

COPE, MILTON

INTERVIEW

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ETHNOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Tribes and Districts Department

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Field Worker's name Robert W. Small

This report made on (date) December 10, 1937 193

1. Name Milton Cope,

2. Post Office Address Blackwell, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 424 West College Avenue

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month July Day 21, Year 1865

5. Place of birth Jersey County, Illinois

6. Name of Father Joseph Cope Place of birth Illinois

7. Name of Mother Elizabeth Davis Cope Place of birth Tennessee

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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Robert W. Small, Investigator
December 10, 1937.

Interview with Milton Cope
Blackwell, Oklahoma.

I was born in Jersey County, Illinois, July 21, 1865, but in 1872 my parents moved to Bates County, Missouri, where I remained until the Opening of the Cherokee Outlet in 1893.

In the race for claims I staked the Southwest Quarter of Section 22, Township 28 North, Range 1 West. I made the Run on a race horse that was noted for his many admirable qualities and especially for his endurance in making a long run. I was ahead of all those near me in the race but in spite of my early settlement on my claim I was contested and rather than fight the contest which ^I was not financially able to do, I divided the claim with my contestant and was his friend and neighbor throughout the years since. This contestant has said in later years that I saved him from starvation.

A boy was hired to drive a wagon loaded with food and feed and to follow the race to a certain point but when I went to look for the boy he could not be found. I returned

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to my claim and got oats from a fellow claimant to feed my horse and I did without food myself and slept on the bare earth with my saddle for a pillow and the sky for a covering. I built a two room box house and a straw shed for my stock, dug a well eighteen feet deep with a post auger and in February, 1894, I moved to the claim and put out some few acres of corn and kaffir, neither of which made much except a little feed for stock.

I put out twenty acres to flax in the year 1894, which made about three bushels per acre. All the crops grown in succeeding years to 1897 were practical failures.

In the spring of 1895, a school house was built in my district which was the first school building in the country nearby. Church and Sunday School was also held in the school building. Prior to the building of the school house, church and Sunday School were held under the shade of a large elm tree on George Hines' farm on Bitter Creek, during weather that was favorable to out-door gatherings.

A sod church house was built by the Baptist denomination about three miles northeast of my claim, which was used for many years.

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Literary societies held their gatherings in the school house as did all other community organizations, including a free homes organization. I took an active part in all the free homes meetings and was twice elected as a delegate to the State free homes conventions- one time held at Guthrie and once at El Reno. Almost every community in the country held these meetings advocating free homes for the people as it had been a custom in the settlement of most countries that people should have their homes free; these meetings held regularly over the entire country doubtless resulted in the free homes act of the National Congress a little later.

I was a member of the first jury empanelled in Kay County; court being held in a big tent at Newkirk.

I was Justice of the Peace for a number of years in my township and established an enviable record as such. The County Attorney complimented me on my record of handling all cases in such a manner that none were ever brought to trial in his court.

I also served three or four years as Township Trustee and Assessor and filled many important places in the civic

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and political life of my community during the early years.

In the early years so many men had contestants on their claims that when a public gathering of any kind was held, they all wanted to tell their troubles and relate their grievances and it was hard to overcome that state of affairs until the contests were settled. After all settlements were made the claimants felt a great relief and took a brighter view of life in every way.

I was Master of the first Grange in his part of the country; they built a store and a grain elevator and had a post office established at Sumpter. We had the best Grange in the country and the Grange buildings are still standing today.

In one of the early years when the summer was hot and dry and crops were doomed to failure. I set out to put up all the hay I could get. I swapped work with my neighbors to get their help and by working diligently through the hot, dry summer, I obtained quite a lot of hay. The following winter when feed of every kind was scarce I would haul a load of hay to Blackwell every time I went to town and I saved my money, depositing it in a bank. One day the

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banker asked me how I was obtaining this money that he was laying away so regularly while all others were hard pressed for a little money. I explained that I had worked through the long, hot summer for all the hay I could get and had kept it to sell when feed got scarce.

I still own my original eighty acres although I now live in the city of Blackwell at 424 West College Street.