

LYMAN, GEORGE SANFORD

INTERVIEW

#9457

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BIOGRAPHY FORM

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WORKS PROGRAMS ADMINISTRATION

Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name Anna R. BarryReport made on (date) December 13, 1937Name George Sanford LymanPost Office Address W1 Reno, OklahomaResidence address (or location) 126 North Foster StreetDATE OF BIRTH: Month July Day 21 Year 1859Place of birth Matseka, Illinois.Name of Father Henry Lyman Place of birth Pennsylvania

Other information about father _____

Name of Mother Alvira (Spencer) Lyman Place of birth Ohio

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 _____.

Anna R. Barry
Journalist
December 13, 1937

Interview with
George Sanford Lyman
126 N. Foster Street
El Reno, Oklahoma.

George Sanford Lyman was born at Watska, Illinois, on July 21, 1859, and when he was thirteen years old his father, Henry Lyman, decided to emigrate to Kansas.

It was in 1871 during the Great Chicago Fair that this family settled in Brown County, Kansas, locating eleven miles northwest of Hiawatha. His father had two yoke of oxen. They came to Brown County just at Christmas; in a short time their oxen began to die. They all died except two. His father became alarmed for fear all the oxen would die and he would have no way to farm.

The first year his father raised plenty of corn. They never raised cotton in Kansas in those days. They did not raise much wheat for a few years, but when people got their land in cultivation they raised lots of wheat. They hardly knew what money was. Everybody was

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poor who came to get a home.

When they wanted a rope, if they had a rawhide they made it out of that, but if they did not have it they would spin coarse thread and make rope out of cotton. George Sanford Lyman has spun and helped to make many a rope and bed cord. His father worked at the carpenter trade when he did not work in the field at home. He worked twelve hours for \$1.50. His father also had a little shop at home; he made all their shoes, sometimes out of buckskin or cloth and sometimes leather shoes, just anything he could get to make them out of. They felt mighty proud of them and almost everybody dressed alike.

George Sanford Lyman never saw a sewing machine until he was a grown young man; in making up their cloth, they would sew it all with their fingers and make the buttons out of thread.

The only way they had to go to church when there was any, was to walk or go in an ox wagon or on a slide. Some people had no wagons and they would make big slides and put floors in the bottom with cross pieces to sit on,

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and they would hitch yokes of oxen to these slides and go wherever they pleased. There was not much preaching those days to go to but when they heard of preaching anywhere near, they would go. Mr. Lyman has walked five miles to church and back the same day.

~~His mother raised gourds, she used them for every-~~
thing. Big gourds, (they called them fat gourds) lots of them would hold a half bushel. They put lard in them or anything they wished. Spanish gourds were large at both ends and small in the middle; they would saw off both ends about half way, clean it out well, tie a cloth over one end and it made a good strainer. They had gourds to milk in and to drink out of. They never thought of owning a bucket in those days.

When the fire would go out they had to go to a neighbor's and get fire, or catch it some way. Many times Mr. Lyman has taken a skillet and an old case knife and knocked fire out of it. He spun fire many times and this is how he did it. He took deep copper thread and doubled it several times and twisted it a

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little, then held it in the whirl of the wheel and turned the wheel right fast and it would set it on fire mighty quick; he would have some cotton ready and stick into it and they would soon have plenty of fire. His mother would weave tape for galluses, ~~bridle reins and saddle girths, but she never learned to weave holes in them for button holes; although she could knit the men folks' galluses with the button holes in them.~~ His mother used to plait wheat straw and make summer hats and take home-made jeans and make caps for winter.

Soon after the Opening in 1889 Mr. Lyman came to Canadian County and worked at the carpenter trade and in the Spring of 1890, he was married to Ida Hund. They made their home in a little one-room log house at Reno City. Their bedstead had only one leg; they took a square stick and bored a big hole in it and one in the logs of the house and put in a pole for a side rail, and one in the leg and the log for an end rail, and one across the back, laid boards on these logs and their bedstead was done. Their table was four sticks with

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small boards around to make the frame, then boards nailed on for a top. Their china closet was made by boring holes in the logs of the house; pins were put in them; a board was laid on that and another one above that and so on until they had as many shelves as they needed. Their chairs were made of wheels sawed off the end of a log, the bark taken off and one side hollowed out a little and legs put in, then a wide board was put in the back and their chair was done.

In the early days here, Canadian County was no place for a person who felt himself better than another. There was no title nor term of respectful address; all were free and equal. No one could feel too proud to do his own work. A minister could not be ashamed to hitch up his own horse, haul his own wood or coal, or black his own boots. There was no respect of persons, for all were respected alike if they behaved well. A storekeeper who would show any difference between a poor and a well-to-do customer, or wait on a business man before the boy belonging to the poverty-

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stricken homesteader, was considered a small man, indeed.

When the first wedding occurred in a new neighborhood, the whole settlement looked upon it as a family affair in which all were interested and concerned. When the first white baby was born the whole community considered it a happy neighborhood event. When death took one of their number the entire neighborhood was there to help and sympathize with the bereaved family. When the lonely homesteader saw the white cover of the prairie wagon camped near his home, he quickly finished his work and visited the camp inquiring of the travelers their names, where they came from and where they were going.

When a stranger happened in at meal time there was soon a command from the head of the house, "Now bring up your chair." This was followed, when the group had gathered around the table, by, "Pitch right in." Usually the woman would say, "Now you just make yourself perfectly at home and help yourself to anything you see." Another custom here in the early days

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was when one farmer came along where another was at work to stop the plow and talk as long as the passer-by cared to stay, or if he happened by the house at mealtime, he was expected to stay. If a man drove up to a cabin, the woman might go into the house and shut the door. This was not unusual, and was a sign that being alone had made her timid. It was not good taste to walk directly up to the door and knock but to shout a greeting, "Hello."

Mr. Lyman said Nebraska was often pronounced "Newbrasky," while you very often heard such expressions as "mighty weak," "powerful bad" or "right smart chance." With the homesteader a pail was a "bucket," bread was "lightbread," hot biscuits were "bread," cornbread was "johany cake," 50 cents was "four bits," a ramrod was a "gun stick," a funeral was called a "bury-in," a newcomer was known as a "tenderfoot."

Few of the residents in this country in frontier days carried watches every day. It was customary to determine the time by the sun. A woman very often had a mark near the house and when the shade reached this

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spot it was time to start dinner. There were no whistles compelling people to be on time to the minute, no cars to catch and wearing a watch was looked upon as an ornament; it was part of a dress-up costume to be worn to town, to the county fair, or to church. It was a general custom for a young man to secure a watch when he was twenty-one.

"Coming of age" at that time was an event of more importance than it is today. A young man worked for his father until he was of age, then he could go where he liked. If the father was able, he ordinarily gave the young man a team or team and wagon to begin life for himself.

In the early days here before the automobile, horse trading was the breath of life to many men. Horse traders and horse swappers existed everywhere; they especially worked among the Indians. The trader usually began his season about the first of May when the weather grew warm and there was grass for his animals. Oftentimes a man with his wife and family journeyed about all summer; generally the man drove ahead

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in a spring wagon or buggy, while his wife and children followed him in a jolting covered wagon. Following the wagon were a bunch of worthless horses known as "snides." These animals, although good-looking, were fit only for trading purposes, worthless as work horses. The first viewpoint with a horse trader was always to get something "to boot." People regarded horse traders as men with very little honesty; a horse trader was usually a good talker and often used his family to act a part in the trade. Generally the trader and his family were on the way to homestead, or that was their story. Just at the moment when a man's suspicions were aroused about the horse, the wife would speak up and say, "Now, you're not going to sell Dobbin, are you, John? You know we raised her from a colt, and these children could never part with her," or would make some similar remark.

Another scheme among horse traders was a pulling contest; usually the trader would hang around the livery barn or dray stand. His little mare would be hitched to a buggy nearby. After a time the stranger would say,

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"You wouldn't think that little mare could out-pull your big team." Often town pride, together with the hope of taking some easy money on a sure bet, caused the cash to be put up and the contest arranged. The trader always insisted that they hitch to a wagon scale, and the little mare, like the trained weight-lifter, was pitted against the big team which was like the raw, untrained man and almost without exception the trained horse won the money. Horse traders often sat and whittled for an hour at a time, then they would walk into the saloon and have a drink. Finally a deal was closed.

It was just after the Cheyenne and Arapaho Opening on April 19, 1892, that Mr. Lyman secured a relinquished claim adjoining the townsite where Geary now stands. It was on this claim that he built a small frame house and went to work breaking sod and trying to improve his place. After a month his money gave out, also his provisions. At this time a man could not get a day's work in this part of the country, so he

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and his wife decided to obtain a leave of absence for a period of six months; during this time he would work at his trade as a carpenter and when the six months were up, he would have enough money saved to make a crop. They moved to El Reno where he worked at the carpenter trade. They drifted on to Okarche, then on to Kingfisher where he found plenty of work and never did return to his claim. Mr. Lyman had built and improved seven different homes in El Reno.

Today he is living alone in his little one-room house at 126 North Foster Street.