

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

COURSEY, VIRGIL

ALTUS

#8814

Field Worker's name Virgil Coursey

This report made on (date) October 8 1937

HISTORY OF TOWNSITE OF ALTUS, OKLAHOMA.

1. Name _____

2. Post Office Address _____

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month _____ Day _____ Year _____

5. Place of birth _____

6. Name of Father _____ Place of birth _____

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother _____ Place of birth _____

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.

COURSEY, VIRGIL

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Virgil Coursey
Investigator
October 8, 1937.

History of the Townsite of Altus.

Back in the days of 1884, when this was Greer County, Texas, and prairie grass and wild peavines grew higher than a man's head, when one could strike out in any direction and travel for miles and miles without finding a fence, a road or a town, two men came and saw and decided to return for their families that they might live in this new land.

So it was that in January, 1885, J. A. Walker and P. H. Holt packed their covered wagons in Whitesboro, Texas, and together with their families, started on an eleven day trip for old Greer County, two hundred and fifty miles away.

Coming into the country at Doan's Crossing, they followed the old Dodge City cattle trail for some distance and then headed for their land near Bitter Creek. Their nearest neighbors were at Doan's Crossing on the south at Mangum to the north and there was a family living near the Navajoe Mountains. The men folk freighted from Wichita Falls, Texas, to cattle headquarters in Kansas for a living

COURSEY, VIRGIL

ALTUS

#8814

-2-

the first year. Buffalo bones picked up over the prairie brought the handsome sum of about \$35.00 a ton.

In May, 1885, John McClearn, the father of Mrs. Walker and Mrs. Holt, moved to old Greer County bringing his own cattle and the cattle belonging to the Walker and Holt families with him. The family community soon grew to a log cabin, a dugout and two tents. This community soon became known as "Buttermilk Station", the name being wished on it by cowboys from the Grooms ranch who frequently stopped at "Uncle John's" for a glass of cold buttermilk.

But Mrs. Holt knowing that their community was a coming town, asked for a post office for the community. The request was granted and a post office was established in 1886 and Mrs. Holt became the postmistress.

What is now known as the Salt Fork of the Red River was then known as the Frazier River and the United States Government decided that the post office should be called Frazier.

It was not until 1886 that these pioneers began to clear up land and cultivate it. Following the year of 1886, there were many years of drouth that tried the mettle of

COURSEY, VIRGIL

ALTUS

18814

-3-

these sturdy pioneers, but they had come to establish homes and stay here and stay they did.

Dry grass erected a fire hazard and cowboys rode their lines watching carefully for any fires that might get out of control and start a prairie fire. However, some one set some grass on fire one day near the mountains and the flames roared across the prairie driving cattle in front of it and endangering the lives of people. Cowboys killed cows, skinned them and dragged the fresh side of the meat across the grass in an effort to halt the blaze. The fire roared on toward the little settlement of Butter-milk Station, but a little creek turned it aside and saved the homes of the settlers.

About sixty Kiowa and Comanche Indians rode into the settlement on a war trip to assist another tribe in a tribal war. They took command of the settlement and demanded food. The white men played on the Indians' sympathy by telling them that all food was secured at Mangum or Vernon and that the children of the white people would starve before more food could be secured. In a short time the Indians, highly painted and carrying bows and arrows, took their leave and

COURSEY, VIRGIL

ALTUS

#8814

-4-

left the settlement as peaceful as they had found it.

In the year 1887, Mr. and Mrs. J. R. McMahan loaded a few necessities into a wagon and departed from Bell County, Texas, on a prospecting trip. In the course of events they drifted into Frazier and spent a few days. This couple owned a gentle team of mules and one wild mule. Just before they were ready to leave Frazier one of the gentle mules died, and Mr. McMahan having sprained his right wrist thought it best to trade for another gentle mule rather than try to drive the wild one.

It was while talking mule trade that Mr. McMahan learned that the community had \$200.00 to be paid for a term of school. He had been a successful teacher in Tennessee and was successful in obtaining the position as instructor. He remained to teach four terms and decided on Frazier as his permanent home. He became one of the most successful merchants of the community.

Among the other early day settlers at Frazier were B. T. Turner and sons, Joseph Cofer, C. C. Hightower, T. G. Braddock, T. A. Lawrence, J. M. Hays, J. M. (Uncle Gee) Russell, E. E. Russell, Elmer Barrett, Charlie Munsell,

COURSEY, VIRGIL

ALTUS

#8814

-5-

Uncle Dan Simpson, Joe Brown, Stan Luikort, the Rush Brothers, C. R. McConnell, the Christian Brothers, Ralph Hudson, Todd Simpson, Frank Simpson, Green Cotney, G. N. Harvey, Jim Reid, D. A. Reid, J. F. Mock, Wesley Cox and Will Cox.

The little settlement of Frazier soon became a thriving frontier town, boasting a hotel, a number of dry goods stores, a drug store, a jewelry store, a saloon or so, a flour mill and a newspaper.

In 1891, C. C. Hightower moved a stock of dry goods from Vernon and opened a store in Frazier in a building owned by W. J. E. Fowler, a prominent physician. The building was built of heavy timber and was sixty by twenty-five feet in size and a story and a half high.

That same year, 1887, is remembered by pioneers as the "year of the flood". In June, 1887, a cloudburst accompanied by a heavy wind storm caused water to rush down the Frazier River overflowing its banks until it and Bitter Creek became one surging stream of water. It was the largest rain that old pioneers remember having seen. The little town was inundated almost before its inhabitants were aware.

COURSEY, VIRGIL

ALTUS

#8814

-6-

Mrs. J. B. Walker unable to sleep because of the terrific rain, arose and busied herself with sweeping water out of the house and not until some one came and told her, did she realize that the water was flowing into the house rather than blowing under the doors. The water came up to the door knob in the C. C. Hightower store, but all merchandise was stacked high on shelves and was not damaged. Other stores reported considerable damage. Women and children were carried out in buggies to higher ground, and no lives in the immediate vicinity were lost. Most live stock were able to swim out of the flooded area.

Soon after this episode there arose a strong contention to move the town to higher ground. Some people, unwilling to leave their homesteads argued that the flood was caused by nothing short of a cloudburst and in the normal course of events might never occur again. However, a townsite company was formed and the present site was selected. The company included, among others, Frank Trimble, Mrs. Sutherland, J. N. Kimberlin and C. C. Hightower.

This company purchased a half section of land from Sam Neal paying \$1,650.00 for it. That half section is now

COURSEY, VIRGIL

ALTUS

#8814

-7-

the north part of town. After a few months Mr. W. R. Baucum purchased the southeast quarter of town for \$1,000.00. Eighty acres were purchased from Mrs. Pollock and Godsbury, who donated the other eighty acres.

The nearest post office was at the present location of Cole Heights. Mr. Baucum was manager of the post office which was located at a place which is now the southeast corner of the town. The post office was called Altus. Mrs. Baucum was an Arkansawer whose home was Altus, Arkansas. When the new town was established he suggested that it be called Altus meaning "The High Place".

The town was incorporated under Texas laws. Lots were marked off and persons who owned lots in Frazier were given an equal amount of property in the new townsite.

Shortly after 1891 a controversy arose between Texas and the Federal Government concerning the ownership of the county. Texas claimed that the state was bounded by the Red River from Texarkana to the one-hundredth meridian, and considered the North Fork of Red River as the boundary, since it was the larger branch. However, the old Spanish line followed the original branch of the river. It was finally

COURSEY, VIRGIL

ALTUS

#8814

-8-

decided that all of Greer County was outside the Texas boundary and consequently belonged to the Government. Mangum remained the county seat even after this decision. It was far removed from some sections of Greer County, and settlers of Altus wanted closer central government.

In 1906, J. R. McMahan, C. C. Hightower, M. E. Kizzar, W. C. Jarboe, Claud Miller and others attended a convention at Guthrie, and in that meeting succeeded in getting Greer County divided. By using some political strategy these men helped get William H. Murray elected as president of the convention, and thus won the favor of the majority of the delegates.

The county of Greer was divided into three counties, leaving Mangum as the county seat of Greer. The other two counties were Harmon and Jackson.

The Federal Government called for an election to determine the county seat of Jackson County. Altus and Olustee being the contenders for the place and Altus won.