

DUNCAN, J. G.

INTERVIEW

#4417

192

BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION 4417
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

19

Field Worker's name Amelia F. HarrisThis report made on (date) June 16 19371. Name J. G. Duncan (Dr.)2. Post Office Address Oklahoma City, Oklahoma3. Residence address (or location) 414 N. W. 254. DATE OF BIRTH: Month January Day 18 Year 18855. Place of birth Wichita, Kansas6. Name of Father J. G. Duncan Place of birth WisconsinOther information about father Made the run of '897. Name of Mother Mary Louise Whitworth Duncan Place of Birth England

Other information about mother

Note: 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 8.

DR. J. G. DUNCAN
State Capitol
By
Amelia F. Harris

My father made the run in 1889 in Old Oklahoma and staked out a claim on Trail Creek about five miles from Kingfisher, where the land office was stationed. A few days after filing, he returned to Kansas for us. We sold everything but what we could pack in our wagon and started out.

Traveling was very slow but we enjoyed the trip very much, camping out every night and cooking over a camp fire. We always pitched tent early so father could kill some kind of wild game for supper, as there was an abundance.

After days of travel, long to mother but too short for us, we arrived at home a virgin country, beautiful beyond description. Here father set up a tent, which was to be our home, until he could build a better one. Our first real house was two rooms built of native walnut logs, which Dad chopped down. He notched out the corners so the logs would fit close together, hewed the surface smooth for the inside, and left the bark on the outside, and chinked up the cracks so the house would be comfortable in the winter. Our water came from a spring near our house.

-2-

Dad cut the hay from the ground and cured, raked, and had stacked it for feed. Then the real work began, that of breaking the ground where he had cut the hay. He did it with a walking plow and progress was slow, but as soon as he had turned two or three furrows my brother would plant corn with a hand planter.

This corn planter was kind of a bellows with two handles at the top, and a funnel shaped bottom. One stuck the funnel shape into the plowed ground and worked the handle, which released the corn into the ground. When we cut oats or grain of any kind we did it with a scythe and held what we cut under our left arm until we cut enough to make a bundle (about two or three cuttings with the scythe); then we tied this with some of the straw. Later we would come along and stack it. All of our tools would be considered very crude today, but they got the work done.

Our entertainments were meager. On Sunday we would gather in the winter at the schoolhouse, and in the summer under an arbor to listen to some itinerant preacher regardless of denomination. Everybody went. Literary societies were held here, too, and neighbors came from miles to attend. Songs, recitations, and debates com-

-3-

prised the program. We always celebrated the Fourth of July. Anvils were fired, speeches made, the Declaration of Independence read, then horse races, potato and sack races, and ball games, but the most important were the family and neighbor picnic spreads. Mother would spend two or three days cooking and preparing for this big event, and seems to me now that we had everything good to eat.

Farm life was too dull for Dad. He longed for the open prairie and cattle (he had been a cattle ranchman before he came to Oklahoma); so he disposed of our farm, bought a bunch of cattle, and took them into the Cherokee Strip, where there was free range. There a group of cattlemen got together and made a deal with a member of Congress to delay the opening until a later date, and to keep the soldiers from bothering their cattle. When the contract was about up (thirty days of time), the ranchmen drove most of their cattle out of Oklahoma leaving only a few worthless ones. Then they wired Washington that cattle were on the range; and Washington immediately ordered the soldiers to clear them off. This made the agreement with the member of Congress null and void.

-4-

In connection with the opening of the Cherokee Strip there was an incident that occurred at the border line near Kiowa, Kansas. There were two brothers by the name of Short, cattlemen who had grazed their cattle in the Strip and knew the country well. About twelve or thirteen miles from Kiowa and over in the Strip there was some fine land with valuable springs on it. The Short boys wanted this land, and they made a deal with a negro to fire a gun two or three minutes before the official time, and they were on good horses ready to run as soon as he fired. The two or three minutes gave them the lead of the crowd. The crowd, of course, started too, and the soldiers immediately fired. The Shorts were successful in reaching there first and they filed on this land. These springs are still known as the "Short Springs".

Father had used his homestead rights in the run of '89, so he went to Eagle Chief and opened up a trading post there. He had been preparing for this opening; he bought the lumber, and had a building made in sections ready to move and put up, before the last homesteaders had filed on their claims. He had this up and a stock of general merchandise installed, and soon a post office

-5-

was secured with mother as the first postmistress. A star route was established. The mail carrier drove a team of horses to a two-seated hack and carried passengers in connection with the mail, which was received every other day.

Money was very scarce. What was in circulation was from the old soldiers' pensions, or perhaps the son or father would go over into Missouri, Arkansas, or Illinois and husk corn for a little money. Nearly everything was bought by trading. Cedar posts were the most popular trading product. They were cut off the Government reservation. This was forbidden and there were United States marshals sent there to protect these holdings.

Once a United States marshal tried to arrest some farmers who were cutting posts down in a cañon. They caught the marshal, tied his hands behind him, put a rope around his neck, then placed him on top of the posts and drove under a big tree, and took the other end of the rope and threw it across a limb. The marshal began to beg for mercy and told them if they would turn him loose that he would leave and never bother them again. This was what the farmers wanted; they really hadn't intended to

-6-

hang him but wanted to frighten him so he would not bother them again. They had to have merchandise and the posts were the only thing they could trade that had a value. Dad had several acres full of these posts. They were transported by freight wagons to Alva, the nearest railroad station, and shipped east to a good market. Then the freighters would bring back a load of merchandise. Many prominent men of today hauled freight for Dad in order to make a little money.

Eggs sold as low as two cents a dozen and country butter for ten cents a pound, yet everybody seemed happy. Those were the days that we bought green coffee in the bulk, parched it at home, and ground it in a small coffee mill held between the knees. People killed their own hogs and cured their meat with cobs and hickory chips, stuffed sausage in little sacks and hung them up in a smoke house, and made their own lye soap and took the clothes down to the spring or river and washed them and hung them on a barbed wire fence so the barbs would hold them and keep the wind from blowing them away. We hung our milk and butter down the well to keep it cool. There wasn't any ice those days.

The biggest convention ever held in that part of the state, was called the Hayseed Convention, Farmers in 1896

-7-

and citizens from every walk of life were there by the thousands. It was a fusion meeting of the Democrats and Populists and held at Augusta, Oklahoma. There were about fifty feet between Estol Snyder's and Dad's stores. They boxed up the back and front and put a box roof on this hall, and had long boards held up by boxes for seats. The people came in buggies, wagons, horseback, or on foot. It lasted four or five days and nearly everybody came prepared to camp out as Augusta was a small place with out hotel accommodations. At this meeting several persons were nominated, such as J. B. Doolin, Jesse G. Dunn, Pat Oats, Fred Hardy, Judge Bowers, and many others who later achieved much prominence in the political field. Nearly everyone they nominated here was elected. During this convention there were various kinds of amusements, horse racing, ball games, and square dancing at night.

There is a legend about the Boiling Springs southwest of Carmen. The legend is that two Indian Chiefs who were jealous of each other over a beautiful Indian maiden agreed to meet there to fight it out, and while engaged in this fight they both fell into this spring, and they are still fighting for supremacy, which keeps the water in an

-8-

agitated condition. Whether the legend is true or not,
the water is boiling hot.