

~~ELSBERRY, EDA FLORENCE,~~

~~INTERVIEW~~

~~#10483~~

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

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Field Worker's name Ethel Mae Yates

This report made on (date) April 15, 1938 1938

1. Name Eda Florence Elsberry

2. Post Office Address Elk City, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) Rural Route South of Town.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month April Day 10 Year 1882

5. Place of birth _____

6. Name of Father Isaac Nelson Johnson Place of birth Arkansas

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Eda Abigail Yoes Johnson 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 6.

Ethel Mae Yates
Investigator
April 15, 1938

Interview with Eda Florence Elsberry
Elk City, Oklahoma.
Rural Route South of Town.

My father was Isaac Nelson Johnson and Mother's maiden name was Edna Abigail Yoes. Father was later know as "Herdlaw Johnson". In the fall of 1896 we started for the Territory; we left North Texas where we lived about sixteen miles east of Greenville. Our wagon was well loaded with a sewing machine, cooking utensils, horse feed, a trunk well packed with dishes and other things. One set of bed springs was carried in the overjet as were all of our bed clothes and what fit in best for me was Mother's big iron wash pot. It just filled in the bottom of the wagon in front of the spring seat. On one special night we were camped at Seger in the Indian Territory when the rain came in a downpour. Father drove out to the side of the road and camped and we fixed my oldest brother a bed in the horse trough that hung under the wagon on some rope." The poor old horses, nine in all, were all tied around the wagon and, although our wagon cover was good, the rain made a terrible noise.

Father, mother and baby brother went to bed in the over-jet and it fell for me to sleep in the wash pot on a feather bed and before morning my position ^{was}/quite uncomfortable.

The next morning Mother was so discouraged that she tried to coax Father to take the road back, but Father was westward bound and so on we went and we reached our destination weeks later. The two little brothers and I had little to say and we took ours out in thinking where and how the next stop would be. When we reached the free homesteads, we camped nine or ten miles east of the present site of Sayre just off the old Mobeetie Trail on the banks of a small ravine. I recall so well our first meeting with Mance Morrison and family at this time. They were living on a place belonging to their son-in-law and Mr. Morrison and Father got into conversation and soon decided to file on a couple of homesteads about half a mile from where we were camped but Mr. Morrison lacked the \$15.00 for the filing fee. Next morning Mr. Prior, an old settler, came by on horseback and found out that Father and Mr. Morrison were members of the Masonic Lodge and, brother-like, Mr. Prior showed them the corner stones of two places and let Mr. Morrison have the money for the filing cost. They all went to Cheyenne next day and filed on our homesteads so we moved farther up this

ravine and settled down to hard work. Our father was thoughtful enough to have put in a crowbar, heavy axe, cross-cut saw, a hammer and a square measure and the measurements of our twelve by thirty dugout were taken and digging began.

The land was sandy loam so the dugout was soon finished. It was seven feet deep at the back and opened out on level ground in front, as it was dug in a hillside. By inquiring of our neighbors we found that farther up the canyon there were tall willow saplings which were just the things for covering our new home. My older brother and I, with Father's aid on the first load, soon had enough of these willow saplings and after they were well laid, Father put about two feet of loam on top. This being a free grass country, the herds of cattle soon found us and did they bellow and hook the new mound. This ran us out like groundhogs. Father tried to buy some wire which had been used for drift fence but was unable to get it. Father got up a petition for a herdlaw. They had an election and the cattlemen by what some believed were unfair methods beat the election but my father contested the election and got the law passed to keep the cattle under fence so the farmers could make a crop and Father's first crop was made ^{with the help} of two faith-

ful dogs, Beaver and Shorty. These dogs would not let a cow come on the place. Beaver threw many a steer and sometimes cut their throats while Shorty brought up the rear.

My two oldest brothers came in from North Texas. There were quantities of red sand rocks west of us. These boys and Father built a house of two rooms twelve by fourteen feet. There was an attic for sleeping quarters. We had a large fireplace in one end of the house and with plenty of cow chips and green cottonwood to burn our new home was altogether comfortable. Father had gotten pretty well acquainted and people were coming in fast and they came to our house to be located. Father located people from places near Sayre to the neighborhood west of Buffalo and north of Doxey. Our attic was always well filled with sleepers and who received their meals, too.

There were trials for both Father and Mother; Father would be gone three days on trips to Weatherford or Cordell for provisions. Mother cooked in an old Dutch oven on the fireplace and in my memory biscuits made with El Reno's best flour and sour dough were the best I ever ate. Mother taught everyone of us the sour dough method of making bread as we did not have cows for milk.

We had our bedsteads and cook stove shipped from North Texas to Weatherford and got them months later. The house really looked fine with bedsteads.

The coyotes were real saucy and they often chased the dogs especially one young pup we had; he would run under the beds; We had no doors and a wagon sheet answered the purpose. The old rock house that my father built with only a crowbar and axe is still standing northeast of Doxey.

When we put wood floors in the downstairs of our rock house, we had meetings of the Literary Society once a week at which home talent had a chance to perform. Other diversions were dancing parties and singings.

Someone told Father that there was a small store east of us about seventeen miles and Father went over to investigate and found the store and found that the storekeeper was Mr. Baldon, a man who had come to our camp when we were on our way to Oklahoma to borrow a tablespoon of flour to make gravy for his baby. The place where the store stood was called Crowe near where Elk City now stands. In those days ^{we} were blessed with a bountiful yield in all we planted; our crops consisted of corn, a little cotton, alfalfa, kaffir corn, maize, vegetables and melons.

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It really got cold in those days. Father dug a shallow well six feet deep with an open top. Father had gone for provisions and Mother called me early one morning to bring some water; everything was covered with sleet and I skipped out after the water in what was it seemed the coldest wind that ever blew and what a surprise ! There sat our pet horse in our well with its front feet and head sticking out. The poor thing was shivering but was only a little lame when we finally got it out, with the help of the neighbors.

We lost a number of our horses with blind staggers. Father replaced them with mules which were tougher. Those pioneer days were tough for us all. Mother often looked worried but Father always seemed jovial; those were the happiest days of my life and I have told you a few of the experiences of our pioneer life. Father and Mother are both gone.