

COUCH, EUGENE

INTERVIEW

#1248

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INDEX CARDS

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

12486

Field Worker's name Harry M. Dreyer,This report made on (date) April 29, 19371. Name Eugene Couch.2. Post Office Address Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.3. Residence address (or location) 1130 W. 10th.4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month x Day x Year x5. Place of birth Kansas.6. Name of Father x Place of birth N. Carolina.Other information about father Vice President and President of  
original Boomers in Oklahoma.7. Name of Mother x Place of birth N. Carolina.Other information about mother x

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 4.

Harry M. Dreyer,  
Field Worker.

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An Interview With Eugene Couch,  
1130 W. 10th St., Oklahoma City.

I was born in Kansas, and came to Oklahoma with my parents when a small boy. My parents came from North Carolina. My father came with Payne and his colony into Oklahoma. They first started from the end of the railroad, at Caldwell, Kansas, and landed near Luther, Oklahoma. Finally they came down to Capitol Hill in 1880, where Payne located the site on which he expected to establish the future capitol of Oklahoma. They were removed from the territory several times but always returned again into Oklahoma. In the first party there were around one hundred and thirty-five people. Payne and my father, who were the leaders, were arrested on several occasions and taken to Fort Reno and usually kept there from four to five days. Then they were taken back to the Kansas line. The officers with a few colored soldiers made the arrest. The soldiers would come up to where they were located and camp and then make the arrest the following day. The prisoners would be put into open army wagons drawn by horses, with their feet and hands bound. This would make a colored soldier feel of great importance to have a white man as his prisoner. Only the leaders were arrested and the others took their belongings and returned to Kansas. In some instances the

entire group was escorted back as far as Caldwell, or Honeywell, Kansas. Pictures were always taken of the colony and I have pictures of a group that landed on one occasion at what is now Belle Isle with better than one hundred wagons. There was only one woman and a small girl the age of seven in the group. Pictures were taken of negro soldiers camped near the colony, and I also have pictures of a party as they appeared upon arrival back to the Kansas line. The second party brought to Oklahoma was much larger than the first and one party had as many as five hundred people. The first boomers were all from Kansas, and each time the arrests were made they were released after taken out of the territory. Some were taken to Leavenworth and released. Payne's headquarters were at Wichita as Kansas was in sympathy with the movement and anxious to have Oklahoma settled. Payne would collect a membership fee from the party members in order for them to join the colony. This ranged from two dollars up. I have pictures of Payne and some of his followers, and a picture of a German and his wife who sold their farm in Kansas for eight thousand dollars and put all their money into the cause. It was contended at that time that some of the legislative body had cattle

interests in the territory. There was a powerful cattleman's lobby for cattle interests. Cattlemen were not disturbed by the soldiers.

Later on Payne brought a group into Oklahoma from Texas to join the original Boomers when the site, which was intended for the capitol of the state, was located, it lay a few miles south of Bethany. This was surveyed and laid out into lots, and a town was located near Luther. These towns were placed there to accommodate farmers located in that vicinity.

After the death of Payne, my father was president of the colony. He had spent almost seven years in Washington trying to get a bill through to open Oklahoma Territory for settlement. My father then picked the present site of Styles Park for the capitol as he liked this spot best, and did not have to cross the river to get to it.

When Boomers from Texas were arrested and returned to the line by the soldiers, they were freed. They would ride back into the territory with the soldiers and eat government food on their way back. They would get off of the government wagons south of Fort Reno and return to Oklahoma City, while the soldiers would return to Fort Reno. The soldiers had carried out their

orders

by taking them to the line, and were not further obligated to do anything.

My father settled on a farm near the present site of the Courthouse. Grandfather located one-half mile west of us. Grandfather looked after father's cows, chickens, farming and family while father was in Washington. I can remember as a boy that I would be called out of bed in the morning to go get the mail at the post office. I was about nine then and sometimes I would carry the mail in a mail bag and again in a flour sack. There was usually quite a bit of mail, as all mail addressed to the colony was received by my father.

There was a lot of publicity in the papers in the East about the Boomers.

My father built a two story frame house on his property where mother, brother, and I lived by ourselves while father represented the colony in Washington.