

## EARLY DAYS IN THE SAC AND FOX COUNTRY, OKLAHOMA TERRITORY

*By George W. Stiles\**

In the Oklahoma Territorial days secretly anyone ever inquired as to your origin, or where you came from. Nevertheless, from a historical view point, or shall we say family pride, my parents were natives of New Jersey.

Father George W. Stiles, Sr., was born near Morristown at Mendham, October 26, 1852; and Mother, Alice M. Merritt, before her marriage, was born April 22, 1857, near Newark.

They were married March 15, 1876, and attended the Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia on their honeymoon.

My advent into the world was June 14, 1877, while my parents were visiting relatives in New York State.

Father had a married sister, Mrs. Charley Tunis, Aunt Belle, living on a farm along the Solomon River, near Minneapolis, Ottawa County, Kansas. The frequent optimistic letters from his sister caused him to migrate West; consequently, with the first born babe in arms, the family took the train for Kansas. Mother returned East a few years later at the death of her Mother, and soon after Father joined her there. Three years afterwards the family returned to the Kansas prairies as tenant farmers. Through years of plenty and famine, hot winds, fire, drought and chinch bugs, we moved from one rented farm to another.

### OPENING OF OKLAHOMA

The Oklahoma country was opened to settlement on my Mother's 32nd birthday, April 22, 1889. This event again stirred Father's desire to travel, hence, he and his younger school teacher brother, Steven, made a scouting trip with team and spring wagon to Oklahoma Territory and Arkansas.

During their trip to Oklahoma, they became acquainted with Henry Mausfield and his wife, Jane. This hospitable couple of-

\* George W. Stiles, M.D., Ph. D., lives at 725 Newport St., Denver Colorado, having retired as director of laboratories for the U. S. Department of Agriculture in Denver for more than forty years and more recently (1953) as head of the State Department of Public Health laboratories. He is a graduate of (1900, B.S.) and began his career at Oklahoma A. and M. College as an assistant in the Biology Department (1900-01). He is the author of some ninety scientific papers in his field and holds many honorary citations, having been specially honored and commended by the Denver Medical Society in July, 1955, for his fifty years of service in the field of medicine.—Ed.

ferred camping ground facilities on their homestead located on the west bank of the Cimarron River, several miles southeast of Stillwater. My Uncle Steve and his new wife, Aunt Katie, packed their belongings and moved to the Mansfield place during the autumn of 1890.

The following March, Father gathered his worldly household goods together and started for Oklahoma. He loaded everything possible into a big canvas covered wagon with extended top sideboards, to accommodate a set of bed springs, and with the surplus supplies in the spring wagon, began the long trek. The big wagon was drawn by our span of mules, and was usually driven by Father, while the gentle team of mares was hitched to the spring wagon following behind, and driven by my eldest sister, Martha, while I brought up the rear with our loose livestock.

In southern Kansas a drenching rain delayed our progress for three days, and at night a kindly German farmer permitted us to sleep in his hay loft. After the storm we travelled over muddy roads, eventually reaching Arkansas City. As we drove through the residential section on Sunday morning, when people were going to church, the 5 or 6 cows I was driving spied the nice green lawns and made a dash for them. I was much chagrined, but with the assistance of the angry property owners, the animals were quickly confined thereafter to the streets.

While travelling through the Cherokee Strip, our big wagon caught on fire, which fortunately was quickly extinguished with but little damage. We also had trouble crossing Black Bear Creek in the absence of a bridge, almost failing to make the steep miry banks and ford.

Finally we came to Stillwater and headed southeast along Stillwater Creek to a store called "Clayton P. O." near the mouth of the creek.

About mid afternoon, we left the main road and turned into a wagon trail nearly one mile from our destination. At this point tragedy almost claimed the life of our Mother. As we came to a deep gully in the trail, Father threw several rails into the ditch to keep the wagon wheels from sinking into the mire. Mother was sitting high on the wagon seat, her feet braced against the dashboard, holding the lines of the mule team taut, with Father at the head of the team, leading them gently down the ravine. As the front wheels hit the rails, Mother somersaulted from her seat and the right front wheel passed over her chest. Later, she told us that she had presence of mind enough to roll over, thus preventing the hind wheels from passing over her body as the wagon emerged from the gulch. We were never able to determine exactly how she escaped death, unless in some miraculous manner the rails lay in such position as to protect her from fatal injury.

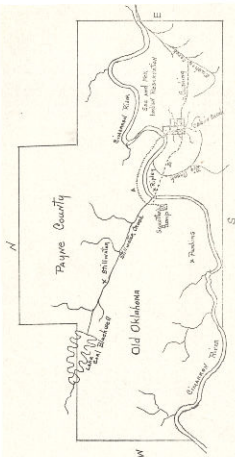


Diagram Showing Outline of Payne County west, Old Chilocow, Sacs and Fox Indian Reservation, Cimarron River, Boundary Line Between the Two Areas.

Map by Dr. George W. Sofka, Showing early Locations in Payne County.

## LIFE IN OKLAHOMA

We soon arrived at the "Squatter's Camp grounds" and our genial host, Mansfield, helped us build a kind of log dugout covered with earth, where we found shelter from the elements in a strange land. The family of seven consisted of two parents and five children; their approximate ages were George, Jr., 13, Martha 12, Nona 10, Minnie 5 and Frank 3.

Besides our own and Uncle Steve's family living on Mr. Mansfield's land, there was the widower Jacob Sorie with four teen age children; Emerson, Elmer, Emmett and Amy. I have good reason to remember Emmett for he rescued me from a watery grave in my attempt to swim in a nearby pool.

Another family was that of M. M. Watson, his wife Rose, and two small fairhaired children. They lived in a dugout in the bank above the river bottom near the hut of Uncle Steve and Aunt Katie. The colony received their water supply from a 20 foot well equipped with "Old Oaken Bucket."

Our livestock were either tied during the night or kept in a corral. However, during the day it was my responsibility to herd the cows. One day these inquisitive bovines found their way to McPeter's corn field. The "hawling out" I received lasted long enough to prevent any further trespassing.

Chiggers, centipedes, snakes, flies and tarantulas were our frequent and uninvited visitors. Also mosquitoes of the variety that caused malaria. We lost two cows with either Texas fever, anaplasmosis, yellow jaundice, or dry murrain. Two horses also died during the summer with what we now know as sleeping sickness, or Encephalomyelitis.

Since money was a scarce item in those days, Father and I found employment among the Indians. June 14, 1891, my fourteenth birthday found Father and me breaking prairie for the Indians at \$1 per acre along the bottom land of Eucher Creek. Each of us had a team and a 12-inch-mould board breaking plow. Father would lay out a plot of ground to be broken, drive a straight furrow by the side of flag poles, and then we would go round and round until the desired acreage was completed. Since it was my birthday, Father suggested that I lay off plowing long enough to bag six newly grown squirrels for my birthday dinner. The savory aroma and taste of that feast still lingers as a happy memory.

When there was no land to be broken, Father helped build log houses or made wooden caskets to bury dead Indians. Strangely enough there appears after all these years in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, the following item: "A number of early citizens in Cushing, Oklahoma, (Sac and Fox country) recall what was standard

procedure for partners in the hardware and casket business. The same casket was used as long as the box held together for burial purposes at \$50 per service. Some boxes were used as many as 50 times at \$50 per trip to the burial grounds of the Sac and Fox Indians, who buried their dead on hides stretched high on poles. The casket was used to carry the dead to the burial ground, then returned to stock and when payment day rolled around, this man and his partner were on hand with their claims for caskets and collected for same before the Indian survivors received their payments.<sup>12</sup>

According to my personal knowledge, Father never heard of or engaged in the above practice which came to light after the land opened.

By referring to the accompanying map, Line B, one can follow the route to our Indian employment. From squatter's camp we went north about one mile, forded the Cimarron River and travelled in a southeasterly direction to Euchee Creek. The route caused us to pass over Big Creek and the smaller Cabin Creek, the latter having a small spring available for camping purposes. During these trips of some 20 miles distance, quite naturally we noted the favorable camp site on Cabin Creek, the general lay of the land and the location of a desirable homestead.

#### THE PRESIDENT'S PROCLAMATION

Several times during the summer someone would give a false alarm, shouting "The Land is open." Away they would dash across the river only to be turned back by the United States Marshals.

Finally the day arrived when couriers from Guthrie officially announced that President Benjamin Harrison had issued a five day proclamation declaring the Sac and Fox Indian Reservation and other lands were to be thrown open for white settlement at high noon on September 22, 1891. This presidential announcement came as a climax to many anxious souls who were eagerly anticipating the event, and for some families it was the end of waiting over many months to secure a possible claim in the "Promised Land."

According to Dr. Grant Foreman:<sup>13</sup> "The Cherokee or Jerome Commission, now so called, next negotiated on June 12, 1890, with the Sac and Fox Indians for their lands, comprising the eastern half of Lincoln County. Here the Sac and Fox Indians owned a tract of 479,667 acres ceded to them by the treaty of February 18, 1867. Allotments of 160 acres each were made to 584 Indians, in the total

<sup>1</sup>Orpha Russell, "Chief James Bigheart," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXXII, No. 4 (Winter, 1954-55), p. 387.

<sup>2</sup>The author observed one small Indian burial ground of the Sac and Fox with the poles as described above.

<sup>3</sup>Grant Foreman, *A History of Oklahoma* (University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1942).

amount of 87,683.60 acres after deducting eighteen hundred acres for school and agency purposes. 391,184 acres remained for white settlement, for which the Government paid them \$485,000."

Muriel H. Wright says<sup>4</sup> that the Sac and Fox Agency was located about five miles southwest of the present town of Stroud, in Lincoln County and that the Sac and Fox reservation extended west from the Creek Nation between the Cimarron and North Canadian Rivers, an area now included in parts of Payne, Lincoln and Pottawatomie counties.

The day before the opening, Mr. Watson left camp and was successful in staking a claim the day of the race along the Deep Fork bottoms, east of the present town of Chandler. Jacob Soric decided to try his luck on foot, so dashed directly across the Cimarron River to the east and secured an 80 acre tract with a spring and cedar trees. Another man was contesting his right to the 160 acres, so they decided each should have an 80 without further dispute.

Since Mansfield had hunted down the Cimarron River he showed by a map how Father and his brother could make their way along the north legal side of the river in the vicinity of Cabin Creek where there was a cow trail up the steep bank on the south side of the stream.

#### QUEST FOR A HOME

We will now follow Father and Uncle Steve on their quest for a home: Tuesday morning, September 22, 1891, the sun rose in a clear sky, with a tinge of frost in the air. At sunrise, Father and his brother saddled their horses, tied lunch and feed for their horses on the back of their saddles, and bade good-bye to their families. Because of poor crossing facilities, it was necessary to go up Stillwater Creek (See map, Line A) some distance, to ford the stream. They then took an easterly course, passed the Van Arsdale homestead where a big black bear was caged in the front yard. The two men had difficulty in locating the mouth of Cabin Creek. However, a teen-age boy with a large goiter accurately directed them to the proper place. This boy's father was later our northern neighbor.

On arriving at the river about 11:00 a.m., they found a dozen other men on horseback waiting for the race. They advised Father and Uncle that it would be illegal to run from that place. The reply was, "We don't need your advice." All the other men turned their horses and disappeared, but returned shortly afterward.

As 12 o'clock approached, all the contestants were lined up at the water's edge. Father was riding "Topsy," a black mare with a white star on her forehead. She was very nervous and fretting

<sup>4</sup>Muriel H. Wright, *A Guide To The Indian Tribes of Oklahoma*, (University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1951).

with her front feet near the quick sand. Father turned to the man next to him, who appeared to have a watch, and asked the time. He replied "Five minutes yet." Father turned his horse's tail to the river for a new start just as the United States Marshals fired their guns from the hill tops on the south side of the river. This little jockeying, caused Father to lose a few seconds. The race was on. All horses headed through the shallow water toward a single objective; a narrow, single cow trail heading up a steep bank some 20 feet high on the south side of the Cimarron River, just below the mouth of Cabin Creek. A man named Lee was the head man. He staked the first claim (See No. 1 on map). This man had waited a whole year to secure this choice bottom farm, and doubtless he had waded the river and surveyed the land with his eyes many times prior to the race. As fate would have it, this 160 acres proved to be the only Indian allotment in that area, so Lee lost possession.

The second winner was Jo Yount, father of the boy with the big goiter, who signaled taking claim No. 2. By this time Father was pressing the third rider, son of Jo Yount, so closely that their two horses jumbled together going up the cow trail and Father's coat came loose and dropped on the bank and his lariat rope became untied. However, he gathered up the rope with his foot. "Gave the gad to Topsy" and caused Jodie Yount to turn east, staking claim No. 3, leaving Father head man of the group.

#### STAKING A CLAIM

Estimating that he had travelled over a mile from the river boundary line, Father indicated he was staking claim No. 4 on the map. Since his coat was lost containing white rags for flags, he removed the flour sack containing grain for his horse, and used it for a signal.

At that time of the year, the blue stem grass was higher than a man's head. Father looked around for a pole and saw a man without horse, with a hole dug in the ground, fresh chips lay nearby, but when asked to loan his ax (Sooner No. 1) said he had none. So Father rode his horse up to a small blackjack and tied his flag on the tree. By this time other riders had passed on their way south. One man, however, returned, saluting Father saying, "I've staked the claim south of you, but there are two men and a woman camped on the creek, team unhitched, cooking their dinner and claiming the land, and I do not know if they are on my claim or on yours." (Sooners-No. 2). So the two men rode down to interview the trespassers. Meanwhile, Father's brother, Uncle Steve, was fifth in the race and staked the homestead adjoining Father's claim to the east.

About two hours after the race a man named "O'Hara" came driving a team hitched to a buggy down the wagon trail (See Line B on the map) from the west and immediately contacted the two

men and the woman campers who pointed at my Father and said, "The little man on the black mare is a sooner." With this information O'Hara hustled around and in some manner made out the legal description of the land, and went to the Guthrie Land Office and filed on the claim.

#### EVENTS AT THE CLAYTON FORD

At this time, we will return to the "Squatter's Camp" back across the river and follow events there. Before leaving, Father had given me instructions what to do at the time of the run. I was to hitch up the mule team to the big wagon provided with side-boards, wagon bows and canvas, loaded with bedding and camping supplies, and was to be ready at the Clayton Ford, above the mouth of Stillwater Creek, on the Cimarron River just before noon, and after the race look for him at the Cabin Creek camp ground.

At the river I saw a sight never to be forgotten. Hundreds of anxious home seekers had gathered at this vantage point. Among the eager throng were many covered wagons, vehicles of all descriptions, sulkeys, rigs, spring wagons, buggies, anything with wheels, men on foot and on horseback. This was merely a sample of what was taking place at many other strategic points along the boundary lines of the Sac and Fox Indian Reservation.

At the sound of the guns sharply at 12 o'clock noon, the race was on. Many persons had never experienced the treacherous nature of "quicksand" and midway across the river some teams were allowed to stop and rest. This gave the wheels of their wagons a chance to settle and become tightened in the grip of the sand. I followed the crowd, kept my team moving and safely landed on the other side of the river (the Route labeled "B" on the map). The present town of Ripley is located on the hill above the river bottom, and at about this spot my trail came upon the uplands.

At the top of the rise, I was confronted by a raging prairie fire, headed directly toward me from the South. Fires were started to facilitate locating corner stones for legal identification of lands. Observing a man in a wagon nearby, I asked for a match to make a back fire. He replied, "No, you little devil, there is enough fire now." Watching my chance I drove the team through a low burning place, and sought safety in the burnt area.

After further danger from fire had passed, I proceeded on my way toward Cabin Creek. About the middle of the afternoon I came to the top of the hill west of our homestead, and looking down the valley saw Father and his black steed. He quickly recognized me and his team and we proceeded to the camping grounds. My first question naturally was, "Did you get a claim?" He replied, "Yes." Then I asked, "What are all these people doing here?" Father said



that they were also claiming the land, and my poor heart sank, for even though a boy, I had heard of contests before.

Sometime later that evening, some men who had made the race with Father came up and informed the several prospective contestants that they had witnessed the race from the described area at the mouth of Cabin Creek on the river, and would testify for Father as the legal owner of the land. With this information most of the claimants disappeared, a few remained.

When Father told me about his cost, I rode Topsy back across the route he had travelled and recovered it, apparently where it had fallen.

We also took a tour around and found a log foundation freshly laid (Sooners No. 3) on the northwest quarter of the claim. Then to the south across the fork of the creek was a brush shed built by an old soldier (Sooner No. 4).<sup>5</sup>

#### THE DAY AFTER THE RUN

The morning after the run, I helped Father remove the top sideboards with wagon bows and canvas from the wagon for my tent, and he told me to stay until he returned. Then he drove away with the mule team with Topsy hitched on behind, intending to return that night.

Night came and no Father. A bewhiskered man with a six-shooter threatened to shoot me. I said, "You shoot! This is my Dad's claim." Another man intervened and said, "Don't shoot the kid. He is not to blame." Somehow the night wore away and on the second day, still no Father. That evening some men set fire to the grass intending to burn my camp. Fortunately the grass was still quite green in the bottoms and I easily licked the blaze.

My camp was beneath a large oak tree and during the night I was awakened and startled by the hooting of an owl overhead, the first one I had ever heard.

At noon, on the third day, just as I had finished eating my lunch, two men on foot came to my camp stating they had lost their party since the race and were very hungry. I started to fry my remaining sow-belly and flapjacks over the fire, not sure when I would eat again, when they grabbed them from the skillet and ate the food half cooked. Someone later told me these men each staked a claim southeast of Cushing, but I never met them afterward. Incidentally, I learned to flip hot cakes from the skillet into the air two at a time.

Late the third night Father came back and explained his delay in returning. When he reached "Squatter's Camp" he found

<sup>5</sup>Father did not make the April 22, 1889 race.

Mother at the point of death. As a result of her previous injury and a severe attack of malaria fever, she had given birth to a premature baby boy. My little brother lived only a week and was buried on the southwest corner of our homestead. Someone rode a horse to Perkins, about ten miles away, to get the elder Dr. Holbrook, the nearest known physician. Under his care Mother recovered from her illness and was able to move to the claim late in October.

#### IMPROVING THE CLAIM

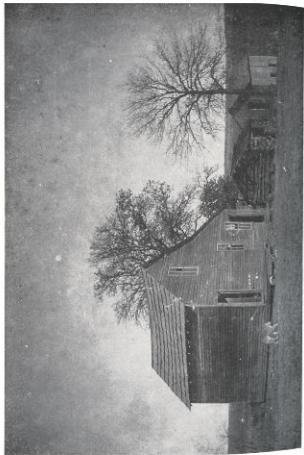
Meanwhile, Father made various trips across the river. He brought a repaired mowing machine and we cut a lot of blue stem grass for forage and building sheds for the livestock. It was my good fortune to cut the first oak tree for our one room log house. The stump of this tree resembled the work of a beaver; in later years my technique improved.

Friendly neighbors helped raise the log house and we moved into it with half of the roof completed during a drizzling rain. Somewhat after the fashion of Abraham Lincoln, I helped Father split rails for the corral and the manufacture of clapboards for the roof of our log cabin. Oak trees, some 18 to 20 inches in diameter, were felled and the trunks cut in lengths of about two and one half feet. These sections were split in half with heavy iron wedges, then quartered and the center cores removed and used for chinking the log house. The quarters were further divided by using a frow and mallet. Now the younger generation would consult a dictionary to learn the nature of a frow. It was a heavy iron blade about one foot long with an eye at one end for a handle. With the aid of a heavy forked log we manipulated the split sections by a series of shittings, until the final shingle-like clapboard was perfected, about one half of an inch in thickness.

#### FILED ON THE HOMESTEAD

About a month after the race, Father went to Guthrie to file on his claim and much to his surprise found that the man, O'Hara, had filed on the same land soon after the race, so the only thing left to do was to file a contest. The attorney for O'Hara offered to settle for one hundred dollars, but Father replied, "The claim is legally mine and I can prove it, hence will not offer a cent."

In order to fight the contest, Father had to have money, which was pretty scarce in those days. He learned that a man named Blackburn had a little to spare, and I recall accompanying Father to see him. He lived down the river some distance. Our case and need was stated to the prospective lender and he asked how much we needed. Father replied that \$200 would be enough and offered to secure the loan by mortgaging our mule team. Blackburn replied, "If your word is no good, neither will your bond be," and



Two houses in center. First house of George W. Sells, Sr., an Oklahoman; frame house at left occupied March 4, 1903, called here at night; the dog named "Sue".

gave Father the money. Thus revealing the nature of some of those early pioneers, not all of whom were horse thieves and robbers. Father's first act after selling the mule team, was to repay the generous donor.

The contest finally came to trial more than ten years later. Witnesses who ran with Father and knew him, testified in his behalf. The defendant failed to appear in person, being represented only by his lawyer.

The "Notice of Publication" appearing in the "Cushing Independent" is as follows:<sup>4</sup>

#### NOTICE FOR PUBLICATION

Land Office at Guthrie, O.T., March 25, 1903.

Notice is hereby given that the following named settler has filed notice of his intention to make final proof in support of his claim and that said proof will be made before John P. Hinkel, U. S. Commissioner at Ripley, Oklahoma on April 28, 1903, viz

George W. Stiles

For the lots 3 and 4 and the E. 1/4 of the S.W. 1/4 of Sec. 31, Twp 11 north of range 5 east.

He names the following witnesses to prove his continuous residence upon and cultivation of said land viz:

Charles S. Gibson, Edward L. McCoy, Joseph Yount, Stephen D. Stiles, all of Cushing, Oklahoma

John J. Boles, Register.

On October 1, 1903, the patent was issued to George W. Stiles, being Homestead Certificate No. 8055, recorded Oklahoma Vol. 105, Page 423.

The stone located at the southwest corner of Father's quarter section was a township corner. This rectangular sand stone monument had six horizontal lines on each of the four sides, indicating it was six miles in a straight line north, east, south or west to another township corner.

The Sac and Fox Reservation also contained 40 acre lots. Consequently, at the corner of each such forty, a flat stone about one foot high bore the inscription 1/16, meaning it divided the section into 16 plots of 40 acres each. At our southeast corner a lone black oak tree about two rods distant, had a partly healed blaze pointing toward the corner stone and was known as a "witness tree." These corner stones have long since disappeared with the advent of modern highways.

<sup>4</sup>Taken from Mother's note book or diary containing about 40 pages relating incidents when a young woman until life in Oklahoma, is possession of the author.

## FAMILY AFFAIRS

A further note concerning Father's brother, Stephen D. Stiles, is of historical importance. The very first night Mother came to the claim she acted as midwife to Aunt Katie, Uncle Steve's wife, who gave birth to a girl, Jennie, the first new baby born in that neighborhood. Other children in Uncle Steve's family who still survived their parents and elder sister, are Howard, Etta, Edward and Ferd.

During the first winter on the claim considerable work was accomplished by clearing and burning brush and scrub oak from land desired for cultivation. When spring arrived, the sod plow was busy turning the rich sandy loam. The older children of the family and Mother were busy planting corn, kaffir and other crops, by using a spade cutting a crevice in the edge of a sod furrow and pressing the soil in place after planting. Those early garden crops of okra, and black eyed peas are never to be forgotten.

## HUNTING DAYS: WILD ANIMALS

A part of my activities was furnishing meat for the family. Armed with an old 12 gauge muzzle loader, I seldom returned without an ample supply of quail in season, rabbits and squirrels. There were no laws governing hunting, nor stamps required for shooting wild ducks. On one occasion I bagged five Mallards at one shot. Two squirrels at one firing was not uncommon. Recalling the Bible story of David and Goliath on one occasion I saw a squirrel lying high on the limb of a tree and selecting a pebble from the brook, brought him down the first time I used my sling shot. This performance was never repeated, so it must have been accidental rather than skillful throwing.

Before the land was broken, the small streams were clear as crystal. Many times I observed channel catfish, perch and bass milling around in pools three or four feet deep. Those days are gone forever.

With reference to fur bearing animals, my younger sister, Nona, aided me one time in capturing six large skunks in the base of a hollow tree. Their skins were sold for \$2.85. Opossum pelts brought less money than prime skunk hides. Near this same locality sometime afterwards, I was walking without dog or gun, about noon along a cow path beside the creek, when my olfactory senses warned that a wild animal was near. Looking upward, I saw lying asleep on the limb of a big oak, a full grown bob cat. After watching it awhile, I passed on, but the creature was gone upon my return. On another occasion, I was fishing on the bank of Buckee Creek, when directly across the stream, within a few yards, a lynx came stealthily down beside the roots of a sycamore tree, took a lap of water and quietly disappeared. The animal was identified by tufts of black hair on his ears.

One night after a party, I accompanied a girl named, Susie Lunsford, home on horseback. Returning homeward old Ben, our hound dog, located a creature under a rock beside the road. To satisfy my curiosity, I dismounted from my pony, lifted the rock, and received the full broadside of repellent agent from the striped animal. My only good suit of clothes hung on the clothesline a whole week before being deodorized.

Early in the morning, the spring followed the opening, we often heard the "gobble, gobble" of a wild turkey a short distance from our claim. Desiring to add to the family larder, I had the old gun loaded with coarse shot ready for the next warning. Sure enough, a few days later Father called me about daybreak saying, "The old gobbler is calling you." Hopping out of bed, scantily clad, I grabbed the gun and started toward the object of my quest. Knowing the terrain of the land, I judged the bird was near a gully, from which a close approach was possible. Soon I came near the object of my search. I waited for his "gobble, gobble" and located an object moving through the half burnt grass and scrub oak. Feeling sure it was the turkey I took good aim and fired. Climbing from the pit, I was horrified to see a man standing where I believed the turkey was strutting. I ran up to him and asked if he was hurt. Lowering his trousers, we observed small trickles of blood from the gun shot wounds. My aim was perfect for the intended victim. He replied, that he did not think that the shot was serious, however, I offered to get a doctor but he declined. Unknown to each other, both of us were stalking the same turkey, which escaped unharmed. He afterwards remarked that he thought the Indians were after him. On reaching home, Mother noticing my great agitation, asked what had happened. I told her I had shot our new neighbor, Ed McCoy. This man had recently acquired the rough claim adjoining us to the south, and it was the first time that we knew it was occupied. In later years, McCoy testified for Father in settlement of his contest. He was subsequently elected County Sheriff on the Republican ticket. Apparently my accidental shooting was not a serious handicap to his future career. Over the years, I have been thankful the old gun was not loaded with buckshot, and was not a modern weapon.

Neighboring boys and I used to go "coon hunting" occasionally during winter months. On this particular occasion, four or five of us had spent the early hours attempting to keep up with our hounds. We would hear their melodious voices far up Cabin Creek, then west toward Big Creek. Finally their clamor was faintly heard down toward the Cimarron River. We scurried through brush, briars, fell down hills and finally, after midnight, came to a large oak tree in the bottom land. The six or seven dogs were frantically barking and trying to climb the tree. Since it was bright moonlight we saw a large object high in the tree, and while discussing the situation the creature crashed down landing on the ground near us

boys and the dogs. With a human-like scream, the animal bounded away into the thicket. Neither boys or dogs desired to hunt further that night. Experienced hunters told us it was probably a panther, and that we were lucky to be alive.

#### PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

Another personal encounter with death occurred the spring after the race. Our cows and horses grazed on the open range during the day and were corralled at night. One afternoon I set out on foot to find our animals. They were located in a beautiful little valley a mile away on the school section. From the nearby hill I saw them grazing among a herd of two or three hundred long-horn Texas steers, and among them was also a wild deer. Desiring to approach the deer as closely as possible, I crept down the hillside and came quite close to the animal before its white tail raised and it began to gallop away. This startling event caused the nearest steer to lower its head, and sensing my presence, bellowing, charged directly toward me. I could almost feel the breath of the raging animal on my face. A lone oak tree was in view but too far away for protection. Either from instinct, a trace of courage, or perhaps a silent prayer, I stopped, removed my vest, and seizing one end swung it lariat fashion over my head, and yelling, faced the furious beast. The entire herd turned their tails and fled. The cows and horses were easily driven home in safety. The vest that saved my life was among clothing sent us from relatives in New Jersey, for which I was very grateful.

#### ILLNESS

Pioneer settlers experienced many hardships. Among them was sickness. Kindly neighbors often sat up nights to nurse and care for the suffering. A modern well equipped hospital and trained nurses were unknown luxuries.

According to Mother's Diary, our eldest sister, Martha, became lost the last evening in February, 1892, and remained out all night. She came home the next morning carrying a few wild flowers in her hand saying she was very much frightened and tried to sleep under a tree. We supposed she was staying with a neighbor, so had not been out searching for her. A short time later she became ill with an obscure fever, and Dr. William H. Scott, who homesteaded north of Cushing attended her. His diagnosis was "sleeping sickness." She was semi-conscious and bedfast several weeks before recovery. Today we presume she had encephalomyelitis caused by a virus, the same type that affects horses and it was probably transmitted by the bite of infected mosquitoes. In recent years scientists have demonstrated the presence of this virus in various species of birds and other wild life, and certain mosquitoes feeding on them could carry the infection to humans.

## EARLY RELIGIOUS LIFE

The religious life of early settlers was kept alive by devout individuals. Mother organized a small Sunday school under the black oak trees in our front yard. Only a few neighboring children attended. At Easter, this group was transferred to Cottonwood School, a log structure I helped build, one mile west and one north located on the southeast corner of A. B. Georgie's homestead. Mother's Diary further says, "We have now about 30 scholars." In addition to teaching a class, she was appointed "Chorister." Incidentally the literature for the Sunday school was donated by various individuals including our eastern relatives.

One of the events that was not uncommon in those early days occurred when a family camped near our place. During the night an elderly woman died, presumably from natural causes. Mother and other neighbors prepared a shroud and aided in burial arrangements. Father helped furnish a pine box for a coffin and aided in digging a grave. In the absence of a minister, Charles S. Gibson, our neighbor, read the burial ritual from an Episcopal prayer book at the grave side, thus committing to earth the last remains of some unknown traveller without record in the files of vital statistics.

An event of much importance was the organization of a singing school for the young music-minded citizens of the community. Someone had said that the people who sing are less apt to go to jail than those who do not. Perhaps that was one reason why the writer was spared that experience. Since the early tutoring of that primitive school, I have had a lot of fun occupying the bass section of a Methodist church choir, or engaging in city choruses for nearly half a century. Our professor was named Smith, a small, sandy haired man, who lived at Stroud, perhaps thirty miles distant. He either rode a horse or drove one hitched to a buggy. Quite often Professor Smith would stay all night and share our hospitality. We generally received extra tutoring for such accommodation. The classes in vocal music began with the rudiments. With Mother's assistance, I was able to make a fair rating. We still have the faded yellow hymn book used during those early days. Some of us more advanced pupils were invited to sing at Fourth of July celebrations. One I recall was held at Cushing under a brush arbor, at the time an epidemic of food poisoning occurred. The source of the infection was ascribed to contaminated ice cream. Many persons became violently ill soon after eating, and the modern bacteriologist would have called it "staphylococcus poisoning." Fortunately there were no fatalities.

## OUTLAWS

The second school house I helped build was named "Independence"; located two miles south of Cottonwood—after the district boundaries were changed—or one mile west and one south from our home.



One Sunday it was announced that a special church service would be held there the following Tuesday evening by some itinerant preacher. As was my custom, I planned to attend this meeting, consequently I started on foot up the hill toward the school house. It was just dusk and on reaching the hilltop, a sudden burst of shooting took place directly in front of our house, and Ben was making a terrible racket. Hastening back toward home, I met two men with a team and spring wagon coming up the road. The men explained they were just shooting to hear the old dog bark, and assured me that nothing serious was wrong. They asked where I was going, and kid like, I told them about the meeting announced at the school house. They invited me to ride with them as they would go that way. On the south side of the road, near the top of the hill, the widower, Berlin, lived in a log house with several teen-age children. As we came opposite the cabin, the shooting began again. Meanwhile, I was becoming rather suspicious of my hosts. The rear of their spring wagon resembled a small arsenal. As they fired toward the log house, the occupants fled to safety, this I learned on my return. They offered me a drink of whiskey, at any rate something in a bottle. On my refusal to partake they began more shooting and swearing. They commended me for my courage in riding with them. The road angled across the section toward the school house, and on arrival they hitched their horses and went inside the building, as the door was unlocked.

A single kerosene lamp hung inside at the front of the single room. After lighting the lamp one man made rings around it with his six shooter while the other amused himself by sitting in the doorway and firing bullets through the windows. Since no one else came for the meeting, probably a false notice, one man suggested that they take me along with them as they intended to rob a bank at Guthrie the next morning. The better judgment of the other man prevailed and after the two argued for some time, I was permitted to go home, with the warning to tell no one. On the way home I stopped at Berlin's house, since he was the Justice of the Peace, and related my experience. Nothing was done to follow the presumed outlaws; however, we learned shortly afterwards that a bank was robbed at Guthrie the next day. It was reported that the "Doolin Gang" committed the robbery. Thereafter, invitations to ride with strangers were gracefully refused.

#### HOUSE TRAINING

A second experience with probable gun-men may be of interest. Soon after the opening, the Sac and Fox Indians desired to fence their allotments with barb wire. Consequently, seven teamsters were engaged to haul the wire from Sapulpa to the Indian village on Echoe Creek. About noon, the first day of our journey, a stranger on horseback approached the first team owned and driven by Hi Newton, and asked where we intended to camp that night. Newton

replied, "None of your d—— business." Newlon's team was a fine pair of medium sized horses, well suited for saddle purposes. Later in the day, we learned there had been a skirmish between some outlaws and United States Marshals the previous night and several horses killed. With this warning, it was decided to guard our horses during the remainder of the trip. Returning from Sapulpa with loaded wagons, we camped for the night. The weather was chilly and it was misting. Shortly after midnight, I was relieved from my turn on guard duty, and as my successor took over, he discovered two men crawling in the grass toward Newlon's team. A shot over their heads warned the intruders who quickly retreated into the thicket. Our camp was soon awake, but no further attempt was made to rustle the horses during the rest of the trip.

#### THE COMING OF THE SAWMILL

The second year, following the Opening, a small sawmill came to the north end of our farm. Custom sawing of native lumber was done for many persons in our vicinity. The principal species of trees were oak of several kinds (burr, white, black, post and water), elm, cottonwood, sycamore, walnut, pecan, and a few hickory, cedar and hackberry.

Many valuable trees were sacrificed to make lumber for building purposes. With cross-cut saw and ax, I helped Father cut the branches and tops of felled trees into fire wood which we sold Cushing housewives at \$1 per load. Of course the lumber was much needed for the comfort and welfare of the settlers; however, when some of my favorite squirrel trees were marked for destruction, I often said, "Woodman, spare that tree."

In those early days, it was rumored that valuable walnut logs were often stolen from various localities in the Territory and shipped abroad, commanding high prices for furniture making and other purposes.

Indiscriminate cutting of timber, in many cases allowed soil erosion to occur, and it was not long before flash floods were carrying our rich soil downward to the Mississippi delta. Nature had planted clumps of wild plum and other shrubs in low places to prevent soil erosion, but the new settlers soon removed them, and today washed out gulleys are the result. We now realize that much native sod on sloping lands should never have been disturbed by the breaking plow.

Perhaps it is pure sentiment, but we have a beautiful white oak (*Quercus albus*) tree 50 feet high growing in our Denver yard I brought a single acorn from the Oklahoma homestead over 30 years ago, and here birds build their nests and squirrels find a safe refuge.

## HAULING FREIGHT

Shortly after the Sac and Fox Reservation was opened, Winn Hull erected a small store building on the hill southwest of the present city of Cushing. It was located near the wagon trail leading toward Suckee Creek. All groceries and supplies were hauled, usually from Guthrie, some 40 miles southwest, or occasionally from Mulhall, the nearest railroad point. During the first two or three years, Father and I would take turns in hauling freight for Hull's store. The round trip required about four days, over rough, rutty dirt roads, without bridges. We were usually paid in groceries.

After we began raising cash crops, we hauled them to market, and upon our return brought a load of merchandise for Hull's. I recall one trip when I took a load of cotton to the cotton gin across the railroad tracks in West Guthrie. On my arrival, the cotton buyer made the usual announcement that the cotton market had dropped that day, knowing full well I would not haul the load back home.

A few days before the Cherokee Strip opened, September 16, 1893, Hull's wife and three children came from the East and arrived at Guthrie. The wagon that met them was inadequately supplied with bedding. I was hauling my last load of freight for the store and upon learning this shared my own with them. Sleeping on the damp ground, because of my loaded wagon without sufficient covering, I developed a case of double quinsy, now known as tonsillitis. The night before the Strip opened, Dr. Scott came at midnight to lance my swollen tonsils.

## SOCIAL LIFE

During the summer of 1893, we raised a nice crop of water-melons. A few days prior to the opening of the Strip, several hundred schooner wagons passed our place enroute for the border. Since drinking water was scarce and the weather sultry our melons, piled under the shade trees sold like hot cakes, the choicest demanding the unbelievable price of ten cents each, while the smaller ones sold for five cents.

Inscribed on the canvas of one wagon was the slogan: "In God we trusted. In Kansas we busted. Let her rip. We're bound for the Strip."

Mother's Diary says we moved into our second home, made of native lumber from the homestead, March 4, 1893, the day President Cleveland was inaugurated for his second term.

Sometime later, Mother's youngest sister, Sylvia ("Aunt Vean", Mrs. Ves Baker) of Kenville, New Jersey, and her young children, Alice and Jerry, visited us. We were delighted to see relatives from

the East. Aunt Vean's grandchildren are still talking about their Granny's trip to Oklahoma.

Our social life was not entirely neglected, even though the struggle for existence was difficult. The friendly feeling among neighbors was fostered by chicken dinners, pig roasts, watermelon feasts and parties at various homes. The mental process of trying to recall the proper names and initials of these persons after a half century is most thrilling. Each individual has left his or her mark upon me and they are chiefly remembered, not by their wealth, but by their friendly spirit and striking personality. Very few of those early settlers remain, and only their children or grandchildren are alive to tell the story of the pioneers.

#### SCHOOL DAYS

In those early days, school financing was a problem. There was one redeeming feature, however, the youth who earnestly desired an education generally succeeded in reaching the goal of his or her ambition. Though schools were limited in number, the teachers were well trained and much interested in their pupils, and encouraged them in every way possible.

In addition to instruction received at school, parents with adequate schooling were of great assistance in advancing the welfare of their children's education. Such were the circumstances facing the author in his pre-college days. It was quite a coincidence that I had a small part in the construction of the first school building in Cushing where I became a pupil soon after. Prior to the erection of this structure, school had been held in private homes or churches.

On May 15, 1895, a photograph was taken of eleven teams loaded with lumber from the Arkansas Lumber Company, Guthrie, O.T., to be hauled to Cushing for their new school building. On the left of the picture in front was Bob Munn, with a mule team hitched to his wagon loaded with shingles. Among other teamsters were Ed McCoy, Jasper Henderson, G. C. Hampton and myself, the remaining names are forgotten.

The owner of the lumber yard was so pleased with such a large sale that he invited all hands into the nearby saloon (legal in those days). Being the youngest of the party, I lagged behind, and finally requested a bottle of soft drinks. A nearby ruffian accosted me and asked what I was drinking. Replying my choice was "root beer," he attempted to forcibly make me drink a glass of whiskey. Another stranger interfered in my behalf. That event fixed my choice for alcoholic beverages and to this day I am a total abstainer.

Six months later the school building was completed and Miss Minnie Gray began teaching about forty pupils coming from rural and urban districts. I was fortunate enough to be among those of advanced grade.

Before the school year ended, Miss Gray became the bride of Mr. Clarence L. Lyon. They were married one Friday evening after school in the school room and every scholar remained to witness the ceremony.

Throughout the school year Mrs. Lyon gave special attention to a few of us who were preparing to enter college, and spent extra time reviewing subjects most needed for college entrance.

A recent issue of the *Cushing Daily Citizen* reports the visit of Mrs. Lyon after fifty-eight years to the scene of her pioneer teaching and courtship days. For the help and inspiration she gave me in those crucial days, I still address her at Christmas time as "Dear Teacher" which she appreciates very much.

#### COLLEGE AND SCIENTIFIC CAREER

Prior to this time, desiring to plan my future occupation, I had applied for a job as clerk in one of the local mercantile stores in Cushing, but being a shy, poorly clad country youth, and inexperienced, was refused employment. I then decided to secure an education in order to overcome such handicaps.

The question of finances became a vexing problem when I began talking about entering college. During the spring of 1896, Father promised me the proceeds from a sod crop of cotton for my college entrance fee. The land was raw prairie and had many running oak grubs to be removed. It required long hours of labor to break and disk the soil to prepare it for planting the cotton seed. The young crop was carefully hoed, thinned and cultivated. It was a pretty sight when the pink blooms first appeared, and even a much prettier one, when the cotton bolls began to burst. Since so much time was required to prepare the soil the crop was late in maturing. My sisters helped me pick the cotton, even then, I was two weeks late in entering College.

A few days before entering the freshman class of the Oklahoma A. and M. College, I joined the First Methodist Church at Cushing. This proved to be one of the most important events of my life. On the day of my departure, Father drove me to Stillwater in our big wagon. At that time it required a full day to make the twenty-five mile trip. I was the first student from the Cushing area to enter and graduate from the College. By strict economy and a little help from home, and by doing janitor service and chores on the college farm at ten cents per hour, I was able to meet college expenses. This was the common practice among male students in those early years.

At the close of our sophomore year, George L. Holter, Professor of Chemistry, requested anyone desiring to elect chemistry as a major subject for the following two years, to consult him after

class. Only two of us responded. There was no question as to the ability of my classmate, Tom T. Goff, but when my turn came for the interview Professor Holter remarked, "Deacon, your only qualification is stick-to-it-ive-ness," and permitted me to choose chemistry as my major. During my senior year, I was the one chosen as student assistant in the Chemistry department. They probably called me "Deacon" because my best suit of clothes was "A hand-me-down" from an uncle back East, and made me look like a preacher. Another likely reason for the nickname was the fact that I had been hired at \$4.00 per month as janitor at the little Methodist church.

In this connection an incident occurred one Sunday evening I shall never forget. One of my duties as church janitor was to always have the kerosene lamps filled with oil, the wicks trimmed, and the globes clean and shining. The large cluster of lamps hanging in the center of the sanctuary were properly cared for. However, like the foolish virgins, I suddenly realized that the single lamp suspended over the pulpit had been neglected. I silently prayed the oil would hold out. Just as the Minister had pronounced the benediction and said "Amen," the lamp began to flicker and went out.

There were six members of our class who graduated June 1, 1900. Of whom three are still living: Mrs. Cora (Donart) Coffey of Oklahoma City; John S. Malone, Shawnee, and myself. We celebrated our 55th anniversary this year.

At \$30.00 per month, I was employed for the following school year as an assistant in biology under Dr. L. L. Lewis at the college. During this period I passed a Civil Service examination, as a Scientific Aid in bacteriology and zoology. On June 1, 1901 I was appointed to the Pathological Division Bureau of Animal Industry, U. S. Department of Agriculture at a salary of \$40.00 per month, and stationed at Washington, D. C. This same position today calls for a salary of about \$225.00 per month. Working during the day from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. in the laboratory to pay my school expenses and support a family, I entered the night class of George Washington University. Taking advantage of holidays and 30 working days of annual leave, by the end of 8 years, I was able to obtain both an M. D. and Ph. D. degree. I was also the honor student of my medical class of fifty-eight members receiving prizes for the best examination in Pediatrics and Dermatology. My doctorate degree was granted under the direction of General George M. Sternberg, Professor of Bacteriology.

On June 30, 1902, Miss Bessie A. Loud became my wife. She had been employed in the U. S. Census Bureau. We were married in the Metropolitan Memorial Methodist church in Washington, D. C. To this union four children have been born: Merritt L. Sibley W., William W. and Alice E. Stiles. Our eldest son, Merritt,



Heeling Lumber for Cushing's First School Building. from Arkansas Lumber Company at Garfield, May 15, 1895.

was born June 26, 1903 on the Oklahoma homestead, and was the first male student of an alumnus to enter the A. and M. College at Stillwater.

Events of the following half century is a story by itself. Briefly, during this period, more than eighty articles have been published, covering a variety of subjects in the field of sanitation, preventive medicine, and disease transmission from animals to man. In 1909, I became a member and later Fellow of the American Public Health Association, and while in active service was also a member of many other scientific and medical societies, and was listed under "Who's Who in Medicine and Science."

Through a Civil Service examination, in 1905, I was appointed the first Bacteriological Chemist in the Bureau of Chemistry under Dr. Harvey W. Wiley, "Father of the Pure Food Law of 1906". Until 1912, my work was concerned with the bacteriological examination of various food products including, milk, water, oysters and other commodities entering into interstate commerce.

Because of my wife's health I was transferred to Denver, Colorado in 1912 and engaged in field and laboratory work until 1918 when I returned to the Bureau of Animal Industry. I established, and was in charge, of the first research laboratory of that Bureau in Denver, retiring in 1947 at the age of seventy. This laboratory is now located at the Federal Center, Denver, and serves the entire Western United States in animal pathology and medical research. For the following six years I was Director of Laboratory in the Colorado State Department of Public Health. Since retiring a second time I now have opportunity to do some church work, a little writing, and exercise in my garden.

Before concluding this article, mention should be made of my father's family. Father died July 29, 1935, at the homestead at the age of nearly eighty-three. Of our family of ten, only three survive: my mother, youngest brother, Lee R., and myself. Lee was born on the homestead and still resides there. In addition to his farming, he has also been Deputy County Sheriff of Payne County for the past thirteen years. Mother was ninety-eight years old April 22, 1955, and is cared for by brother Lee and his wife, Jane. Mother is one of the few survivors of those pioneer days and her life has been an inspiration to all who have known and loved her.

#### OKLAHOMA, A GREAT STATE

The honest home-seeking men and women, who largely made up the population of the early settlers, were courageous and ventured from comfortable firesides to establish new frontiers. This is the history and spirit of our western civilization. The stalwart character and educational standards of the descendants of those first pioneers are attested by the generations of fine young men and women who



sprang from brave fathers and mothers. When it comes to superior merit in the field of human endeavor, record the fact that Oklahoma boys and girls rank high, if not first, in the field of athletics, stock judging, 4-H Club, and Future Farmers organizations. Also, the state schools, colleges and universities rank among the highest of the Nation. Personally, I am proud to have been an adopted son of Oklahoma, and I believe in the future welfare of the State.