

DORSETT, TOM.

INTERVIEW.

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

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Field Worker's name Ethel V. Elder.

This report made on (date) February 10, 1938. 1938

1. Name Tom Dorsett.

2. Post Office Address Waurika, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 304 North Meridian Street.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month July Day 25 Year 1866.

5. Place of birth Bosque County, Texas.

6. Name of Father Ambrose Washington Dorset Place of birth Rusk County, Texas.

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Martha Hancock. Place of birth Meriwether County, Georgia.

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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Ethel V. Elder,
Investigator,
Feb. 10, 1938.

Interview With Tom Dorsett,
304 North Meridian St.,
Waurika, Oklahoma.

My father, Ambrose Washington Dorsett, was born in Rusk County, Texas, died in December, 1877, and is buried at Spanish Fort, Texas. My mother, Martha Hancock, was born in Meriwether County, Georgia, died in 1929 and is buried in the Odd Fellow's cemetery at Ringling, Oklahoma. My grandfather on mother's side, Tom Hancock, died in 1879 and is buried at Spanish Fort, Texas. My grandmother on my mother's side, Annie Weldon, died in 1878 and is buried at Spanish Fort, Texas. My grandfather on my father's side was John K. Dorsett; that is all I know about him.

I was born July 25, 1866, in Bosque County, Texas, on a farm. My father had married young, had lived in Texas in Bosque County one year and then moved ^{to} Hill County and lived there for about ten years.

We came to the Indian Territory, landed here about March 1, 1876, at the place called Courtney Flats and Father

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died there December, 1877, on a farm he had rented from a Chickasaw Indian named Clyner.

When we came to the Territory we came in covered wagons, driving three head of horses and one yoke of oxen; we called the oxen Spot and Brandy. We crossed Red River at Gainesville, Texas, fording the river at Burneyville Crossing. We stayed about one week in Gainesville looking over the country around there.

I was the oldest child of my mother's family of three girls and two boys, so it was up to me to help my mother raise the smaller children and make the living. We lived on the farm all the time; I have always liked the farm life.

I was about six years old when I started to school. The first school was in Hill County, Texas. I stayed with my grandfather and went to school as I was too small to go the long way to school from home; that was a subscription school that lasted about two or three months. The next school that I went to was after we came to Indian Territory over southwest of Courtney Flats on the Bolen Farm. The house was made of logs with dirt floor, and logs were split for benches and short pegs were driven into them to make the legs; they did not have any

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backs to them. How tired we would get sitting all day, we could not lean back. That school lasted three months, my teacher's name was Cain. Then I attended another school called the McGee school about two months and the school house caught fire and burned up, so that was the last of my school days. My grandfather let me use his slate and old Blue Back Speller and I would study at noon hour when I would come in for dinner from the field. I never learned very much about arithmetic until after Statehood, then I began to study that for I saw the great need of mathematics.

There was a man named Hancock, we called him Parson Hancock, who was a Methodist preacher. He lived on the farm and worked all week and then when Sunday morning came he would start out to church, and when he would get his crop all laid by he would hold a big camp meeting in the fall under a great big brush arbor. Sometimes it would last from one month to two months and we would have the best times going to meeting. A big bunch of cowboys would always be on hand to make the outsiders keep peace and order for there was always a bunch that would try to show off and try to break up the meeting.

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Charlie Rummel owned a big cattle ranch down on what we called Clear Creek, five miles southeast of Cornish. He owned thousands of head of cattle; his ranch was called the Bar Six Ranch, (this is the Bar Six branding sign that he always used -6).

Wyatt and Kirk Williams owned a large ranch down on Mud Creek, and the Graham and Florence Hall ranches were also good sized ones.

Suggs Brothers owned most all the ranch land back of Courtney Flats on the river, they moved over two hundred head of stock up on Mud Creek west of Ringling, they then moved to Sugden and established a small village there which was named for them.

Charles Rum owned a ranch that he sold to Sam Horton and a man named Williams.

Rube and Sandy Horton also owned a large ranch that they sold to W. C. Newton. I worked for W. C. Newton on his ranch a long time, rode the lines for him. He sold out to Ed Morris and another man named Sacrey from Gainesville, Texas. Dave Thomas and Captain Daugherty owned large ranches south of Cornish on Long branch.

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Tommie Joins and Bill E. Washington owned ranches west of Ringling and close to Marietta.

Press and Zack Addington owned a large ranch over close the to town of Addington.

There were no wells of water in the Territory in the early days when we first came, they had water from natural springs to use for all purposes, then after a few years some people started to digging wells but not very many.

Spanish Fort was the oldest cow town and a very rough and rowdy place. The cowboys would get drunk and kill each other. One Christmas Eve two cowboys got drunk and got into a fuss about something and before they could get it settled they had killed each other.

The oldest store in that part of Indian Territory was built at Courtney Flats. A general merchandise and post office in connection was built by John Fowler and run by him. The next was built in 1891 at Cornish by Isaac Roberts and managed by John Smoots.

Old Spanish Fort and Old Red River Station were the original frontier towns. When we first moved to Courtney

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Flats there were only six houses there and white people lived in them. They would lease a place of fifty acres for a period of ten years, build a log house on the place and fence it in.

In 1877 when Governor Overton was in office, we had to pay a permit of \$25.00 to live here in the Territory and \$1.00 per head for cows. Some would try to get by without paying the cattle permit, they would get some Indians to come work for them and hold the cattle without pay. After that time the permit was only \$5.00 per year.

Hobbs Ferry was on the Hobbs Crossing on Lud Creek; Johnnie Rich operated a ferryboat at the crossing at Petersburg and Bob Morris operated one at the crossing at Grady.

There was a place at the Hobbs Ferry that could be forded sometimes, also at Spanish Fort, Bore Tree, Courtney Flats, Yellow Bank and the Red River Station, most all of these could be used for fording places when the river was normal.

Luke Jackson, Bill Wymes, John Leens and the Hancock Brothers all had some fine race horses that they ran a great

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deal. Bob Long and George Powers were among the ones who had the lead in the betting game all the time; they would bet anything that they had on a horse race, it did not make any difference what it was. A man of the name of Enghram who rode in so many of the races was accused of making a foul ride one time and one night he was shot while sitting at the supper table and killed; no one ever knew who shot him. Charles Rummel was another one of the great gamblers.

One time a bunch of men gathered at the horse race tracks and started to betting on some foot races; they started at \$1.50 and raised it until they reached \$500.00. They had the track measured off in ^asixty-five yard length, and I ran with Harris Higgins of Healdton and beat him by twelve feet. I was considered very fast on foot at that time.

Marschon, Heck Thomas and Al Jennings were the only United States deputy marshals that I was personally acquainted with, but I have heard of several others who were here in the early days.

Stanley Brothers put in a farm down close to Courtney Flats. One time one hundred desperadoes came over from

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Texas, Sam Harrell was their leader. They took possession of the crop and feed stuff and everything the Stanleys had, cattle and stock included, and tried to take the stores in Courtney Flats, too. We gathered a bunch of men together and tried to defend ourselves as best we could; their leader was killed and several of their crowd and some of ours were killed, too. The remaining ones of their bunch drove off a large herd of cattle and started to the state of Wyoming, ^{and} we never heard from them any more.

In the winter the cattle would drift south, many would come to the ravines and down under the large bluffs close to the river at Courtney Flats; there would always be from fifty to seventy-five cowboys with the cattle and they would go to Spanish Fort and get several jugs of whiskey, then build up a fire and spread their blankets down on the ground and there they would sleep.

Old Doctor Scaggs, who lived at Courtney Flats, would give big dances in the winter. The girls would want to go home, and the cowboys would shoot the door steps and they had the girls so scared they were afraid to go outside so

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they would have to stay at the dance all night. The cowboys would rope the chimneys and tie the ropes to their saddles and pull the chimneys off from the house.

There was a smart fellow of the name of Davis, at least he thought he was smart, who lived in the community. He married an Indian girl who had allotted land down on Mud Creek close to Petersburg and that gave him Indian rights. They separated and he married again. His wife became very ill and he started to Petersburg for a doctor and some medicine but before he got to Petersburg, he was killed. No one ever knew who killed him. They buried him on the hillside under a big blackjack tree, which still stands today, and his is the only grave there.

Over east of Addington on the hill some cowboys were grazing some cattle and they stopped to let the cattle rest for a few hours and they casually started to pile up some rocks and every time they would stop there to rest they would pile more rocks, forming them like a chimney, so they called it Monument Hill; that was in 1878.

Courtney Flats was the oldest post office in this country, Petersburg was next, then Atlee. They no longer exist.

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We went to Denison and Gainesville, Texas, to do some of our marketing of stock, feed stuff and anything we had to market and we bought our provisions there, although we did some trading at Spanish Fort. Our main marketing points, however, were at Caldwell and Hunnewell, Kansas, which were the largest cattle shipping points.

Chills and fever struck the community one time. It became a terrible siege on the people and several died before they could get the disease under control; seemed like it was different from the regular chill and fever people have today.

When I was a young man I met a very beautiful young lady with brown eyes and black hair who lived in the Petersburg community. After I had known her about two years I managed to get nerve enough one day to ask her to be my wife and after persuading her to say 'Yes', we went over to Spanish Fort, Texas, on Christmas Day, 1890, and were married by the Justice of the Peace, a man named Isaac Roberts.

We then went to Cornish and started farming, living there till 1911, when we moved to Ryan and lived seven years.

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We then moved south of Ringling, staying three years on the farm, when we moved to Ringling and lived in the town for fifteen years. Four years ago we moved to Waurika. We have had twelve children born to us, seven are still living.

I have been living in this county over sixty-two years. When it was the Chickasaw Nation this was Pickens County. I have always lived east of the Meridian line until I moved to Waurika, now I am just over the line on the west side as the line runs right in front of the house where I now live.

I was appointed deputy sheriff, which office I held four years, after which I was tax assessor for eight years after Statehood. I was elected Constable of Right Township for one year and was commissioner eight years of Precinct Two of Jefferson County.