

DUNGAN, CORA GEOFFROY

INTERVIEW #9005

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Nora Lorrin,  
Investigator,  
October 18, 1937.

An Interview with Mrs. Cora Geoffroy  
Dungan, 206 N. El Reno St., El Reno, Okla.

Mrs. Cora Geoffroy Dungan was born in Osage County, Kansas, September 22, 1869, on a farm.

Her father, Gregorie L. Geoffroy, was born in France, in 1842, coming to America when he was twelve years of age, moving to Kansas when he was fifteen.

Her mother, Elizabeth Collins Geoffroy, was born in Ohio in 1843 on June 9th. Her mother grew to womanhood in Ohio and then moved to Kansas and she and Mr. G. L. Geoffroy got married in 1866.

Mr. Geoffroy was a Union Soldier in the Civil War. Mrs. Dungan was born and reared in Kansas and lived on the same farm until she came to Oklahoma in 1894. Her father homesteaded the farm in Kansas where she was raised. The Indians in Kansas used to walk right into the homes of the white people unannounced, say "How!" and make themselves at home. If there were any eggs or other eatables around handy, they would just take them without asking.

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They would pick the eggs up and shake them, listening to see if they were good and then would put them into their pockets. They did not steal in the ordinary sense of the word for they took what they wanted with you looking at them. They knew better but depended on the people's fear of them to get by with their nervy doings. Mrs. Dungan said that her mother never said anything to the Indians, just letting them have what they wanted. It was always food that interested them.

One of Cora Geoffroy's married brothers came down to Oklahoma about 1890. He had heard through friends about a place here and he came down and took it. Cora Geoffroy came down later to visit her brother, Gustave C. Geoffroy and his wife.

Though Cora Geoffroy had never taught school before, she found that there was a dearth of teachers here at that time and she was hired to teach the school near her brother's farm. It was called "Pleasant Valley" and it is located about twelve miles northeast of El Reno. A man teacher had started to teach the school but <sup>for</sup> some

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reason he quit it and she finished the term, teaching three winter months. There were sixty pupils enrolled but she said that it was seldom that they were all in school at one time.

Many of them had come from Western Kansas where the school facilities were very meagre. The children were eager for an education but the parents could not see the need of constant attendance which accounted for the irregularity in attendance. The school had a wood burning stove and the patrons cut the wood for the school. Cora Geoffroy lived with her brother's family while teaching the "Pleasant Valley School" and walked a mile to the school house which was a mile south of her brother's home.

One evening at closing time, a blizzard struck. The snow was falling so fast that they could not see any distance and it was bitterly cold. Her route home was straight north facing the blizzard. A family that lived nearby asked her to stay all night with them. They had come after their children; she accepted the invitation

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gladly and wrote a note on the blackboard telling where she had gone in case her brother came after her. He came in a wagon, found her gone and did not go into the school house, assuming he had passed her on the road missing her on account of the snow. The visibility was nil. Her brother went home and on the way stopped at every bridge or culvert looking for her, thinking that she might have been overcome with the cold. Arriving home and finding that she had not yet come home he went back to the school house and entered it, finding the note she had left on the blackboard. He had been very worried about her and was much relieved. When her three months' school was up Cora Geoffroy returned to her home in Kansas and taught a three months' spring term in her old home neighborhood.

She came back to Oklahoma again in the Fall of 1895, thinking that she would teach again but she had been corresponding with a man whom she had met when she was in Oklahoma the first time, a Mr. Isaiah S.

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Dungan, and she was married to him, instead, in 1895.

His wife had died two years previously during a typhoid epidemic, leaving him with two children, a boy and a girl.

Mr. Dungan had taken a claim six miles east and five miles north of El Reno. They had a little box house fourteen by fourteen. It was not ceiled but Mrs. Dungan papered it with newspapers and was very proud of her little home.

There was a well of good water right by the side of the house, a shed stable made of poles and brush and a chicken house made of corn stalks. A neighbor had some very tall corn and they let the Dungans have the stalks to make their chicken house. The framework was made of poles which they had cut from the draw on their place and then it was sided and roofed with the corn stalks. She said that it was both dry and warm.

They had an east and a west door to their little house and one day the chickens came marching in at

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the west door and went on through the house and out of the east one. She wondered what on earth. The answer soon put in its appearance. A pole cat brought up the rear and it was after the chickens. Mr. Dungan was present and he grabbed the broom and with a mighty sweep knocked Mr. Pole Cat out of the door which he had come in by. Then, Mr. Dungan followed the pole cat and killed him. The pole cats were very bad out there. Mrs. Dungan at one time carried off a whole tubful of young chickens that the pole cats had killed and sucked the blood from.

Mr. Dungan proved up on his farm just fifteen days before they were married. He took out a loan on it for \$250.00 in order to have the money to get married and to buy a couple of cows. It took them just five years to pay off that mortgage and the interest in that time came to the same amount as the principal, \$250.00 for \$250.00, making a total of \$500.00. Interest on money was high and you could hardly get a loan.

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They never mortgaged the farm again. Their two cows furnished them all the milk and butter they needed and they raised enough hogs to supply their own meat. Butter and eggs were very cheap when you want to sell them. The first crop of wheat they had, Mr. Dungan boxed off half of their fourteen foot house and used it to store the wheat in and the children had to sleep on the wheat as long as it was kept there.

The next year he built a lean-to kitchen and the wheat was stored in it, until it was sold. They got about 50 cents a bushel for their wheat. There was a draw on their place that had enough wood on it for all their uses, including fuel. Of wild fruit, there were persimmons and wild tree plums. They planted an orchard later but it did not do very well.

At first, it was sometimes two weeks before they could come to El Reno to get their mail. A few years later there was a store and post office at Richland

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about five miles northeast of their farm. A man named Joe Walker was the first storekeeper and postmaster.

When the country was first opened, Mrs. Dungan's uncle, Mr. Charley Geoffroy, homesteaded the hundred and sixty acres of land that later Richland was built on and the first school house in that neighborhood was name Richland.

The soil there was and is rich and the school was named Richland because of that fact and later when the store and post office needed a name they were given the same name as the school.

Mr. and Mrs. Dungan were great hands to go places and they had lots of friends. Their friends would come to their place and stay all night, often having to sleep on the floor and Mr. and Mrs. Dungan would go and visit friends in return and sometimes they too would have to sleep on the floor but more often it was the children who had to do that. They attended candy breakings, parties, picnics, literaries,

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Church and Sunday School, often leading the singing.

They sometimes went on horseback, sometimes in a wagon and they had a two wheeled cart that they used to go places in at times.

They always raised plenty of potatoes and other vegetables and meat; gravy and potatoes were their main foods. People used to call gravy "Starch" and often someone made the remark, "I have eaten so much starch that I am stiff from it."

Mrs. Dungan like most of the pioneers, raised pie melons, a sort of a citron, and they made both pies and butter or jam out of them.

Cream pie used to be called "Oklahoma Pie" because the things needed to make it the Oklahoma women nearly always had on hand, namely; milk, butter, eggs, flour, sugar and some kind of flavoring.

There were buffalo wallows in their pasture. Places where the ground had been stomped and pawed until there were shallow, saucer-shaped depressions made in

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the ground by the buffaloes and long after the buffaloes were gone these depressions filled with water when it rained and you could tell where they were by the grass always being greener in them than at other places. Mrs. Dungan has seen the ruts made by the cattle following the "Old Cattle Trail". It passed near Richland. "The Old Cattle Trail" was possibly a quarter of a mile wide.

Mrs. Dungan still owns the homestead and one of her sons farms it.