

Notice of Copyright

Published and unpublished materials may be protected by Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S. Code). Any copies of published and unpublished materials provided by the Western History Collections are for research, scholarship, and study purposes only.

Use of certain published materials and manuscripts is restricted by law, by reason of their origin, or by donor agreement. For the protection of its holdings, the Western History Collections also reserves the right to restrict the use of unprocessed materials, or books and documents of exceptional value and fragility. Use of any material is subject to the approval of the Curator.

Citing Resources from the Western History Collections

For citations in published or unpublished papers, this repository should be listed as the Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

An example of a proper citation:

Oklahoma Federation of Labor Collection, M452, Box 5, Folder 2. Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

BOYCE, LUCY E.

INTERVIEW

10083

67

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

68

Field Worker's name Zeida B. Bland

This report made on (date) February 21, 23, 24 1938

1. Name Mrs. Lucy E. Boyce

2. Post Office Address Altus Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 123 S. Grady St.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month September Day 9 Year 1877

5. Place of birth Fredrickberg Texas

6. Name of Father J. R. White Place of birth Virginia

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Marzee Colbath Place of birth Arkansas

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 22.

BOYCE, LUCY E.

INTERVIEW

10083

Zaidee B. Bland

Journalist

February 21, 23, 24, 1938

Interview with Mrs. Lucy E. Boyce
Almost a Native of These Parts.

This story would have to begin before the Civil War for that was when my father first became interested in this part of the world. My great grandfather was Scotch Irish and settled in Texas early in the nineteenth century. He had many many slaves and lived like a baron of old surrounded by his vassals who were only too willing to do his bidding. All stock run wild and you had about all the land you cared to try and cultivate or claim. There was no market for anything to speak of except at New Orleans or points north in Missouri or Kansas.

My grandfather and my father came north with cattle to market them in Kansas. After marketing cattle all the men were free to go home any way they wanted to alone or in groups. Only the chuck wagon gang headed for the home ranch the nearest way. My father was a young sprout and ready for adventure.

In driving the cattle north they always came far enough west to avoid the Indians if possible. Father was very much impressed with the country between the Red Rivers.

BOYCE, LUCY E.

INTERVIEW

10063

-2-

The grass was taller than a man on horseback. Only once in a while did you encounter a lone dugout or a line camp of some big ranch men who were grazing cattle on free range.

Father wanted to explore the country more carefully for good water as the grazing land was good as any one could see. His idea was to establish some kind of permanent camp for cattle to be looked after that were bought up farther south and sent up to winter.

With such emergency food in his saddle bags as was deemed necessary for a month or more trusting to come to some isolated point where he might replenish he headed south alone to explore. Wherever a camp was found food was always divided and no questions asked or answered.

If you came to a deserted camp dugout there was usually cached food. A lone traveler went in helped himself to what food he needed, bunked in the place if he so desired and then went on his way. Father came near losing his life on this trip. Having traveled all day without water for himself or nag he came to a mound on the prairie that meant a dugout. He dismounted to investigate

BOYCE, LUCY E.

INTERVIEW

10063

-3-

but found no one at home. From the looks of all it was occupied but the inmates were away. Father hobbled his horse, cooked his meager supper and rolled into the bunk for a long rest as he was very tired.

That was the custom of the plains. Some time after midnight the owner of the dugout came home. Never suspecting any one was around, with out striking a light he tumbled into his bunk only to tumble onto a man. Father's gun was under his pillow and the man had his gun out as quick as Father in the dark could cock his gun ready to shoot. Father realized almost as soon as he drew his gun that of course it was the owner of the bunk come home. He said, "I am a friend; don't shoot; let's put up our guns". The other voice from the dark said "you first". It was too dark to see but you could hear. Father tossed his gun into the middle of the bunk and you could hear the dull thud as the gun hit the blankets. A light was made and the two men had a friendly talk before turning in again. Father stayed here several days looking over the country.

About two miles from the river straight north from Chillicothe, Texas, a camp was arranged for and a dugout made. There were several boys in my grandfathers family and

BOYCE, LUCY E.

INTERVIEW

10063

-4-

some of them usually stayed at this place which was a kind of headquarters for the men as they drove the horses, mules or cattle north. The Civil War broke out and my father and his older brothers were sent to guard the Indians and try and keep them on the reservation. There was no one left at home but great grandfather and the very young boys with the women folks.

Father and his band had many skirmishes with the Indians. Once on going home for more supplies he found that the Indians had raided the plantation burning even the fence around the house and corral and driving off every animal on foot into the Creek bottom except one little bay mare that had been his and was in the house with the women and children. This one little mare great grandfather used to take corn to mill for all the women around about. One day when going to mill Great Grandfather was surprised by a small band of roving Indians who tomahawked him, scalped him and left his body in the middle of the path, while they slit all the sacks of corn and let it pour out on the ground for the birds and animals to eat. This was a sight my grandfather and my father rode

BOYCE, LUCY E.

INTERVIEW

10063

-5-

onto in the bridle path as they were going home again a few weeks later. My father, only a young boy then, swore that he would get a scalp for great grandfather's.

This dugout they had about two miles from the river became a kind of headquarters when the men of my family were in this vicinity. They had many skirmishes with the Indians during the four years of war. Every time Father thought he had gotten an Indian when he would go to scalp him he would find several shots in the body so never could be sure that he had killed his Indian. There were a good many cattle which stayed round the old dugout for they had been fed there. One night Grandfather and Father with about half dozen other men crossed the Red River on the way to the dugout to spend the night. It was a moonlight night and they were taking advantage of every draw and riding down every one in order to be as little seen as possible when on turning into a draw they came onto a small band of Indians who had just killed a beef and were guzzling the warm blood and meat just like animals would. The white men were upon them before they knew it and of necessity this meeting became a hand to hand encounter. You had to be very careful not to hit one

BOYCE, LUCY E.

INTERVIEW

10063

-6-

of your own men, the Indians and whites were so close together. Naturally my father was watching his father to give him quick protection if the occasion arose. As Father looked across to his father he saw an Indian in the act of tomahawking him from the back. My father fired in time to save his father. Nearly all the Indians were killed except a few who fled.

The dead in such fights were always buried if possible and as they were burying the dead Indians when they came to the one who had come so near getting Grandfather and whom my father had shot, Father recognized him by his head-dress for he seemed to be the chief from his dress of feathers and paint. This Indian had only the one wound so Father rightly decided that he was his Indian so scalped him and to his dying day this scalp hung on the walls of our home some where to remind us all that our great grandfather was avenged. Father and Grandfather did not usually scalp the dead Indians; in fact, I think this was the only one they ever did scalp.

When the Civil War was over and all the negroes freed, Grandfather felt broken up indeed and began to move all

BOYCE, LUCY E.

INTERVIEWS

10083

-7-

steak and household goods to this northern dugout. We had a full dugout, a half dugout and after many years built a house hauling the lumber from Chillicothe. My uncle and grandfather came on up here to live but my father wanted to stay near the old home for he and my mother were in love and wanted very much to marry. My mother was a pure blood French lady and her father's consent was not so easily won. Several years passed with visiting between the northern headquarters and the old home grounds.

You had as much land as you could fence around and care for up here. No one seemed to know who really owned it. There was no one to pay taxes to. The United States claimed it twice and Texas claimed it twice while my people occupied the land. We were two miles from Red River near the place where Boggy Creek runs into the Red River.

Years went by and the family was really a large clan with some of them living in Texas and some up here and one was for all and all for one with whatever was needed. Mother and Father were married and I was born and other children were born. I was never very strong and the doctors thought that if I were brought farther north and allowed a wilder,

BOYCE, LUCY E.

INTERVIEW

10063

-8-

freer life I possibly would get stronger. We made many trips back and forth always either in a covered wagon or on horseback. We encountered high waters and other dangers often.

I remember once we had to wait on the banks of Red River several days before we could cross as the water was so high we could not even be ferried across. There were quite a few people gathered on the banks of the river waiting. When it had run down enough to deem crossing safe people began to drive their teams on the ferry boat and unhitch them from the wagons. All the people on the boat stood up and by the time we were in mid-stream it was clearly noticeable that the boat was overloaded and was slowly sinking. You know, animals are very quick to sense danger and the horses became very restless. Father took all the harness off his horses leaving them free. He knew his horses were good swimmers and believed they would save themselves if they were free to do so. Grandmother was with us. Father came and stood near me and said to me "Now if I get ready to jump you cling to my coat and never turn loose for any-

-9-

thing." Grandmother could swim, too, so we hoped to stand free. Not a person was making a sound except a few who had dropped to their knees and were praying. Some way we got across but the water in the boat was up to my waist when the boat touched the other bank. There were no very well defined roads, you simply headed your team in the direction you wanted to go and followed the line of least resistance to travel. There were ten of us children of whom I am the oldest. All of us are still living except one who died in infancy.

There was not much law in the country at this time except a man's gun. There was a lot of stealing of cattle and butchering of cattle for the hides. Everyone had his stock marked and branded but stolen cattle were hard to trace and if there was a suspect he was summoned before the Grand Jury that convened only once or twice a year and there was many ways of getting out of going. Neighbors were not very near each other but we got to know quite a few people. We had some neighbors that there was more or less speculation about but very little heed was paid to it. One day one of my younger uncles was coming home a new way and came upon

BOYCE, LUCY E.

INTERVIEW

10063

-10-

this neighbor butchering beeves that had the wrong brand on them and could not belong to the man who was butchering. Uncle passed the time of day and rode on without comment.

A few weeks after that this neighbor got a summons to appear before a Grand Jury. Of course, he jumped to the conclusion that my uncle had informed on him and sent my uncle word that he was going to kill him on sight. My uncle paid very little attention to the message of death. One day this irate neighbor came by our place asking for my uncle and making great threats. While he talked to my father Mother slipped out back, bridled a horse without waiting to saddle it and raced through the woods to warn my uncle who was home at Grandfather's. When Mother burst into the house with the news, the enemy was coming into the front yard. He called very loudly for my uncle to come out while he himself got behind a big tree. My uncle picked up his rifle and leisurely walked toward the door cocking his rifle as he went. Both men fired but uncle's bullet found the mark going through the lower part of his enemy's heart while the enemy's bullet went wild into the leg jamb of the door. This, however, made a difference in my uncle's life.

BOYCE, LUCY E.

INTERVIEW

10063

-11-

He took a permanent abode in this Northern home and never seemed to care to come where there were many men again. He gave himself up at once and he was exonerated at once but he never seemed happy and until the day of his death was always telling people never to kill a fellow-man. He said that the man whom he had killed walked with him, slept with him and ate with him all the rest of his life.

This uncle quit ever coming back south to the old home at all and became the head of the family between the Red Rivers. Father continually sent stock up to him and money to have a dugout fixed for our family. There were corrals to be built and fencing to be done. The day came when Father got two wagons ready with sheets and bows, a camping outfit, a nice big tent and with a small bunch of horses and mules we began the long trek to the Oklahoma plains to remain forever we thought. We had gone only a little way from Throckmorton, Texas, when the team of mules Father was driving ran away, overturning the wagon, throwing Father out and then dragging him some distance. A tent was hastily stretched and some one went into the town for a doctor. Father was very badly bruised up with a shoulder, fore-

BOYCE, LUCY E.

INTERVIEW

10063

-12-

arm and one leg broken. He was a cripple for the balance of his life although he lived to be eighty-nine years, six months and ten days old. He was hearty and well, ate a big supper the night he died and went to bed and the next morning he was just not there.

This was May time of the year. You see uncle had our dugout ready for us and land fenced and crop planted. There was no shed or wind break of any kind for the stock. We lived in our tent until lumber could be hauled from Juana and Chillsithe, Texas, to build a two room house. Our tent was nice and large and we could put up beds and get out our chairs and live just like you would in a house.

With our coming the whole clan was up in this country. Grandfather, Grandmother, uncles, aunts and cousins all whom the Civil War and Indians had left. Grandmother learned to be a midwife after the Civil War for she had never learned to do anything in her life but look pretty, and she felt that she must be useful now since the family was poor and had no slaves. She would go a hundred miles or more to deliver a child and I never knew her to lose a baby or mother during the twenty years of her active work. She delivered hundreds

BOYCE, LUCY E.

INTERVIEW

10083

-13-

of babies and never charged a cent. Of course she was often given handsome presents and sometimes money.

Mother learned to be a seamstress. She cut by chart and made men's clothes the same as she did women's and children's. She has turned out as pretty coats, vests and pants as I ever saw a tailor make in my life.

With our family there came two boys and two girls so we were a company of ourselves. We all rode anything you could put a bridle on in the way of a horse. We girls were never allowed to ride astride but had our side saddles and riding skirts and we could jump ditches or fences, swim a creek and herd a bunch of cattle with any boy. A neighbor said once that he thought we must have all been born in a saddle we could ride so well.

I was now about fifteen years old and only weighed eighty pounds but how I could ride and how I loved to ride! I was always guarding the cattle, keeping them out of quicksand or driving them to water. I have herded more than one bunch of cattle right here where this town of Altus is built and while the cattle grazed no one could see me or my horse without coming right up onto me as the grass was so very high.

BOYCE, LUCY E.

INTERVIEW

10063

- 14 -

School.

There was an old dugout in the bend of Boggy Creek called Boggy school where school kept sometimes but we did not pay a great deal of attention to school. Willow Vale was the next to have a school. We always had a lot of pets - dogs, cats, horses, calves, or any wild animal or bird we might be able to catch and tame. My brothers did a lot of trapping of wolves, coons, possums, pole cats and such varmints for their hides. They shipped them direct to Chicago and got nice cash returns. We were never allowed to molest a bird's nest or kill anything except when we needed it. We trapped prairie chickens in traps to eat and killed them just like we would a chicken.

Mother raised chickens, ducks, geese, guineas and enough hogs were raised each year for our own meat and lard. There was always plenty of milk and butter. Father always raised all the horses he needed on his own ranch for he thought horses were more docile if raised at home. The river was our greatest real danger. We lived near enough to the crossing to hear the calls of distress and many times we went to the rescue of strangers caught in the quicksand or high

BOYCE, LUCY E.

INTERVIEW

10063

-15-

water. Once when the land was as dry as could be a head
riss came down. A lot of people were gathered on the bank
on this side watching the waters roll. The water was in
two channels with a long sand bar near the middle. As we
all stood and watched a team drove up on the south side of
the river. One man remarked "That looks like a livery team
surely he will have too much sense to drive into that river".
But as we looked, shuck, went the team forced into the river.
The first thing that happened was that the buggy bed broke
loose and floated away. In the buggy was the driver (a man)
and his passengers were a woman and a little child five or
six years old. The driver jumped right out to save his team.
The woman caught hold of a buggy wheel with one hand while
she clung on to the child with the other arm.

Every one on the shore stood aghast at the man abandon-
ing his passengers to save his team. My father said "I would
go to that woman's rescue but I am a cripple and we would all
be drowned". One of my brothers began to shed his clothes -
he said "I am not a cripple and I am a good swimmer so I am
going to have a try at saving them." He swam out to where
they were and swam round and round them talking to the woman

BOYCE, LUCY E.

INTERVIEW

10083

-16-

telling her to hold on and not to be afraid that he was going to save them but that she must not grab him but hold on to the child and let him hold to her.

The woman promised but when she had turned loose the buggy wheel and they began to drift down stream it was too much for her and she grabbed Brother and almost strangled him. He managed to get them to the sand bar and just threw them all prostrate on the sand. Even if sand is "quicky" if you lie still in a horizontal position on it you will not sink. Brother was too exhausted to do otherwise; anyway, he simply had to rest and get his wind. As the watchers on the shore looked on there was a lot of speculation as to whether he would make it or not. Most of the people thought that he could make it with one but doubted if he could with two. At last a big fat man spoke up and said "Well, I am awful big and fat and not a very good swimmer, but I'll be blamed if I let that youngster be a better man than I am; I can at least try." He stripped and into the water he went. He brought out the lady and Brother brought the little girl, so all was well.

The woman was a widow and was trying to get to her people near Mangum and everything she had in the world, clothes

BOYCE, LUCY E.

INTERVIEW

10063

-17-

and money, too, were in the back of the buggy in a trunk and the buggy was never heard of again. We took this woman and her little girl home with us, gave them dry clothes to put on and washed and dried theirs and in a few days Father took her on to her people and we never heard of her and the child again.

Another evening we were seated at the supper table when Mother said "Listen, I believe I hear a woman scream". We all tumbled out to look and down the lane came the biggest, fattest woman I had ever seen screaming with every breath. When she got to us she told us that she and her sister were coming from Chillicothe with a load of groceries and dry goods when they bogged in the quicksand. She had gotten out on the tongue of the wagon and cut the horses loose and waded ashore and come for help.

Brether went and caught one of our biggest horses for he reasoned if the other lady was as big as the one talking to us he would need a big animal. Father got one of our teams that was used to the water and could be trusted not to get excited but to pull steady and true in the quicksand and we all went to the river to see what we could do.

BOYCE, LUCY E.

INTERVIEW

10063

-18-

Brother rode in to resuee the other lady and she was larger than the one talking to us on the bank. With much persuasion he got her astride the horse behind him and brought her to the shore. We could not move the wagon that night but we got the things out and the next day the wagon was pulled out. Both women were as wet as drowned rats.

My mother and grandmother were little French women so their clothes would not fit such large woman, so we put them to bed while we washed and dried their clothes so the next day they could go on their way.

There was no place to go but Mother was always very strict about having us rest on Sunday. One Thursday Father came in to Mother and said "The millet and oats are ready to cut and I simply must go to Chillicothe before I start cutting them. One day to go, one day to stay, and one day to come home will throw it on Sunday but I simply must go." The team was gotten ready - we never started off for a trip without sheets and bows on the wagon and Father said that Sister and I could go with him. He trotted over and got there all right that night. We stayed in the wagon yard and as we were getting ready for bed Father called to us "Girls, you must arise early

BOYCE, LUCY E.

INTERVIEWS

10063

-19-

in the morning and get through your shopping for there is lightning in the southwest and you never know what the river will do when it rains - we must get started back".

The next morning it was raining but not hard. We got our errands done speedily and started for home, but when we got to the river she was bank full. One of our uncles lived on the south bank of Red River. We turned and went to his house. We left home on the last day of May. This was now the first day of June. Every day we went to try and cross but it was the fifteenth of June before we ever got home.

There was a small band of Indians who had been down to Wichita Falls waiting to cross. They had no provisions with them so were nearly starved. The day we did cross it took the Indians and all the cowboys on horses all day trying to settle the sand so we could cross. There was a bunch of people waiting to cross. When we got home after fifteen days Mother had eaten everything like sugar, coffee, etc., up and was out of seal oil. She had taken lard and made a grease lamp in case any of them got sick in the night. She and the rest of the family did not get up until day light and went to bed at dark. The weeds were as high as the fence. The grain was all down

BOYCE, LUCY E.

INTERVIEW

10063

-20-

but the feed that had been planted just before we left was knee high and the weeds just as high. Father let them grow side by side for a while then went to the blacksmith and had a hoe made that looked like an adz without a top. He and the boys cut the weeds and pulled them to the center of the furrow so that the grain could be gathered. I never saw such fine feed as we made that year.

Every year we had sandstorms and hot winds and once the wind blew sand for four days and nights until we had to take our food down into the dugout and stay right there and eat and sleep until it quit. One of my uncles lived down on the sand and he had to abandon his home until the storm blew itself out. When he did go back home he had to take a team and shovel to drag away the sand before he could go inside of the door. I have seen sand mounds eddy up as tall as a house and as clean and white as sugar. We used to climb to the top and roll down - it was great sport. Hot winds were terrible. I have seen the corn in tassel when a hot wind come and we would not even get a roasting ear. When a hot wind starts it blows day and night and curls all vegetation like an oven and nothing growing is ever spared.

BOYCE, LUCY E.

INTERVIEW

10063

-21-

I married early but my husband only lived a little while so when they were building Altus I came over and went to running a hotel. You gave room and board for \$5.00 a week. I could buy three dozen eggs for 25 cents, large frying chicken for 15 cents and butter for 15 cents per pound. Sweet milk cost 10 cents a gallon and buttermilk 5 cents a gallon. I gave a dandy meal for 25 cents. When they put up the first steam laundry here I could get my laundry done for 1 cent a piece, sheets, towels and all and they were mangled, too, as all the flat work was.

There was not much to go to but dances when we were growing up and Mother was very particular where the dance was to be held if she let us go. Once there was to be a dance over beyond Willow Vale and some of the young men came to ask us to go. I said "There is no use to ask Mother; she will not let us go that far". The young man said "Leave it to me, I'll ask her." He would not let on that it was as far beyond Willow Vale as it was from our house to Willow Vale. Mother suspected something I think when we began to get ready to start so early. She asked me why we wanted to start so early. I evaded the answer for I would not lie to my mother. As we

BOYER, LUCY E.

INTERVIEW

10063

-22-

were going we noticed a big black cloud coming up and by the time we got to the place where the dance was to be it was raining. A lot of the folks who planned to come never did get there at all. We had to stay all night for it rained all night but Mother was not worried for she knew there was a wagon load of us and that we were safe for we had started so early.

Not any of us children or Father ever left the house without telling Mother where we were going for she always wanted to know just where we were and just about when to look for us home.

After Oklahoma was granted this land and Father found that he could hold only one half section of land he sold his improvements to a settler who wanted to improve and went over into Arkansas and bought four hundred acres of land and we children own this land to this day although several of us still live in Oklahoma.