

CROCKETT, SUSIE

INTERVIEW

#8975

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

CROCKET, SUSIE.

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Field Worker's name Zaidee B. Bland.This report made on (date) October 25, 1937. 19371. Name Mrs. Susie Crocket.2. Post Office Address Altus, Oklahoma.3. Residence address (or location) General Delivery.4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month January. Day 13 Year 1875.5. Place of birth Arkansas.6. Name of Father J. K. Eakins Place of birth Kentucky.Other information about father Breeder of saddle horses.7. Name of Mother Mary D. James. Place of birth Tennessee.

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 12.

Jaidee B. Bland,
Journalist,
October 25, 1937.

An Interview With Mrs. Susie
Crocket, Altus, Oklahoma.

Father raised horses as well as farmed. When I was ten years old Father came into this country and filed for land. We brought all the household goods we could pack into a wagon, hitched two horses to it and some one came along with us to drive the loose stock. This was in 1885 and you simply picked out your location, plowed around it and filed when you got ready. Father pitched our tent in a mesquite grove and began to dig a hole in the ground for us to live in.

When he thought he had the hole big enough they out poles and walled up the sides and over the top. A chimney was built in one side of this and in two places on each side a box was set in for a window and ventilation and the whole was covered with the native grass over the logs and then dirt was put over the grass.

There never was a time when it rained for a number of days that our dugout did not leak although we lived in it for many years. Two children were born there and an eleven year old brother died in the dugout before a house was ever

built. The floor was dirt. After a year or two a small cook stove was placed in one corner for lighter cooking but most all cooking was done on the fireplace.

Father brought twenty-five head of mares and young horses with us besides our stallion.

Father picked a place not too far from water in a mesquite grove and as he was digging our dugout, we heard shouts and running feet and hoofs.

Father came running up out of the ground to see what was the matter and we saw a large herd of antelope headed our way with some Indians in hot pursuit. The Indians were shooting as they came. Father had us all to run out of the tent into the hole he was digging and throw ourselves on the bottom of the pit. Then he went out to meet the Indians. He scolded them and they seemed very sorry saying they had not thought of there being a white man and his tepee in the thicket.

To prove their sorrow they divided the meat of the antelope which they had killed with us. There were several arrows in our tent but no one was hurt.

The Indians always remained friendly with us. They often visited us and we were sometimes afraid of them when

Papa was gone for they never said a word when they came. The first we would know of their being on the place, they would come walking right down into our home. If they saw anything to eat they always helped themselves and if they did not see anything to eat they would ask for whoahaw (meat) coffee or tobacco and if we told them we were nearly out they would look around to find some. Mother usually fed the Indians what she had for she had learned that that was the easiest way to get rid of them.

FOOD.

We kept out traps for wild animals and fish hooks for fish out all the time. And these traps and hooks had to be visited every day.

We lived on wild meat, only going to Vernon twice a year for sugar, flour, coffee, dried fruit and such things. We usually had enough pelts or hides to send along for the groceries needed. The pelts which we collected and sold furnished all the spending money we children ever had but as we always sent for whatever we happened to want and never went to town there was not much desire for money. We learned to tan hides and took great pride in the number of hides we would accumulate.

Mother and Pa had twelve children, six girls and six boys.

I was not the oldest child but I was the oldest girl and prided myself that I could do anything my brothers could do. I had my trap line and once I remember when two of my older brothers and I were out looking at the traps I had a wolf in one of mine and they drew blank. They told me I could not kill so big an animal and would have to give them a share in the pelt to get them to kill it for me. I said, "I won't"; I went back to the tent and got a tent pole and beat that wolf to death with that pole. I can see that wolf run and snarl after all these years but I got the job done and skinned the carcass myself.

I would milk twelve and fifteen cows and get such a bucket of milk that some of the big boys would have to come and bring the milk to the house for me. I could milk the cows but was not big enough to carry so large a bucket of milk.

WATER.

Water was a problem. In the summer the creek water was so brackish that it was not good for either man or beast.

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Father and the boys dug a well and the water was always cool enough to drink and there was enough for all the stock. It was lots of work to draw water for such a large herd of animals and the water was so hard that nothing could be cooked in it unless it was boiled and broken and lye was all we had to break it with and that lye had to be dripped from a hopper.

CLEARING THE LAND.

Father and the boys grubbed all the mesquite stumps out of the land so it might be cultivated for wheat mostly.

Our land was tight and did not lend itself to the cultivating of fruits or a variety of vegetables.

FARM ANIMALS.

We brought a coop of chickens and a box of hogs tied onto the back of the wagon with us when we came and always had plenty of hogs for all the meat we needed but were not so fortunate with chickens. There were too many enemies of fowls.

Hawks, owls, wolves, polecats, badgers, coons and any of them would come right up to the house and help themselves whenever they took a notion.

We used to kill so many hogs that we never used all the bony parts. We cured the hams and made sausage of the shoulders and lard and soap grease out of the heads and sides.

We had meat on the table for every meal and very often we had two or three kinds of meat on the table.

We had fish most every day in some way. Once when brother and I went alone to look after the hooks we got such a large catch that we were late in getting started back to the house. We had two dogs with us. After we got out on the prairie the wild cattle took after us. There was nothing for us to do to get out of their way except to climb a tree.

Brother pushed me up into the low branches of the tree and some way climbed up himself. There we stayed all morning. The dogs came and laid down under the tree out of the sun.

Father came hunting for us. Mother was afraid that we had been drowned. When Father found us he pointed out that that we were such a little way from the ground that had the cattle been after us they would have gotten us any way. They were really after the dogs and had we sicked the dogs on them they probably would have run away and when the dogs lay down, the cattle went on to feeding quietly.

Once when we went to bed it was raining but not hard when in the night mother waked up and said to Pa, "Jump up quick I hear water; we will have to put buckets under the leaks". Pa hopped out of bed into water to his waist and he was certainly frightened. They waked all us children and went further up the hill nearly a mile to grandfather James' dugout and we had to stay with them for over a month before we could ever get fixed again. I think we had to dig another dugout, as we never could stop the seep in the old one.

We lived like badgers in the ground. Once we were burnt out by prairie fire, and had to seek refuge for several weeks in the fort that was at the mouth of Otter Creek.

We always thought that the Indians set the fire but never had any real proof.

My father and brother, my two grandfathers on both sides of the house and an uncle all took up land. I think the kin in all had three sections of land joining each other and we all lived in this way for many years. The grave of "Brothe", a young brother, of Grandfather and Grandmother James and several other graves are, on the hill side of

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our quarter yet although the quarter passed out of Father's hands, years ago. Mother and father both died at Elk City not so many years ago. Mother was eighty-seven years old.

When little brother died there was no one near us but some cowboys in a line camp about ten miles away. The cowboys came and dug the grave and made a box to lay him away in. The cowboys sang a song and my grandfather James prayed a prayer and that was all. Only the family and near relatives and the cowboys were there.

I have never been back to the old place since it passed out of our family's hand although it is not so far away.

SCHOOL.

A hole in the ground lined with poles and also covered with poles was our school room. We sat on split logs for benches.

The teacher had a chair which mother lent her, with a rawhide bottom in it, and a home-made table. Father polished the teacher a cow horn to "call books" with. I had only one book for the first two years, a blue-backed

speller. My third year arithmetic was added to my course. I never had a pen and ink until after I was fifteen. We always used a slate and pencil. Teacher would set us a copy on the slate to learn to write by.

Our dugout was so large that three beds could be put up in it so the teacher always stayed at our home. I got to sleep with her and thought that very grand. She took her dinner along to school with us in the same tin bucket and we all ate together and I thought that was grand, too. We always had meat in the lunch and something sweet. If there was nothing sweet ready Mother would butter biscuit and put sugar on them while they were hot and they were good, too.

We most always had a baked sweet potato and nuts were plentiful. The teacher was paid by people making up money for her. We went to school as long as the money lasted and started again whenever some one would get out and make up some more money by asking for it and later people paid by the number of children they had in school and children any age came after they were eight years old. We never had over twelve or fifteen pupils and some of them were bearded men. We did not have many big girls.

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FURNITURE.

I can't remember my first looking glass but when I
I was
got it / a great, big girl. We had wooden bedsteads and
chairs with hide bottoms, a home-made table to eat off
of and barrels to keep flour, sugar and such things in.
A meat box was used to sit on when the top was on it.

All cooking vessels were iron. Pot hooks and skillet
and lids were all iron. Mother had several of them as
well as iron pots and flat irons to smooth the clothes with.

Our dishes were tin and white china and our knives
and forks were steel with iron handles.

When Mother washed, the clothes were spread out on
the bushes and weeds to dry. Boiling was done out of
doors in an iron kettle and we made all our own soap also
in this kettle. We had an ash hopper that the ashes were
always emptied into and it was a hard job to get the water
when Mother would start her drip for lye.

When thrashing was done we usually had to cook for
about twenty-five men. We would make a big fire on the
outside of the dugout and have all the lids and skillets
full of bread or pies while the meat was being roasted

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in the dugout before the fire or it was boiled in the pots.

It would be some job. We would begin cooking before day. Mother made a salt rising light-bread out of meal that was certainly good and she always tried to have a batch of this kind of bread ready for company and big crowds that way. We loved this bread as well as we did cake. There was always plenty of good butter, fresh and sweet. We kept our drinking water in a cedar bucket and drank out of a gourd. We were careful^{of}/our gourd dipper and planted gourds each year so that we might have new ones.

I remember one rainy winter that Pa could not get to town for we were surrounded by water almost as though we lived on an island. The bugs got into the flour and Mother did not know what to do for we had never heard of a sifter.

We all sat around the fire and picked worms out of the flour for Mother to make little cakes of and those little cakes were all we had in our stockings for Christmas. It seems like we were always happy though.

We had to sew with our fingers and I always hated to see Ma come in with a big batch of sewing for I knew it meant long hours sitting by her side sewing seams for I

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would much rather be out with the boys/^{than} to sit in the house and sew. I could help the boys with the plowing or trapping but they would never help me with the sewing.

I have plowed horses and oxen, too, to walking plows. I have run a binder to cut the wheat into bundles also. The thrashing was done by horse power.

Hard work, lots of meat to eat and gyp water to drink won't kill anybody for I am ~~am~~ still alive.