

DUCKWORTH, NANCY.

INTERVIEW

10516 -

90

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

DUCKWORTH, NANCY

INTERVIEW

10516

Field Worker's name Ethel Mae Yates

This report made on (date) April 18, 1938

Name Nancy Duckworth

Post Office Address Elk City, Oklahoma

Residence address (or location) Route 4

DATE OF BIRTH: Month October Day 16 Year 1866

Place of birth \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Father James Nelson Place of birth Kentucky

Other information about father \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Mother Susan Drake Place of birth Virginia

Other information about mother \_\_\_\_\_

Give 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 10

DUCKWORTH, NANCY

INTERVIEW

10516

Ethel Mae Yates,  
Investigator,  
April 18, 1938.

An Interview with Mrs. Nancy Duckworth,  
R. 4, Elk City, Oklahoma.

My parents were James Nelson and Susan Drake Nelson. Father was born and reared in Kentucky and Mother in Virginia. When they married they moved over in Indiana and moved from there to Kansas when I was five years old.

This was in 1871 and there were five families who came through and made the move in covered wagons to Caldwell, Kansas, and Father took a claim right on the border of Kansas and the Territory, and we lived in a tent for awhile.

Father got some yoke of oxen and broke out sod and put in some crop. We children would follow along behind him and in every third furrow we would take a hatchet and cut holes in the sod and drop the seed and cover. By Father plowing with the oxen, we could keep up with the plow. We hadn't been on this claim long until there was a

DUCKWORTH, NANCY

INTERVIEW

10516

- 2 -

sawmill put in near and Father got some lumber and built a one-room log house for us. But we had no door shutter and a quilt answered the purpose for a long time. This place was right on the trail that the Indians would come out of the Territory and go to Wyoming and other places. Although they never did harm us, we had several real scares. These Indians wore nothing but their leggings and moccasins and a blanket fastened around their waists. They had different things painted on their body and faces. They very often made camp near our place.

Father and my oldest brother, Reuben, were great hunters and would go over in the hills nine miles west of us and hunt Buffalo. They would take the wagon and bring back loads of hides and maybe just a hind quarter of meat. The Indians were always coming to our house, begging Buffalo meat, meal and coffee. They always would have a sick papoose or squaw. I didn't go to school until I was seven on account of the Indians and when I did start I had to walk three miles.

DUCKWORTH, NANCY

INTERVIEW

10516

- 3 -

There weren't any people living in there for a long time but the five families of us who came together in 1874.

A man whom we knew, Jim Barlen, went out in Wyoming, prospecting. He and his friends had made camp and he had left his son, Harvey Barlen, with whom I had gone to school, to watch the wagon while he was out prospecting. The Indians came along while he was gone. As well as I remember they were the Black Hawk Indians. They wanted this boy to cook something to eat for them and for some reason he didn't do it. They drove a wagon tongue through him and on down in the ground and left him. He was still alive when his father returned, and able to tell who did it. He soon died from the injury and his father brought him back to Caldwell for burial.

Father fought through the Civil War and contracted a disease from which he never did recover. He died while in his fifties, leaving Mother with <sup>us</sup> children. It was a struggle for her to make it through.

well, I grew up there and in 1881 I married Jerry Nelson and in 1887 we came to the Chickasaw Nation. We

DUCKWORTH, NANCY

INTERVIEW

10516

- 4 -

had two children at that time. We came in one covered wagon, putting two trunks and a box in the wagon bottom and fixing our bed on them. We cooked on camp fires and slept in the wagon. There weren't any roads at that time. Part of the time we traveled on a cow trail. There was not even a railroad across there at that time. There was no El Reno at that time. We came to Fort Reno and stayed one night and to a little town called Silver City and to Minco, then through a large Ranch known as the Bars Ranch which was owned by a Mr. Bar. We camped there for awhile, then went nine miles west of Purcell and camped. My husband got a job working for a squaw man, Mr. Briton, on a ranch. A squaw man was a white man married to an Indian woman.

We made a dugout on this place in a bank and covered it with dirt and walled up the front. Our bedsteads were stubs driven down in the ground with poles nailed across, with a straw bed for a mattress. We cooked on fire place.

My husband worked for this man until the Run in 1889, when made the Run and got a claim, right where the south-east part of Norman is now. He gave a man who was crippled

DUCKWORTH, NANCY

INTERVIEW

10516

- 5 -

a horse and a spring wagon to make the run and he also got a claim.

At this place we also made a dugout back in a hill and boxed up the front and put a shingle roof on it and had a one half glass window. But before we made the dugout we lived in a tent.

My husband had to go to Guthrie to file and was gone a week. And I with those two small children was left alone in the tent with no one near. There were lots of wild varmint at that time and I was afraid of Indians, too, I was so uneasy that I didn't know what to do. But he returned and found us there unharmed, except for nerves upset. It was then that he made our dugout. We still lived on a dirt floor and slept on the same kind of beds, cooked on fireplace getting our wood on Timber Creek. Our table was a large box and our chairs smaller ones, and a box was nailed on the wall for dishes. I brought my sewing machine from Kansas and that was a real luxury. It was the only machine in the country- any where near and all the women near came to my place to sew.

DUCKWORTH, NANCY

INTERVIEW

10516

- 6 -

We lived at this place two years when we sold out to Berry Brothers who put in a grocery store there in Norman. They traded us some horses and mules and some money for our claim, and that was when we made our mistake by selling. We left there and moved over in Kingfisher County and settled on some school land and dug another dugout and lived in it and a tent. My husband was quite a stockman, and worked for cattlemen most of the time.

When the Cheyenne and Arapaho country was opened he made the Run and set his stake. He made this run just for fun as he knew he couldn't file. He also made the Run when the Enid Run was made for townsites and got eight lots, but didn't keep them. We then pulled up and went back to Kansas.

In 1903 we came back to Oklahoma and rented a place nine miles southeast of old Hannon. There we made another dugout back in a hill with a boxed in front. We still lived on a dirt floor and used our home-made furniture for my husband was like a rolling stone and never stayed one place long enough to get settled down. We farmed here

DUCKWORTH, NANCY

INTERVIEW

10516

- 7 -

and here in 1906 he died. During his lifetime we put in most of our time in a covered wagon and in tents and have camped in almost every county in the State, cooking on campfires and washing in creeks.

In 1908 I married Mr. Duckworth who had come in an early day and was a pioneer preacher and a great friend to the Indians. Old River, an Indian man, and his two sons, Turtle Roads and Lone Elk, would come to see us often. Mr. Duckworth owned a dog that would hunt turtles. They called Mr. Duckworth O man and they would come over and want him to hunt turtles for them. They would roast these turtles and eat them. They would come and eat with us many times and would say "white squaw cook good chuckaway" Our home here was a dugout back in a hill with a room in front of it, with one middle door and no back door, and many times I would be at work and look up and one of these Indians would be standing in the door before I knew that they were on the place. It would almost scare me to death, and then they would begin to laugh. I guess they meant no harm but I didn't know it.

DUCKWORTH, NANCY

INTERVIEW,

10516

- 8 -

We lived only two miles from the Washita River when we wanted fish we would go to the river and catch them. Mr. Duckworth was quite a hunter and trapper. He would set traps and catch muskrats and some coons and opossum and few beavers. Selling the furs, one day he was down on the river and killed two squirrels and was counting on a feast when he got home, but some way he lost them on the way and didn't know it until he got home. But while he was gone I had killed a rabbit and had it all cooked nice so he wasn't so badly disappointed. We moved over to old Hamon and ran a butcher shop there three years. But when the town was moved to new Hamon we went back to the farm and lived there until 1917 when we moved to Elk City. Mr. Duckworth died here in 1927 and is buried here in the Fairlawn Cemetery. He came here as a pioneer in an early day and endured many hardships, not only his personal hardships, but he also went through many hardships trying to carry spiritual food to both whites and Indians. I wish that I could tell more about him for there was a whole history in his life

DUCKWORTH, NANCY

INTERVIEW

10516

- 8 -

and it is worthy to live on in history. and as you see almost all of my life has been spent on the frontiers and I liked it. I don't like this modern way. I have made Elk City my home ever since coming here first.