

NEWSOME, WILLIAM JHUE. INTERVIEW 9860

455

BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

456

NEWSOME, WILLIAM JHUE.

INTERVIEW.

9860.

Field Worker's name Anna R. Barry.

This report made on (date) January 20, 1938

1. Name William Jhue Newsome.

2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 701 North Foster Street.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month July Day 13 Year 1873

5. Place of birth Lincoln, Nebraska.

6. Name of Father John Newsome Place of birth Nebraska

7. Name of Mother Sarah Jane Newsome Place of birth North Dakota.

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 10

NEWSOME, WILLIAM JHUE. INTERVIEW. 9860.

Anna R. Barry.
Journalist,
January 20, 1938.

An Interview with William Jhue Newsome.
El Reno, Oklahoma.

I was born near Lincoln, Nebraska, on July 13, 1873, the oldest son of John Newsome and Sarah Jane Newsome. In 1884, or when I was eleven years old, my parents moved near Dodge City, Kansas, and the next year my father took me on a buffalo hunt.

These expeditions were for the purpose of laying in a winter's supply of meat for the neighborhood and at the end of this hunt the community held a feast or barbecue. After these hunts game formed a larger proportion of the diet and when people ran short of supplies sometimes lived for weeks on game and bread.

On these hunts we usually camped near some streams or pool of water where the buffalo often came to drink. Each hid himself behind some bank or in some low place where the unsuspecting beast was compelled to come for water, and in this way each hunter often got two or sometimes three animals before they could get out of range of their rifles. Buffalo hides were in good demand when properly tanned. In order to keep this meat it was "jerked" or dried.

-2-

Two methods were used for "jerking" the meat.

If the weather was the least bit damp, a scaffold was built by driving four forked sticks into the ground and laying other sticks on these until a complete scaffold was formed large enough to dry the flesh from a large buffalo. The flesh was cut from the bones and sliced into thin pieces then dipped into boiling specially prepared brine. It was then hung over the rack and a slow fire of hot embers was used to cure it sufficiently to prevent spoiling. This could be done in less than a day's time. If flies were bad the smudge also kept them away from the meat. The second method was used when the weather was warm and dry as it usually was on the high plains of Kansas. The meat was prepared in the same manner except that no fire was placed under it, the wind and sun dried it in eight or ten hours so it would keep all summer in a dry place.

The settlers often secured the services of Indian squaws to tan the hides for robes. Only buffaloes killed in the late fall or early winter were suitable for robes. The hide of the buffalo made good rawhide for all uses. Many people cut the green hides into strips and dragged them behind their wagons. When cured, the hides were used in the dozen and one

NEWSOME, WILLIAM JHUE. INTERVIEW. 9860.

-3-

ways that hay wire served in later years to repair things, to braid into lariats, and even to stake the pig or the old hen with her brood of chicks.

Deer were hunted in much the same manner as buffalo. They came into the wood along the streams for protection in the winter and were frequently easy prey for the settlers.

I was very much afraid of the Indians when I was a lad. In one instance my family was away from home and upon our return found Indians had emptied the feather beds and pillows to secure the ticks, canvas and bed-ticking being valued highly by the Indians. We picked up enough feathers from two feather beds to make three pillows after the raid on our home.

In 1886, our family moved into Ne-Man's Land, locating about fourteen miles southeast of Beaver City. Because this part of the country was ~~not~~ included in any state or territory, there were neither courts or laws and people settled on this land with what was known as a squatter's right. Practically all this land was occupied by cattle ranges, these ranges being stocked with herds of half-wild

-4-

cattle from Texas. These were very different from the cattle kept on the farms of Oklahoma today. They were gaunt and thin, long horns and were of several colors- black, white, brindled and spotted.

Several days after we arrived here father, mother and we three children were living in our little one room sod shanty. The room was plastered with a mixture of clay and ashes while the roof was made by placing a forked post in each end of this room which furnished a support for the ridge pole. The rafters were made of poles and the sheeting of brush over this. This was then covered with sod blocks thinner than those used to cover the side walls and laid with the grass side down, the cracks being filled with fine clay. From time to time this dirt filling had to be renewed as the rains carried it away. In the Spring great growth of sunflowers and grass appeared on the roof. Mother worried with this leaky roof; if the rain came from the north, the north side of the house leaked, and it was usually my job to move everything to the south side. If the rain came from the south side, a move had to be made again. When the roof was saturated it dripped for

NEWSOME, WILLIAM JHUE.

INTERVIEW.

9860.

-5-

three days after the sky was bright outside. I remember seeing mother frying pancakes while I held an umbrella over her and the stove.

Wood was scarce in this part of the country; people went twenty, thirty and even forty miles to haul firewood of even the poorest quality. Most settlers, however, gathered cow chips for fuel. They hauled them in and stacked them in ricks like haystacks to keep them dry for winter use. Hay-burning stoves were put on the market. One style I remember seeing used was built somewhat like an ordinary cookstove with a fire-box in the front part. Two pipes about thirty inches in length, filled with weeds, hay or straw, were fitted in below the oven with an end opening into the fire-box. The hay was set on fire in the box and as it burned a spring at the other end of the pipe pressed on the hay pushing it into the fire-box as fast as it was consumed. A supply of six or eight pipes were kept filled and on hand. When one pair of magazines was burned out, a ratchet was turned, winding up the spring, and the fireman inserted a loaded pair of pipes.

My father purchased another type of hay-burning stove,

-4-

known as a drum from the fact that drums of sheet iron held the hay. The stove, constructed similarly to the "Round Oak" stove so familiar a generation ago, stood about three and one-half feet high and consisted of a base which rested on legs and a top which lifted up to allow removal of the drum. The drum, which sat on the base and on which the top part of the stove rested, was about two feet in diameter. There were two drums, and while one was being packed tight with straw or hay at the nearby haystack, the other was in place on the stove. When the fuel burned out, the empty drum was replaced by the full one. One of these drums packed tight with heavy grass would keep a good fire for an hour or two but hay, although used for several years, was unsatisfactory as a fuel. It made a hot fire but it required constant attention. There was a saying that it took a man and two boys to keep the hay fire going. Quantities of gas were released in the house, during the process of continually replenishing the fuel. People were frequently afflicted with a severe headache from inhaling these gases. The fire hazard was greatly advanced by the use of this fuel.

NEWSOME, WILLIAM JHUE.

INTERVIEW.

9860.

-2-

Water in this part of the country was not to be had closer than a hundred feet and frequently it was two hundred. The buffalo wallows held the water from rains and this water, although it was warm and distasteful was used to drink. Ponds were made but the water they held was no better than that in the buffalo wallows, for they were filled with snakes, bugs and frogs. In later years cisterns were dug. Many people hauled water ten and twelve miles in the old water barrel which usually stood in front of the house and supplied the house. In the summer the water became warm and insipid and in the winter it was taken in the house to keep it from freezing solid. Sheet water was to be found at a depth of about two hundred feet and since the settlers had no money to pay for drilled wells, many were dug to that great depth. These deep-dug wells not only proved dangerous for diggers and repair men, but occasionally those on deserted claims became death traps for the passerby who happened to stray into them at night.

In the fall of 1889, I, then a lad of sixteen years of age, came to Canadian County and went to work at the Old " Star " livery stable in El Reno in the Spring of 1890.

-3-

When the rural dweller came to town he "put up" his team in the livery barn while he transacted his business during the middle of the day or overnight. Tenders as they were called, fed and watered the animals, saving the owner the trouble of carrying grain and hay and also affording him a certain luxury in that it relieved him of the care of his animals while in town. To have the hostler take care of the horses when the settlers arrived in town and to have the team brought out to him when he was ready to leave, was appreciated service although it could be afforded only occasionally.

Those living in town who had no horses could hire a rig and team to drive out into the country. Land agents generally provided their prospective customers with livery rigs and a stranger in town desiring to make a business trip could secure transportation at the livery barn. The highest tribute a young man could pay to a desired young lady was to give her a ride across the prairie on a moonlight night in a livery rig.

Telegrams giving notice of the death of relatives in the home state were delivered by livery messengers. The office of the barn was a place for the loafers. A hot stove made it comfortable and enabled travelers to heat bricks or stones for foot warmers on long trips across the prairies. In the evening the

NEWSOME, WILLIAM JHUE.

INTERVIEW:

9860.

-2-

stable man entertained his cronies at checkers or cards and the livery barn was also a news center of the town, as well as an information center. The livery could tell the stranger all about the country, where the most desirable claims were, which trails were best, where to cross the various creeks, and how best to get to an isolated place.

The land hunter, loan agent, or other prairie travelers ordinarily took a driver with him, for the price was no higher, and this was my job driving these teams from place to place. The liveryman preferred to send a driver, for experience had taught him that it was to his advantage to care for his property even though it cost him the driver's wages. The customers preferred a driver, also, for in case of accident, the liveryman attempted to collect damages. Fifty miles was considered a full day's work for a team. The price varied; if business was rushing, it was higher, if times were slack the proprietor, Mr. Stoneman, went about seeking business at cut rates. Ordinarily the rate was \$ 5.00 for a day's drive anywhere within a range of fifty miles. Often a number of land seekers would drift together at the hotel, form

NEWSOME, WILLIAM JHUE.

INTERVIEW.

9860.

-10-

a party, and hire a two seated spring wagon or surrey. The liveryman, of course, charged a much higher rate for such an outfit, but the cost was small for each individual.

I worked at various livery barns for twelve years, then took up farming. Today it looks good to see a horse and buggy going down the highway.