

10-PRINS, ALIDA SCHEELE? INTERVIEW

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

TOMPKINS, LYDIA BOUCHEELE

INTERVIEW.

10013.

Field Worker's name Anna R. Barry.This report made on (date) February 11, 1938. 19381. Name Lydia Boucheele Tompkins.2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma.3. Residence address (or location) 625 South Hadden Street.4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month December. Day 16 Year 1878.5. Place of birth Lyons, Kansas.6. Name of Father Edwin Boucheele. Place of birth Maryland.

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Mary Ann Causdin Boucheele. Place of birth Kentucky.

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 7.

TOMPKINS, LYDIA BOUCHEELE.

INTERVIEW.

10013.

Anna R. Barry,
Journalist,
Feb. 11, 1938.

An Interview With Lydia Boucheele
Tompkins, El Reno, Oklahoma.

Mrs. Lydia Boucheele Tompkins was born in Lyons, Kansas, on December 16, 1872, the daughter of Edwin Boucheele and Mary Ann Causdin Boucheele. It was in Kansas that her father helped to build the road bed for the Union Pacific Railroad and he also worked in New Mexico helping to build the Santa Fe Railroad. Lydia attended a small rural school located two and one half miles from her home, which was located five miles north of Lyons, Kansas.

In 1892 when Lydia was fourteen years of age her parents left her in care of a married sister who lived at Barnard, Kansas, to attend school, as her parents were leaving the state of Kansas to seek a new location in the Indian Territory. After about two weeks of hard traveling in their two wagons they located on a relinquished claim one-half mile from the present site of Calumet. In 1894 Lydia joined her parents on their claim. Here she found them living in a small log cabin fourteen by sixteen feet,

TOMPKINS, LYDIA BOUCHERIE.

INTERVIEW.

10013.

-2-

but to the delight of the whole family, her father was building a three room frame house; he hauled the lumber for this house from El Reno.

The pioneer, like his friend, the Indian, was a great worker. Almost all homesteaders were poor, -stricken, to a certain extent, yet they enjoyed visiting one another and usually families would come to spend the day. The lonely settler, looking out the window some Sunday, might see a neighbor coming across the prairie in his big wagon and soon the whole family unloaded, and soon the children of both families were out of sight at play. The wives in many cases knew the circumstances of one another and it was not offensive for the visitor, more blessed than his neighbor, to bring a cake, some butter, eggs or fresh vegetables. These things were welcomed and all had a good time. Neither are, wealth, nor position made the least difference. After a day's visit the two families separated, to remember the pleasant occasion for days.

If frontier food was unhealthy it was not because of its richness and high seasonings; but rather on account of the sameness which made the menu monotonous and very

TOMPKINS, LYDIA BOUCHEELE.

INTERVIEW.

10013.

-3-

unappetizing. Corn and cornmeal were used in many ways in the early days; cornmeal mush, corn on the cob (green corn or roasting ears), dried corn, hominy (a dish made by taking the hulls off corn with lye and boiling the kernels), corn cakes, apple corn bread which was made of cornmeal and other ingredients mixed with raw apples and baked, cornbread, pumpkin Indian loaf, a kind of corn cake made of cornmeal, pumpkin, and molasses together with other ingredients, corn muffins, griddle cakes and a gruel made for invalids.

In these earlier times game was plentiful; in the winter when the weather became cool enough to preserve the meat, two or three settlers would go out on the prairies for a big hunt and the principal kinds of game brought home from these hunts would be rabbits, wild turkeys, prairie chickens, quail, wild ducks and geese. The settlers raised a few hogs each year to butcher, and hog-killing time was looked forward to with keen anticipation by the children as well as the grown-ups. For the grown-ups it meant days of hard work, but for the children it meant a welcome change from the summer diet of cornbread, molasses and greens.

TOMPKINS, LYDIA BOUCHEELE

INTERVIEW.

10013.

-4-

The children in the neighborhood where Lydia lived went into the woods each fall to gather walnuts. Among the wild fruits to be found along the streams were currants, plums, grapes and in a few places blackberries. These fruits were welcomed by the settlers families for use as fresh sauce and as a palatable raw item of diet. They were also preserved for winter. The prairie near Lydia's home produced some wild plant foods. In the summer wild greens formed a part of the diet. Sheep sorrel, sweetened, made a very good sauce, sugar mixed with watermelon juice boiled down made a good syrup. If store fruit were to be had at all, the staples were dried apples, peaches and raisins. The process of canning was not in use on a large scale during these early years. Vegetables were very seldom canned; however, a number of women canned green beans, using a tablespoon of vinegar to each quart, and everything was dried that possibly could be such as green beans, corn, pumpkin, peppers. Green beans were strung on a thread, and hung in the sun to dry; peppers were also dried this way; pumpkin was sliced thin or cut up into little dice and strung for drying; corn or

TOMPKINS, LYDIA BOUCHEELE.

INTERVIEW.

10013.

-5-

corn on the cob was dropped into boiling water, and boiled from about ten to fifteen minutes. When cool the corn was cut from the cob with a sharp knife; it was then spread on clean boards in the sun to dry; over this a large piece of cheese cloth was spread to protect the corn from flies. Each day this cloth was removed, the corn stirred and the cloth replaced, and after one week of this process the corn was gathered up and placed in a flour sack, which was hung in a cool dry place, ready to be used in winter.

In the winter after the hard fall work was done, a school usually invited three or four other schools to a spelling contest which was anticipated for weeks ahead and school houses gleamed as night after night the contesting schools prepared. McGuffey's spelling book was learned completely. Parents pronounced words by the page to their children at home. Children spelled every Friday afternoon at school and practiced dialogues and readings at noon. Those who could not spell so well, prepared parts to play, sing or present in dialogues. When the eventful night finally arrived, each school chose its spellers and wrote

-6-

each name on a piece of paper. These pieces of paper were placed in a box from which they were drawn one at a time. The spellers took their places as selected in long lines arranged along the small school house wall. A disinterested person was asked to "give out" the words. By guess of page the starting side was learned. The spelling continued until only one speller was left standing. He or she received a prize as a reward, usually a book, and after the recess the musical and literary program began. There were "pieces" by little tots, songs, violin solos, and other selections by the older ones. When finally the group broke up, the songs of the various schools as well as the noise of the lumber wagons made the prairie merry as the crowd wended its way homeward. There were also ciphering matches; each neighborhood had its ciphering champions whom it was ready to match against new comers. School teachers were tried out in this way and as more and more skill was displayed addition and simple problems gave way to work in square and cube roots. The singing school was also a social place where young people got together. Many times young men who showed little interest in singing and could not carry a tune, attended these singing schools

TOMPKINS, LYDIA BOUCHEELE.

INTERVIEW.

10013.

-7-

merely for social purposes. Before the settlers could afford buggies, the young couples went in two-wheeled carts and on horseback to places of amusement. Ordinarily each person had his own horse; the ladies rode side saddles and dressed in riding skirts which had shot in the hems to hold them down and insure modesty. Washington's birthday was usually celebrated with a party or dance. Valentine's day was celebrated by an exchange of valentines. The drug store was headquarters for valentines. Many fancy ones with lace on them were to be had.

It was on August 23, 1890, that Lydia Boucheele was married to Richard Tompkins; they moved to El Reno and her husband went to work at the Davison Case Lumber Yard, a position he held for twenty-two years. In 1920 they established The Tompkins Grocery, Feed and Seed Store located in the one-hundred block on South Choctaw Street in El Reno and after eleven years in this business they sold out and established the Tompkins Cream Station located at 217 South Bickford Street. They are the parents of three boys. On December 29, 1937, Mr. Tompkins passed away and is buried in the El Reno cemetery.