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CRISMORE, M. S. INTERVIEW

Field Worker: Harry M. Dreyer
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BIOGRAPHY OF: Mr. M. S. Crismore
729 SW Pottawatomie St.
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

BORN: Oct. 9, 1857, in Nebraska

I, M. S. Crismore, was born in Nebraska, October 9, 1857. My wife, whose maiden name was Bourn, was born in Indiana. She is now seventy-seven years of age. We lived on a ranch near Kearney, Nebraska, before coming to Oklahoma. All of our lives we never turned anyone away from our door. I used to kill a beef and give one entire quarter of the beef to a neighbor at one time, and never did think anything about it. Cattle were not so high then, as they are now.

My wife and I came to Oklahoma on the train and landed at the red depot of the Santa Fe Railway in Oklahoma City on November 16, 1892. We have a family of seven children. We have lived together for fifty-seven years. We also have nine grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

I bought a lot for three hundred and fifty dollars where the Montgomery Ward Building stands now. I built a house on it and lived there five years. I also built a barn there but a twister came along and blew it down and so I never rebuilt it. The houses were just boarded up on the outside and were not very solid. There was a two-story shack next to me, at the time of the storm and part of it was blown away. The fellow that lived in it started to go

over into one of the other rooms and walked directly out into the street, not knowing that that part of his house was blown away.

The City at that time was from Seventh Street on the North, Santa Fe on the East, Walker Street on the West and Canal St. on the South. This street got its name because a fellow came here and was going to furnish water for the city. He made a canal from about sixteen miles west of the city to run water into the town. He spent about a hundred thousand dollars to put the canal in and it was a failure. All the water seeped through the loose sand and never reached the city at all. Very few people know anything about this old canal, but part of it is still visible on Noble Street. We talked of having a city of four thousand population, and got our water from wells. We had a great deal of Typhoid Fever from them. One time there were eighteen families affected from the same well. It was condemned.

When we first got a water system here I was on the committee and Late Street, the father of Mr. Street of the firm of Street & Draper, was also on that committee. We went out to the site of Lake Overholser and Mr. Street told us that the Lord had made that place purposely to furnish water for Oklahoma City. We all agreed with him and so the work was begun.

I could recount stories of those early days that would grow grey hairs on your head, but I do not care to put it on paper.

We got lumber from yards that started in business after

the opening. Grand and Main streets were the busiest, but California street did a good deal of business. All we had for walks for a long time was board walks and some were a foot high, others six inches, and they were very irregular all up and down the street.

I saw a team of horses that were hitched to a buggy break loose from the hitching-post one day. They got caught on the board walk and ran up the street and down Main street draggin g part of the walk. When they were stopped there on Main Street there were only two wheels left on the buggy.

On another occasion I saw a woman driving up Grand Ave. with a highspirited horse hitched to her buggy and the bit in the horse's mouth broke. The horse ran up Broadway and turned west on Main and as the horse ran, the woman stood up in the buggy and let the top down. The horse ran into a store building and broke a window out. The woman was helped from the buggy unhurt, but badly frightened, and she fainted after being taken from the buggy.

I drove a cab here then, and had a Livery Stable. I used to haul Sam Lord, a farmer, and the United States Marshal around. Sam Lord killed seven men during his term as Marshal. Things were pretty wild at that time. The City Council decreed that all gambling places should be on the second floors of the buildings, while the saloons were allowed to operate on the ground floors. When anyone was challenged to a fight during an argument, the man who was the quickest with his gun and the "best shot" won the fight.

There were several Real Estate sharks here. There was

one man who began developing land around Putnam who said that he was going to give tracts of land to get the Capitol^{48?} moved to Oklahoma City long before it was brought down here. He sold options on lots as far back as Tennessee. When some of the people came here to look at their property the described location had been misrepresented. Instead of getting property near the city, they found that the land they had purchased was in a hollow north west of Putnam. They usually refused further payment on the property.

There were a couple of fellows trying to sell lots here who were glad to get two dollars for each lot. One day a man dropped in to see them and they showed him some lots and asked seven dollars. He accepted their price and went on to look at some more of their property. He kept on until he had bought twenty thousand dollars worth of property from them. The agent had not sold any property for some time, and said to his prospect, "Let's go back to the office.", thinking that the man must be crazy to be buying so much property at one time. At the office the buyer took five hundred dollars out of his pocket as a down payment and told the agent to wire Kansas City for the rest of the twenty thousand dollars. The agent was so excited that he wanted to show the man some more property, but his client said, "No, I have bought enough, you mistrusted me, so this is all."

The Higgins addition and the Ed Horn Addition were all sown in oats when I came here. There was a little farming done on farms further out, according to what the individual farmers could afford to plant. After I was here a while I

wrote to some of my friends at Kearney, Nebraska and told⁴⁸ them that the trees were full of black walnuts, the river was full of fish and the woods were full of deer and wild turkey. I said, "This is not the Garden of Eden, but it is just outside of the Garden of Eden." In a few weeks my house was full of people from Nebraska, and it cost me about a hundred dollars to board them and drive them around and feed their horses. I decided not to write any more letters home for a while because I could not turn my friends away and there was no work here only what each individual did for himself. No one was hiring extra help except when it was absolutely necessary.

Hunting was good here then. We had plenty of rabbits, quail, squirrel, and wild turkeys and deer. I have seen many deer along the river when I first came here.

I sold some realty here, and received a commission for my sales. When Mr. Perrine bought lots where Perrine building stands now, he paid four hundred dollars and traded a stallion for them.

The government owned a strip of ground three miles square, what is now Council Grove, that they put on sale and could only get a bid of two dollars per acre, so they took it off of the market and later sold it for twenty dollars an acre. Soldiers were there to keep the white people from cutting timber there. But all that the white people had to do if they wanted a load of wood was to pay the soldiers fifty cents and take the wood. The soldiers would come to town and use the money for whiskey to get drunk on.

When the Kickapoo Indians came to town they camped east of the Santa Fe tracks. They came over from around ⁴⁸⁴ Harrah, Oklahoma and came here to get their allotments. The Chief of the tribe was Oponoxie. I was well acquainted with him. I drove a team to my cab then and had a sorrel team, one of which was a racing mare. I would drive down to the depot and the Indians would motion for me to stop, and would get some money ^{from} their squaws, then a bunch of them would pile in my cab and I would drive them down to the saloons to get whiskey. I had to rush them back across the line before the U. S. Marshal caught me. I could out-run them as I had faster horses than they did. The Indians would pay me any price that I asked.

When the government officials would ask the Indians who had sold them the liquor they would make a sign, "short and fat fellow". If a person of that description was presented to them, they would shake their heads and say, "No, it was a tall and slim fellow". Hale sold many ponies to the Indians. He would buy them for two dollars apiece and sell them to the Indians for thirty dollars apiece. That way he made money off of the Indians.

There was an old Indian that went to Washington and contracted a disease somehow, so when he came back all the other Indians were afraid of him. They made a grave and buried him alive, but he escaped and when the Indians saw him again they said the Great Spirit had sent him back and they would have nothing to do with him. They called him "Stink Nose". He lived by himself with six or seven dogs

that he kept in his teepee all the time.

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The Indians dressed very much like they do now, except that they wore bright red blankets that the government had given them. The money given to the Kickapoos from Harrah never got far from Oklahoma City, because the Indians would stay there until they had spent all of their money. They would sometimes get a bottle of whiskey in each hand, wave them in the air and yell and whoop when they were drunk.

THE END