

MORRIS, TOM

INTERVIEW

9865

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

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Field Worker's name Bessie L. Thomas. Investigator.

This report made on (date) January 26, 1938. 1938

1. Name. Tom Morris.

2. Post Office Address Lawton, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 401 Park .

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 4.

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Bessie L. Thomas.

Investigator,

January 26, 1938.

An Interview with Tom Morris.
Lawton, Oklahoma.

I used to herd cattle here on the plains in 1884; it was grass land entirely then, deer and other wild life in abundance, none of which were here when I came back to settle and make a home.

At that timethere were many Indians, cattle, and only a small fort at Fort Sill. The Indians used to hobble their horses and stay about the camp fires of the white ranchers, never seeming to be afraid nor were the white men, as a rule, afraid of the Indians, who did not seem to be the least hostile.

When herding we all lived in tents, moving about from grass to grass, water to water, in the chuck wagon. We cooked over camp fires, just like cowboys on any other Western Plain . Occasionally we would hear of rustlers being busy amongst the herds, but there was not so much of it going on as really was told. We used to give the Indians a beef now and then, which always caused a happy day of cele-

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bration, and feasting for them. This, I think, was one reason why the Indians learned to like the cowboys.

I herded for Rufe Choat from Young County, Texas, and while here in the early days I met Lark Burnett, and Tom and Dan Waggoner, all Texas cowmen. I knew the Waggoners in Texas, and also Jimmie Roberts and Cort Babb, all well known to the early ranchers in this part of Oklahoma and Texas.

I also knew Batt Carr, met him in Fort Worth before we came to this country. He had a bad name in Texas, was a shrewd dealer. He was a mighty tough man, really among the worst in this part of the country. I do not know how he came to get so many good cattle, but do know he prospered here on his ranch in the Wichitas.

In the summer of 1901, I had a herd of 300 or 400 cattle grazing southwest of what is now Lawton, along Pecan Creek. I bought some school land, improved it a little and then went back to Fort Worth, Texas, to bring Mrs. Morris out to help "tame" the country.

When I first came here I landed on Snake Creek, one and one-half miles west of Geronimo, with 250 head

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of cattle which I brought with me from Texas, driving night and day over the old Chisholm Trail. I left Texas because the grass land there had been grazed out by big herds of cattle being driven from Texas, grazing on the way, sometimes going only eight or ten miles during the day; but I pushed mine, as I had no grass for them in Texas for almost a week, and could find no new grazing fields there.

I settled on Pecan Creek when the Territory was reached and later bought a farm and built a house on Blue Beaver, a crude house of one room, with a lean-to for a kitchen. In rainy weather it leaked like a sieve and in the winter we could hardly keep warm in it. It was in March, 1902 that we moved on this place and we lived there fifteen years, then moved to Lawton thirteen years ago, and are still living here.

When I came back here in 1901, I met many early-day people who had herded on these plains prior to 1884, among whom are Ira Carr, Joe Dorrance, John Hewitt, and Tom Watson, who was an Uncle to Joe Dorrance.

When I came back here in 1901, I became well ac-

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quainted with Frank Fuller, who had been a rancher here prior to 1884, and later he worked for me, for years, as a butcher in my shop in Lawton. He used to freight across the county in an early day, knew the country well, and could tell many an Indian story.

While we shipped from Lawton a great deal we shipped most of our cattle from a little station named Holliday, on the Rock Island Railway.

I saw Lawton grow from a wild tent city, to the prosperous town that it is today. When Lawton and ~~part~~ Sill were young, the "fire-water" brought into this country by the white men, had a most demoralizing effect on the Indians, and the hardest fight the Indian Agents had was trying to keep liquor away from the Indians.

In the early days terrible storms of wind, rain, hail, and dust swept over this country, many times leveling tents, and causing destruction, but always the spirit of the pioneer was to build back, and go on trying to battle the elements.