pointers, moving in the proper direction, while the other part of the herd was pushed slowly and quietly along spreading out over as much a pace as was needed for grazing. At the back of the herd, where the drags lingered, were several men riding back and forth quietly and slowly urging all to move onward. Often when camping time came the drags had only reached the place where the leaders were that morning.

This herd moved north after crossing Red River and continued to do so passing through the mesquite valleys in which are now located the towns of Hess and Altus in Jackson

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county, crossing Salt Fork of Red River South and a little west of the town of Granite, and passing between Head Quarter Mountain of the Wichita Range and the present town of Willow. It was here on this flat, while the herd was bedded for the night, a most disastrous stampede took place, one which has been remembered by the cow-people through the years and to the present day.

A band of Comanche Indians had met the herd and demanded that they be given beef for the privilege of driving the cattle through the territory. They had been given some beef and yet they demanded more. The foreman of the out-fit refused, and that night the cow-boys standing guard just before day saw some Indians approaching the herd. The moon was shining and they could be seen clearly. One of the number dashed into the herd of three thousand sleeping cattle waving and shaking a dry cow-hide. This made an awful noise and the frightened cattle dashed in every direction. There was no way to stop them as they would run over any thing which got in their way. A fight took place between the

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Indians and the cowboys and a number of Indians paid with their lives for what that band of Indians did.

The cattle scattered in every direction and it was three weeks before the cattle could be gathered and started again on their way to Dodge City, Kansas. Many were found back in Texas.

My mother died, and when I was eleven years old, in 1877 father moved our family to the Indian Territory, near Page Crossing, on the Arkansas River, in the present county of Leflore. This Page Crossing was a ferry boat of an old raft style and was run by Will Page, a Choctaw Indian. It was located north of the present town of Spiro.

The old stage line between Fort Smith and McAlester ran near. There was a stop called Skullyville and a stage stand where they changed horses. This was run by the Choctaw Indian Chief, Green McCurtain, at Toll Gap, which was a road worked and kept passable through the mountains, by Green McCurtain. The stage was one of the old style, high behind and before, with a driver's seat and luggage rack on top.

The charge for crossing this Toll Gap on that early Oklahoma Highway, was twenty-five cents per wagon. Jim Darneal was the Indian Sheriff at that time.

Father bought a lease from Reverend Willis Folsom of the Choctaws and we knew him as Uncle Willis Folsom. I never knew a better man or heard any preacher who could preach better sermons than Uncle Willis.

We had something like one hundred acres which we farmed and all the free range we wanted as all stock ran at large. If the people needed money they got together and drove in a bunch of hogs which belonged to anyone who wanted them. If the hogs were not fat, they were fed corn for a while; but as a general thing they were fat. These hogs were then taken to Fort Smith and sold, often for three cents per pound, but it made no difference, if the price was low, for it had not cost anything to raise them and if they had been fed corn, that had cost practically nothing to grow.

We had little need of money. We lived in a double hewed log house with a shed room running the full length.

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The logs were cut on the place. The roof, floor, doors, and window shutters were all hand hewed.

We also raised cattle, and like all the boys of that time, I worked and rode after them from the time I was large enough to do so.

I also worked for other cow-men. A white boy who was good with a horse and rope was always wanted by the cow-men, especially if he knew the country and the Indians.

I worked for the Belt Brothers, Al and John, or Jack as we called him, and I remember that one time they bought four-hundred beef steers from four to seven years old from the Widow Travy, a Choctaw Indian who had a ranch on Culla Creek. We gathered these steers out of the woods. Many of them had never been touched since the day they were branded and were as wild as rabbits. We rounded them up as best we could and placed them in strong log corrals. These round-ups were on Sugar Loaf Prairie, southeast of the present town of Poteau. When the cattle were gathered the Widow Travy refused to allow any of them taken off

the range until she received her pay, which was about \$18.00 per head, and amounting to \$7,200.00, all to be paid in cash. Jack Belt paid her, as he had the money in his saddle-pockets. It was in gold, silver and green-backs.

We drove the four-hundred steers to Fort Smith and sold them to the Neveland Brothers. The Belt Brothers went back and bought four-hundred three year old steers from the Widow Travy and sold them to the Neveland Brothers.

I wanted to go back to Texas and in July before I was fourteen in November, Father had to go to Fort Smith on business, so I decided that was a good time to run away.

I had a good horse and saddle, rope, spurs, blanket and good clothes. I gathered up all the cooked food I could find in the house and enough flour and meat to last four days. I had my pocket knife and thirty cents in change when I set out for Texas. I rode all day following the trail through the woods, which was called a road, and at night I made camp and staked my horse away from the road several hundred yards for fear Father would return and find that

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I had started for Texas and would come after me; but he did not follow me at all.

The worst fright I ever had in my life happened when I got way down on Baggy Creek. I had ridden down the first bank following the trail and had to ride down the Creek about a hundred yards before I reached the crossing, and in turning round a bluff, I came full upon a party of Comanche Indians in full War garb with painted faces and feather head dress. There was a big bunch of them and I was too close to try to get away. I had no fear of the Choctaws, Chickasaws, or any of the East Side Indians but I knew the Comanches and the Western Indians were dangerous. I rode on and they halted me. One began to say something, I could not understand and another, who seemed to be Chief, came up and could talk English. He told me that the Indian wanted to trade horses with me. I told him I would not trade my horse, saddle, or anything with him. Then he wanted me to get up behind him and ride down the trail. I refused to do anything.

The Chief asked where I came from and I told him the

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truth about my-self and that my Father was leasing land from Uncle Willis Folsom and I was running away to be a cow-boy in Texas. He said No, Texas bad, better go back or with them. He would give me lots of ponies. I was a much little Cow-boy. He knew Willis Folsom, a much good man.

I was frightened so badly, I thought they would kill me any minute and take my horse, so when I got a chance I made a dash to go on, and to my surprise they never bothered me.

When I got to Red River at Denison, I gave the ferryman my pocket knife to ferry me across to the Texas side. I went on to the R. P. Ranch, southwest of Fort Worth, Texas, owned by R. P. Arnold, and they gave me a job. Many of the cow-boys there were my father's friends. I made the trip in five days.

I worked for the D. D. outfit and the E. P. out-fits and others who had ranches on the Texas side of Red River and ran their cattle over in the Indian Territory.

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At one time E. P. Taylor sold ten thousand cattle and three hundred saddle horses to Tall and John Willowby. The cattle were branded E P on the right side and the horses were branded E P on the left shoulder.

The Willowby Brothers bought eight thousand saddle at one time from David Davis, called Cow Davis. These were branded D D. This brand was well known in Greer county.

I came to Oklahoma in 1877, just sixty years ago, and since that time there has not a year of my life passed that some part of the year has not been spent in Oklahoma. At present I am operating a tourist camp and filling station at Granite, about ten miles east of where the stampede took place in 1876.