

RIDGLEY, H. (MRS.)

INTERVIEW #9866

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Bessie L. Thomas,
Investigator,
Jan. 27, 1939.

An Interview With Mrs. H. Ridgley,
Lawton, Oklahoma.

We came here from Illinois in 1901, bringing a car-load of things with us, thinking we had a house, but when we arrived the house was gone, and we had to live in a tent. I had never lived in a tent and it was an alarming experience to me to live in one out in this new and wild Indian country. I was terribly afraid of the Indians. We went into our tent and the first introduction to this new home was a terrible wind storm, and then it began to sleet until it broke the tent down and the wind blew, and blew, until the fire was blown out of the stove.

We expected to find the Sunny South when we came here, but instead we nearly froze to death. I had to stay in bed most of the time, to keep from freezing to death, while we were living in the tent.

My husband had come down here before this with a company of twenty-seven men; he was the only one to draw a claim and had come back to Illinois and told me he had

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drawn a claim but wasn't going to file on it. I told him I thought it would be a great outfit to come here and live, but found out later that it was not. Our claim was about half way between Snyder and Lawton. In a few weeks after arriving here we started hauling lumber out from Lawton to build a home and completed the kitchen on New Year's Day, 1902, moving in right away. Our house was the second one built on the road and was called by the real estate men who used to stop with us for meals "The half way house."

After I got acquainted with the Indians around here and found out they were not going to scalp us, I used to do things for them. When we first lived on the farm we lived right next to old Poah-way, the "Medicine Man". I have baked pies for them big things for medicine making and have made as many as thirty at one time for Poah-way who proved to be a good Indian.

When we lived in the tent on our claim there was no way to lock it and I would tell my husband that I would give anything to be back home as I just knew the Indians were framing up to kill us. I heard the panthers screaming

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thought it was people screaming. I feel as though anyone who has never lived in a new country and never heard the screaming of the panther, together with the howling of the cattle when a calf has been killed, has never had any experience whatever. But we, like so many people, came to this new country wishing to better our condition and now can look back and say we are truly glad we stayed. After a few years here, the Indians became an interesting study to me. In the early days they received considerable cash annuities, paid to them semi-annually, and they spent it as soon as they got it, except old Poah-way. He would bring his money to me to keep for him and would say, "Comanche woman no savvy money," and white woman heap savvy. I would put his money in the wardrobe and keep it until Poah-way returned home. When he would go away, he would also bring his chickens over for me to keep for him, tying a red string around their legs to tell which chickens were his.

The opening of the Kiowa-Comanche Indian land had a most demoralizing effect upon the Indians, for with the opening came hundreds of saloons and the white man would

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sell whisky to the Indians for a "big price". These persons were akin to the human leeches who hung around the camp at payment time ready to set the Indians into "bailin' time" and fleece them. The Indians love to "bleed and 'Monty" is the one time they like best.

The children of the tribe were not with the family here, but were named from some object which the parents saw just after the birth of the child. The names were not for animate objects and the females for inanimate things.

We came to Lawton when it was in saddling clothes; we saw the first railroad train arrive; we walked the streets when the dust was six inches deep, and we have seen nearly every building in town going up, and here in the shadow of the Wichita Mountains I want to go to my last resting place.