

INDEX CARDS

Ponca City  
Saloons--Oklahoma Territory  
Trails  
Pioneer life--Oklahoma Territory  
Indian trade  
Ranching  
Stage routes  
Outlaws--Oklahoma Territory  
Cattle--hides  
Enid

Field Worker: Merrill A. Nelson  
April 2, 1937

BIOGRAPHY OF Mr. George W. Elliott (White)  
520 South Monroe,  
Mid, Oklahoma

BORN April 29, 1867  
Cumberland County, Illinois

PARENTS Father, James I. Elliott, near Salem,  
North Carolina  
twice refused enlistment in Civil War,  
cause- asthma. Folks came to Indiana  
Mother, Lucy Sellers, near Salem,  
North Carolina-  
Father had six brothers, one sister.  
Mother had five brother in army, Southern  
side. Parents buried in St. Clair county  
Missouri,

#### STORY OF MR. G. W. ELLIOTT

##### Early Life.

My parents were from North Carolina. My mother had five brothers on the southern side. My father was twice refused on account of asthma. After their marriage in Indiana, they settled in Cumberland county, Illinois. About 1870 or when I was in my third year, they settled in St. Clair County, Missouri. My father was in the hide business and also lived on a farm. His farm was near the home of the famous outlaw people, Jesse James and Younger. The older members of these families were good folks.

At the age of twenty one I was made deputy sheriff of the adjoining county to the north, Henry county, Missouri. When I was twenty-nine years old I went to Kansas. That was in 1896.

##### Looking over the New Country.

In 1897 I came over to Oklahoma. I traveled over quite a

-2-

stretch of country trying to decide where to locate. I went as far as Oklahoma City and Vinita. Finally I decided that Ponca City, with the Csages on the east and the Loncas and Guaraws on the south, would be a good place to settle, for I knew I would have dealings with the Indians in my business. As, by this time, I had become a representative of the Lyons Company of Kansas City. It was my work to weigh and inspect the hides and care for them. Sometimes if I kept them a day or so, I would have to drain them and bury them. I also started in the meat business in Ponca City. I had no special motive in coming to Oklahoma, only that it was "on a boom" and it was a new country. Ponca City was a town of about 25 00 then.

#### His first Business Furniture.

I made myself a home made ice box. Ice came from Arkansas City and was shipped to a local concern and then distributed. I had a home made counter and cut off sections of a sycamore tree for meat blocks. A large wheeled sausage grinder, a log hollowed out and a rocker chopper for hamburger completed the outfit. I boarded out but slept in the store.

#### "Life in the New Country"

It was a rather tough place. There were 14 saloons and many bad women there. Conditions made a prohibitionist out<sup>of</sup> me. One was careful to mind one's own business and leave others alone, especially a man with a gun lest he take a shot at you. The awnings were peppered with bullet holes and one day a man shot out my big lamp. I saw five men killed or murdered. One of these was when Cyde Maddox

and Link Sweeney had a fight in the white race saloon. They were drunk and had an old grudge. Clyde shot Sweeney and mutilated him. Another incident of this kind was when some officers were having a scuffle in a feed yard. A young man carrying there was accidentally shot while in his bunk, in the altercation.

I knew Black, an outlaw, who was killed out near Lahore and also the leaders of the Craven gang.

#### Story of an Outlaw

Lill Craven ran a saloon in town. His brother, Len Craven, was one of the leanest looking men I ever saw. He was head of the gang. He stole horses and shipped them. People knew him from Texas to Kansas and they were afraid of him. His rendezvous was in the Minisco mountains over by Vinita. I bought a large number of hides from a man by the name of Riley, "One eyed Riley" he was called. One day Craven came up to the house. "My horse is played out, trade me for one of yours" he said. "I can't trade my nice fresh <sup>horse</sup> for your weary one" parried Riley. "I got this horse straight, you can keep him," declared the outlaw. The deal was made and Len Craven rode his pet away. Soon the marshals rode up.

"Where did you get that?" they demanded. Riley explained the circumstances. They asked where Len was, then arrested Riley for harboring Len, as he had also fed him. But he was released on bond.

One day soon after, one of the gang, Frank Tinker rode up to the marshals. "Trade horses," they demanded. They were afraid not to, as he had a big gang of men with him. They even fed the outlaws. After a while Riley was brought to trial. Riley's lawyer was

shrewd. "Did not you marshals trade and feed horses with Tinker, one of Craven's gang"? he asked. They had to admit it.

"Well then," said the lawyer, "let Riley go for he had done what you did yourselves." So Riley was released.

Story of the Jew, the Gold miner, the Irishman, and the Indian.

Not all of our experiences were so serious. The Jews are said to be always trying to save money. One time a Jew asked the price of being taken by freighters to L'vnee. This was a two day trip. There was a trail there and also one to Lawhuska for in those days you just, <sup>rote</sup> in a bee line to your destination across the prairie. They wanted \$5.00 or \$6.00. The trip would take two days.

He could get a bicycle for \$10.00 he decided to buy this. He got along fine until he came to the "big pasture." Some cattle had drifted into a slough and timber and when he came by, they took after him. He hastily climbed an elm tree. The steers got after the wheel. One of them got it on his horns. The Jew stayed up in the tree until the freighters came by and rescued him.

I knew an old California Gold Miner. He was maybe a '49er, maybe not. Anyway he had been to California in the early days and brought back his money in gold bars. He was in a restaurant one day and the following incident occurred.

At first they had no butter, but finally one man managed to drive some milk cows through. But dairy products were high. Cakes and butter were served in a boarding house *only*. "Go slow with the butter, fat", said the proprietor, "It cost me \$2.50 per pound." "Well" said the boarder, "It's worth it."

I went by train to Woodward in the early days. Frequently I went there from Bliss. Our train was due at 12 O'clock but came in about 2 or three. The passengers all hurried over to a place where meals were served. Woodward was a city of tents. Half the business houses were tents. One of the men did not like his coffee. It was not hot and was muddy. It was set down on the floor. The lady running the establishment came in. "What's that coffee doing on the floor?" she clamored.

"Well," softly answered the boarder. "It was so weak, I thought I would set it down where it could rest."

They tell the story of some men who went to the graveyard where an Indian was buried. "We asked him what was down there," said some one. "What did he answer?" "Nothing", said the dead Indian. I know this is true for a dead Indian never will say anything.

#### Story of the Ventriloquists.

There was a ventriloquist in Guthrie and he was good. "Help me out of this box car" he shouted one day. So realistic did it seem that men began to tear the box car open.

I had a teacher <sup>who</sup> was a ventriloquist. The boys did not know it. One day he was in the barn as teachers used to visit around in those days. "How many ears shall I feed you horses", father asked, "He will tell you" he replied, as the temptation was too great. As soon as father had given him what he thought was the right number of good clean corn, no nubbins. The pony (sic) said: "One ear more." Father was angry with that teacher <sup>made</sup> and/him own up to being a ventriloquist.

## Business and Pioneer Conditions

I did a strictly cash business but a neighbor was even more careful. He had a sign that ran like this: "Trust is Lust, Lust is Hell; No, trust, no bust; no hell". Sometime I traded with the Indians. This business was strictly regulated. You had to have a license and it was same as robbing the post office to cheat in the trade. I knew a little Indian, enough to trade especially in the Osage and Cherokee languages, but I could not make out Creek which seemed a series of motions and grunts. Some of the words I remember were He Loginey which was "water" good, as they seem to talk backwards. Another word was Cshilet which means "beautiful." Others were Ho-a- Howdy do; in totsina; dollar, brocha; half-dollar, mesonio; quarter; ashman; dime, chince; and a nickel, lobsta. I visited many of the tribes and learned some Indian ways.

I noticed my helper would always add a little meat, in weighing. "Can't you tell how much meat you are cutting?" I asked. "O, Yes," he replied. "But that's not the way to deal with an Indian, always add, never take off any meat, or he will not like to trade with you." The Indians would take meat and cut it in circles and hang up.

## Cattle men

Brain was easy to sell as the cattle men would buy all that could be raised. The cowmen shipped out of white Eagle below the quarantine line. There were a great many cattle in the region and they were rather wild. I had a good meat business; I killed my own animals buying them from the cowman. The Striblum brothers had 75,000 head of cattle. Their ranch was 60 miles in one direction. However, their animals had poor proportions, broad in front and

narrow in the hind quarters where the best cuts were. They called these cattle finger tails. I could use them just as well my self and bought about 90 head to be delivered from time to time for cash. My work was to inspect and weigh the hides as well as sell the rest and if I had to care for them over night I would have to grain and bury them.

One winter there was an awful freeze in Texas. I went out to the IXL Ranch 60 miles from Amarillo to buy skins as some of the hides had frozen. Before I went out, I bought a suit of ducking and trousers of corduroy as I wanted to look as much like a cowboy as possible. Some of the other men were afraid to go out, we reached the place about night. I had been advised to buy green glasses to prevent snow blindness. This I did. As we went on I could not tell just where, it seemed to me that we were in the center of a great depression. I sampled the cowboys' fare which was mostly beans and meat. I ~~ask~~ drank, chummed and ate with the cowboys. I bought 260 skins from this ranch and some from other ranches.

I thought the cowboys would want me to ride a broncho or play a joke on me. But they treated me as one of them. I told them I could not ride although I was a fair horseman. So they gave me a gentle horse called "Cheyenne" to ride.

I stayed there two nights. I enjoyed their kind of life and their voices which reminded<sup>m</sup> of Kentuckians.

I had to travel all over the county in my business. When I first came I traveled in a wagon. Then I traveled in stage and mail coaches and also on trains. I have been both behind and ahead of hold-ups which were not so infrequent but I have never been in one. If



369

you meet a stage coach that has been held up, do not be afraid.

The men are intent on making a get away who did the robbing. The stage coaches were built like a boat and the wheels could turn clear around. The mail coaches had a niche for the wheels but they could not make a complete circle. On the coaches the driver was high in the air. The driver on the mail coach would sit as low as the passengers and the mail sacks were placed in side. Not very comfortable was the riding over the rough roads and high speeds the vehicles made to maintain their business by making the connections on schedule time.

One time a man had a team of six finger trail bronches. This was near Cleo Springs on the "Chisholm" trail. The coach shot down a steep hill. The center horse stumbled. The stage went right over him stripping him of his harness. The other horses were excited. They kicked and got mixed up in their harness and went over to a pile of brush. One of the horses was unhitched and tied on behind; the center horse was let loose as it would have been too difficult to catch him, he was too wild. The other four were left hitched to the coach and on they went.

There was a hold up near where Cleo Spring is now. Down in Table Creek bottom they had been deprived of their guns and money. We met them after they had come four miles. You can always tell a stage load which has been held up. Their heads would be sticking out of the coach farther. I took care never to ride with a bunch of home seekers. In those days they carried money and the robbers knew it.

After a hold up the coaches would go to the nearest town and report. The the officers would collect and scurry away on horseback.

370

By the time the coach had reached the town and the officers had started back several miles, the robbers had a good start.

More about the country.

I had a pump where I got my water. Wood was easy to get. You could buy it for \$1.25 a cord or you could go to a river and cut some down free for yourself. The farms were all dug outs and so low it looked like no one lived in the country but suddenly you would see a team emerging and you knew you were near some farm house.

Game

There was a lot of game and fish in this country and in Kansas. Deer were not infrequent. You could scarcely drive all day without seeing a deer. I have a knife here that I used to use in skinning deer back in those days. There were also quail and turkey.

Town

The towns have changed a great deal since I first came to this country. Place like Marion, Breckinridge and Ingersoll, which were once flourishing, are disappearing, and others that were small then are growing to large proportions. North Enid was four or five times as large as Enid. Vinita was a good town but had no electricity. Fonca City was just abandoning oil lamps. Tulsa consisted of the blacksmith shop, a livery barn and a few stores and was little more than a trading post. Oklahoma City was a small place. Not much larger than Waukomis, it seemed to me. Guthrie was the one large town. It had about 10,000 population including the whites as a colored man once said.

I had worked considerably for the Indian Agencies, some of my points in addition to Fonca City were Chillicothe and Ft. Supply. The Indians did not barter but paid cash. I would buy the skins of which the animals had been used for meat and ship to Arkansas City or other

railroad point. There was a stone fence with loop holes there. Only a few soldiers controlled the place. There was an Indian School there.

#### Move to Enid

I had been working for the Lyons Hide Company, of Kansas City. But in 1910 the Southwestern Hides Company offered me \$75.00 per month, railroad fare and \$2.00 a day for board and room. This was too good to resist. They moved me to Enid. I had a building several blocks down east Broadway and finally moved to where the Champlin filling station is now. I would trade there with the Indians and cowmen who came to Government Springs Park. The Indians often would have a feast there. When I first came to Enid there were no stores and almost no houses south of Main Street.

The only church building still remaining that was here then is the Catholic Church one block south of the main structure. The post office was in a building across from where the Oxford Hotel is now. Another name was given to it then. The telephone office was a two or three girl business with a stick plug system. The first national bank is the only remaining bank of those days due to the careful policy of the Champlins who were born bankers.

In 1928, I retired. I returned to south Missouri and northern Arkansas and saw many changes there also.

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