

MURPHY, ED

INTERVIEW

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

Field Worker's name Ruth E. Moon

This report made on (date) October 4, 1937. 1937

1. Name Ed Murphy

2. Post Office Address Cuthrie, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 114 South Elm

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month May Day 4 Year 1866

5. Place of birth Near Martinsville, Indiana

on White River

6. Name of Father Wm. Murphy Place of birth Indiana

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Mary Gray Place of birth Indiana

Other information about mother Died when I was only four years old.

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 _____

Field Worker, Ruth E. Moon,
October 4, 1937.

Interview with Ed Murphy,
Guthrie, Oklahoma.

My experiences in Oklahoma have been along several lines. I was a cowboy as early as 1881 and made five trips down into the new land to hunt game. I made the run from the Kansas line when the Strip was opened and came to Guthrie in '94 where as a contractor I have helped to build the town.

There were still plenty of prairie chickens and quail in southern Kansas when my family came out from Indiana in '78. But often as a boy, I would see a party of hunters returning from the Indian country with their wagons piled high with deer, bear, cougar, and wild turkey until the load was so heavy that the team couldn't pull any more, so the hunters had to walk by the side of the wagons. And my ambition was to go on such a trip.

About the time that Garfield was assassinated, in 1883, I made my first trip into the Indian country but I went to help drive cattle instead of to kill deer. Everybody was talking "big ranches" and trying to build up

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their herds. Those who had cattle were making money for a good sized steer brought \$40.00 and cost almost nothing to raise. So the settlers in Southern Kansas wanted more cattle. A man named Northrup agreed to go to Texas and buy fifteen thousand head of cattle and bring them back as far as Pond Creek (the old site is now called Jefferson). There the people who were buying the cattle were to meet him and get their share. My father and brothers and I went down to get the hundred head that we were buying. I was only fifteen, but I was much interested for four head of cattle were to be mine. Helping to get those cattle back to Anthony, Kansas, was my first experience driving cattle.

A few months later, I began working on the T 5 range on the Cimarron west of here and was there about six months. Then I spent about a year on the Charlie Martin Ranch near the Medicine River--there were usually five men at a ranch. It was still all open range. We would ride with the cattle and bed them at night, that is turn them back until they were in a compact bunch and quiet. Later the cattlemen went together and formed the Comanche Pool. They fenced about

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a hundred square miles of grazing land and built line camps every thirty miles around it. A cowboy's regular work was to ride about fifteen miles along the fence. I worked on the north side and back to camp. Anything wrong with the fence must be repaired. If any cattle had got out they must be rounded up and put back in. This life was not so hard except in times of storms. It was in '36 that the worst storm came and about thirty-five per cent of all the cattle on the plains died in that storm.

When they were getting ready to open the country to settlement, President Cleveland ordered the cattle moved out of Oklahoma. So there was a big final round-up near Pond Creek called the Lone Tree round-up. Hundreds of hands were there to cut the cattle that belonged to their ranch. The number of men were pro-rated. I was not one of those picked to help, but I went down there anyway just to see it. I sat on my horse on a little hill and as far as I could see there were cattle. Representatives were there from six or seven states. Herds were taken from there as far as Montana and Wyoming. Railroads were jammed with cattle, as one big herd right after another waited to

be shipped to market. Of course the market was glutted, for a while, and the ranchers lost a lot of money.

I was working on the T 5 range when General Phil Sheridan rode down through there with about three or four hundred men on their way to Fort Supply to head off an Indian uprising. He had lost an arm in the Civil War. Once I got off my pony for a minute and he grazed away from me. Immediately several big steers came between me and my mount. A man on horseback is safe enough among them, but that was a pretty ticklish moment when I found myself on foot and surrounded by wild, big-horned steers. I have never been able to figure out anything I could have done if I had been in my shirt sleeves. But it was cool enough weather that I was wearing a coat. So I drew it up onto my head and ran at the steers, flopping the sides of it. This frightened them away long enough for me to reach my horse.

Later, I worked as a stone mason and contractor in Anthony and Wellington, Kansas. During the winter months, when work was always slack, three companions and I went on hunting trips down into Oklahoma. We sold the game

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taken at trading posts or shipped it to market and made a nice profit off of our furs.

We started south from Kiowa, Kansas, following old ranch roads, which were the only roads. Usually we spent most of our time between the Cimarron and the North Canadian Rivers near Cantonment. We made five such trips; the first in '84 and the longest in '92. We stayed three months that time, and I never shaved once during that time. When I returned my wife hardly knew me. That Christmas I sent Mrs. Murphy a deer and a huge wild turkey. It weighed twenty-two pounds after it was dressed. She had to cook it in the wash boiler and roast it on the boiler lid, propped up in the oven by bricks. All the neighbors had to help her eat that turkey.

We took with us only flour, sugar, and meal, the meal mostly for use in making bread for the dogs, and lived mostly on the fresh game we killed. It was fine at first, but after a steady diet of it for some time, we would get so hungry for fat meat that we would just have to find a trading post and get some. The thicker and fatter it was the better it satisfied our craving.

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At this time the Government was issuing beeves to the Cheyennes and Arapahoes at Cantonment every three months. Just a few days before time for the rations to be given out, a bunch of Indians camped close to our camp. One night we heard some one snooping around our tent. I went out to see who it was and there was an Indian. When he saw me he started to run but fell over one of the stakes and ropes to our tent. He got up and went only a few feet until he fell over another rope. He was not used to stakes and ropes all around the outside of a tepee. He was probably looking for food, for the next day several Indians came over to our camp and wanted to trade a bunch of good furs for some groceries. We really did not care to sell any of our supplies for we didn't know how long it might be before we could replace them, but we gave them about 50 cents worth of stuff for the furs which brought us \$7.00 when we got them to market.

We had skinned the animals that we had killed, and stacked the carcasses up not far from our camp, intending to dispose of them. There were coon, possum, skunk, and everything in that pile and they had begun to swell and

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were covered with green flies. The Indians noticed them and began to grab them and make off as if they had stolen something. In no time the whole pile was gone. I guess that was enough for them until the beeves were issued three days later.

Ten miles up the river from Cantonment was Sheridan's Turkey Roost. It was a valley about a mile long and filled with cottonwood trees. We would go in there in the late afternoon and hide. About sundown the turkeys would begin to come walking in in droves from every direction. That was a sight worth seeing. By the time it was dark they would all be settled, with every tree literally covered and loaded down with the big birds. A bright star-lit night was best. When everything was quieted down we would all shoot at once.

I killed sixteen deer myself on that trip, and a multitude of turkeys. We took a hundred and sixty furs. We sold game at Higgins, Texas, and at trading posts along the way. Game that was going to be sold was not skinned. It was just drawn, and the cavity filled with a soft dry grass. It got pretty cold at night at that

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time of year and we kept the stuff shaded in the day time. We could keep it in good shape for a week. We found that if we only ate the front quarters of the animal and sold the "saddle" as the rest of it was called, we got almost as much as if we had sold the whole animal. For instance, a whole deer brought \$6.00 to \$8.00 and we could eat the front legs and get within 75 cents of that amount for the remainder. From then on we lived on front quarters and sold all the "saddles."

Buffalo robes were plentiful and cheap. A good heavy one only cost about \$2.00. We spread the buffalo robes on the ground for our beds and they also made warm covers.

There was always some danger of Indians. They said that white men stole their ponies. I never was in a fight with them but the sight of them with war paint on always sent shivers down my back. One night we were about fifteen miles west of the Cantonment with a bunch of Indians camped about two miles away. In the night they began to beat their tom-toms and have a war dance. We didn't sleep very well that night and moved camp bright and early the next morning.

In '94 we went hunting over in the Creek Nation.

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We killed a deer the first evening and another the next morning but that is all we got except turkeys. We were a little afraid that we would meet some outlaws in those hills. We came to a hog ranch run by a deaf and dumb man and asked his advice, by writing. He answered that the outlaws would not bother us if we tended to our own business, but to look out for United States Marshals if we shot too much game. We had a right to kill enough for our needs, but must not take any out. That evening we were sitting about our camp fire when five heavily armed men rode up. They asked a lot of questions about our business in there, looked at the one deer that we had shot that day. They talked in a very friendly way but they left us rather nervous. We decided they were marshals and rode back down the hill to tell the deaf and dumb man of our visitors. When we had described the men, he told us who they were. Bill Doolin and Bitter Creek are the only two whose names I can remember now but they were all outlaws. I saw three of those five men hauled into Guthrie in a wagon with their boots on after being killed by officers. I helped my friend Bruce Daugherty, a photographer, take a picture of Bill Doolin after his death. Papers said

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\$10.00 apiece for a copy of that picture. I was acquainted with Bill Dalton but that was before he went into the gang.

When the Strip opened I rode down from Caldwell, Kansas, on top of a stock car. The train was only making about fifteen miles an hour and people kept jumping off all along the way. The right-of-way was fenced and they would try to jump over the fence and put up a stake. Some of the women got hung up on the fence. Women had an advantage for if one was trying to stake a certain claim, the men would let her have it. We met some soldiers taking some Sooners out. I knew of a place that I wanted, it lay a half mile north of old Pond Creek and was a wonderful piece of land. I expected someone on horseback to beat me to it but when I got there no one was on it. One man thought that he was but when we had found the cornerstones and measured his claim, his stake was just outside the line. About two days later two men appeared and both claimed they had been there first. I knew that I had been there ahead of them, but it was expensive to contest such things so we agreed to sell out to the first buyer and divide the price among the three of us. We were offered \$200.00 but had to make a trip to Caldwell with the buyer to get the draft cashed.

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While there, the other two men told me that the deal was off, as the buyer had changed his mind and taken a train for home. I decided that they were only double-crossing me, having collected the full price they were cutting me out. So I took the first train to Enid and got a number. With it I could file on my lead ahead of anyone else. Then I went back to Pond Creek where I met the buyer on the street. It was just as I had figured. He had paid the other two men the money and they had left with my share. I told him that I had a number and the place belonged to me and he gave up gracefully. I told him that I would appreciate it if he would write me out a quit claim deed to any interest he had in my claim, but neither of us had a piece of paper so he picked up a little piece of 1 x 4 flooring board that was on the ground and on it he wrote me a quit claim deed.

This left me sole owner of the place, which was easily worth \$3000.00. But in a little while I decided to go back to Kansas and sold out for \$200.00. The next time it changed hands the price paid was \$2,000.00. I went to the El Reno drawing but drew too high a number.

He moved to Guthrie in 1894, and I built several of the early business buildings here. One of these was the

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Charlie Pond Laundry on West Oklahoma Street that burned many years ago. I was the contractor for the second building on the campus at Langston. During the winter months when building was at a standstill, I turned again to hunting to keep up expenses. Every morning my little brown bird dog and I would start out and return with from six to seven dozen quail which I sold to the local markets.

I have been shot five times, and three of the five times was wounded seriously. The worst wound was when my left arm was about half shot off. When Mrs. Murphy was making up my clothes after my return from one hunting expedition, she saw a whole flock of small holes in the heavy underwear that she was hanging up in the sunshine and surprised me by asking "who shot you this time"? All of these mishaps were accidental, but how I ever survived them all is a mystery.

We have raised a large family and have prospered. I still work at my trade, in which my sons are associated with me and although hunting is not what it used to be I am looking forward eagerly to the opening of the 1937 duck season.