

CONOVER, GEORGE (MRS.)

INTERVIEW

#9538

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

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Field Worker's name Lillian Cassaway,

This report made on (date) December 31 1937

1. Name Mrs. George Conover,

2. Post Office Address 602 West Virginia, Anadarko.

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month July Day 23 Year 1872

5. Place of birth Uvalde, Texas.

6. Name of Father Lyman Smith Place of birth New York.

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Matilde Tatum Smith Place of birth Alabama.

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 8.

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Lillian Cassaway,
Investigator.
December 31, 1937.

Interview with Mrs. George Conover,
602 W. Virginia, Anadarko, Oklahoma.

Mr. George Conover came to Fort Arbuckle, Oklahoma, with the 6th United States Infantry of the regular army in 1867, leaving Fort Smith about July 1st for Fort Arbuckle. The Infantry came through Scullyville and Stonewall, Indian Territory. Scullyville was so called because the Government paid out the money to the Choctaw Indians there. From Stonewall on to Fort Arbuckle there was no sign of life or habitation.

It was between the present site of Sulphur and Davis that cholera broke out in camp. The camp was panic stricken; the teamsters took the saddle mules and left camp to find relief somewhere else. There was only one doctor in camp but he would not visit the sick, and when sent for would get on his horse and ride up to the tent but refused to get off and go in. Finally the hospital steward from Fort Arbuckle came and rendered aid. Twenty-eight men died from the plague. There were no coffins so the men were wrapped

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in blankets and buried in shallow graves. As soon as possible the camp was moved a little way by the side of a spring of pure water and the plague was stopped. After a little while the company moved on and arrived in Fort Arbuckle in July, 1867.

Fort Arbuckle was built entirely of hewn logs and at that time there was nothing west of it except a wide range for buffalo, with the exception of two negro settlements, one about two miles and the other about five miles from the Fort.

Mail was brought to the camp once a week when the weather permitted. It was carried on horseback and often the streams were so swollen they could not be forded, and there were no bridges. After arriving at Fort Arbuckle it was not long until the camp had its first visit by the Comanches and Wichitas, bringing two captives along with them, a girl and a boy.

In 1868 Company E of the 8th Infantry in command of R. T. Jacobs, and troops S and L of the 10th Cavalry,

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were ordered to Fort Cobb. This fort had been abandoned and destroyed during the Civil War and had not been rebuilt. On their march up the Washita they reached Elm Springs where they were met by a band of friendly Comanches; they came to warn them of the approach of a large band of unfriendly Indians who opposed the invasion of the soldiers. Two days later at the present site of Verden they were met by this hostile band, numbering about fifteen hundred. Their objections were soon overcome and that night the soldiers camped just west of the present site of Anadarko, then went the next day to Fort Cobb.

The ruins of the old fort were still standing. The buildings were chiefly of adobe. Those that had been built of lumber had been burned. The fort was located just east of the present site of Fort Cobb.

On the 12th of March, 1869, Company E, 6th Infantry, was ordered to Medicine Creek to help General Sheridan in a campaign against the Indians who were making raids

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into Texas and New Mexico. They camped at the foot of the hill where old Fort Sill now stands. The building of the rock fort was begun in 1870.

Soon after the post was started a post trader's store was established by J. S. Evans. In the summer of 1869 the Government built an adobe house for the Indian Agency about three miles from the fort to the southeast.

Mr. Conover's connection with the army ended in January, 1870. After receiving an honorable discharge, Mr. Conover continued to live near the Indian Agency and to work as a Government employee.

The Government officers had persuaded Joseph Chandler, who had married a Comanche captive and was living on a farm near Pauls Valley, and who had great influence with the Indians, to come and settle near the Agency. His duty was to watch the Indians and keep the Government officials posted as to their movements.

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In the spring of 1870 he gave warning that at a certain time the Indians were going on the war-path, but Horace P. Jones, Government interpreter, declared that there was no danger, and said that Chandler and his wife were too excitable. He said that he had never seen the Indians any better satisfied than they were then. The Indians began their depredations almost at the time Chandler said they would. They raided in Texas and surrounding country until cold weather. When it began to get cold the Indians came in and settled for the winter, ready to make peace and receive their usual rations. They also brought their captives expecting to be paid ransom money for them. This time the agent told the Indians that he would pay no ransom nor would they get any rations until all captives were brought in. Finally they were all brought in and turned over to the agent who found relatives and returned the captives to them. Some of the captives were never heard of after they were

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taken from their homes. Things were quiet until spring when they again began their raids.

Soon after reports of certain raids made by the Kiowas and Comanches, the Five Civilized Tribes called for a peace council and appointed delegates to meet with the wild tribes to try to persuade them to stop their depredations. This council was held at old Fort Cobb in July, 1872. Tatum started to the council but was called away by a bogus message that his wife was sick.

At this council White Horse, the Chief, said that he didn't want peace and that the young men would raid where and when they pleased; neither did he intend to give up the captives. But through the influence of Kicking Bird and denying them their rations, the captives were soon brought in.

Mr. Conover was in the Government service under Agent Tatum and for a while under Agent Haworth. During this time he learned the Comanche language, which

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was the universal language, and became interpreter.

Mr. Conover left the government service in 1873 and went to work for a cattleman by the name of Buckley, but for only a short time; he then went on to Little Washita where he took charge of Widow Chandler's ranch and farm. Here he had a chance to observe the operations of the cattle thieves.

The thieves had their headquarters either in Texas or in the Chickasaw Nation. They would trade with the Indians for a number of horses, then they would sell them whiskey and while they were drunk the thieves would drive off many more horses than they had paid for.

Wood camps were established by contractors who furnished wood for the military posts. Cattle thieves and bootleggers under the pretense of being employed would carry on their evil work.

In 1875 Mr. Conover and the Widow Chandler were married and in 1880 they left the ranch on Little

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Washita and moved near Anadarko. When the Jerome Treaty was made in 1893, Mr. Conover was adopted into the Comanche tribe, and was given a quarter of land. Here he lived many years; then when the country was opened for white settlement he went into partnership with Phil Romic in the mercantile business. After a few years he sold out to Mr. Romic. In 1900, late in the year, Mrs. Conover died. After some time Mr. Conover married Miss Laura Smith, who still lives in Anadarko, though Mr. Conover has been gone from us now a few years.