

ELLIS, MARY M. (Morrison) INTERVIEW

#7090

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

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Field Worker's name Alene J. McDowellThis report made on (date) July 21, 1937

1. Name Mary M. Morrison-Ellis
2. Post Office Address Ochelata, Oklahoma
3. Residence address (or location) Ochelata, Oklahoma
4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month April Day 12 Year 1884
5. Place of birth Mayes County, near Pryor, Indian Territory

6. Name of Father Robert Morrison Place of birth Iowa
Other information about father Living at Ochelata, 80 years old

7. Name of Mother Susan McCoy-Morrison Place of birth Oklahoma
Other information about mother Living at Bartlesville, age 71 years.

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 19.

Alena D. McDowell
Research Field Worker
Indian-Pioneer History, S-149
July 21, 1937

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Interview with
Mrs. Mary M. Ellis
Ochelata, Oklahoma.

Mrs. Mary M. Ellis was born April 12, 1884
in Mayes County, Indian Territory, near where
Pryor is now located.

Father - Robert Morrison was born in 1857,
in Lynn County, Iowa, and is now living in
Ochelata, at the age of 80 years.

Mother - Susan McCoy-Morrison was born in
1866 near Sallisaw, Indian Territory, and is
now living at 1112 West Third Street at Bartles-
ville, at the age of 71 years. She is one-
quarter Cherokee Indian.

Our first home was on a farm in Mayes County,
and the house was a double log house with a
hall way through the center. The north side
was boarded up with clapboard. This home was
located near the old Dalton home, near Pryor.

Our nearest trading post was Chelsea,

Indian Territory, and Coffeyville, Kansas. We only went to town twice a year, and at that time we bought supplies to last for six months.

We always went to the creek to do our laundry. When I was about 12 years old we lived about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles southwest of Ochelata, on this place there was what we called a second creek bank, where we did our laundry. We had large iron kettles, lined on the inside with white enamel, that we used to boil our clothes in. When we finished the kettles/^{were} tied to a tree and the tubs were wired to the fence near by, so they would not wash away if the water should overflow.

CATTLE RAISING

Everything was a free cattle range with no fences. Our range extended from Glenoak,

located east of Bartlesville in Washington County, to Skiatook in Tulsa County.

Cattle raising has existed in the United States since the early colonial days. It was first started along the eastern coast, but was replaced by agriculture and forced to move westward.

After the buffaloes were slaughtered , leaving the vast pasture lands without animals to consume the excellent grass, this was an ideal place for the cattlemen.

The Plains Indians were placed on reservations in the Indian Territory. They had depended upon the buffalo for their livelihood, for food, clothing and shelter, and after ^{the} disappearance of the herd, the Plains Indians were comparatively easy to keep upon the reservations, where they were fed by the Government of the United States.

This made it possible for the ranchmen to occupy the region with some degree of safety.

The Indian Territory was a splendid area for the ranching industry, considering the climate, soil and land system. The winters were mild, enabling the cattle to feed on open range throughout the year. The soil produced a good quality of grass and the free range for the cattle made this the popular cattle country. This new country was thinly settled and was not used for agriculture, which was another advantage for grazing the herds. The water supply was fairly abundant.

We had our disadvantages to face also. The hungry Indians sometimes made a raid on the ranchmen and the cattle rustlers were to be dealt with. There was no protection of the law and the cattlemen were forced to live by their own law, and their only

protection was their faithful Winchester and six shooters.

My father owned a small ranch with about 500 head of cattle. His brand was RM. Lon Everetts and John Legal were two of his cowboys. Captain DeNoya, a Texas cowman, also stayed at our place.

My father had worked on the Robert L. Owens Ranch, South of Caney, Kansas, before his marriage. Their brand was O H.

THE STORY OF THE COWBOY

The cowboy's work took him out in all kinds of weather, and he was at home in the saddle, as he spent long hours on horseback, riding the range and looking after the cattle.

The stock were much different from the peaceful, quiet cattle of this age; they were small, wild creatures that were liable to become unruly at times. The cowboys buty

was to "ride fence" and keep it in repair; often the ride would last for two or three days. The cowboy would then cook his grub over a camp fire and roll up in his blanket and sleep under the stars.

ROUNDUP

The round up was held in the spring and fall of the year. At this time each ranch sent their outfit to the round up. The cattle were driven together in one big herd, then divided into smaller herds, where the calves were branded. Each ranch had their individual brand and the calf was determined by the brand of its mother.

The calf was thrown, tied down and the red hot branding iron applied to its side.

Unidentified calves were known as "mavericks" and were divided among the different cattlemen.

A remuda, of at least two horses for each cowboy, was taken to the round up. When one horse was tired out, the rider roped another and continued with his work.

The chuck wagon was another important feature of the round up. The cook served hot coffee and meals at all hours.

When the outfit left for the round up, we never knew when they would return, nor how many of them would return. The cowboy felt the responsibility of his herd and fought for them as if they belonged to him. Any differences to be settled between their employer and another outfit, was an individual battle for each loyal cowboy.

RANCH HOUSE

Our ranch house, like all others, in this section of the Indian Territory, was a two room house, built of logs, with a porch on two sides.

The bunk house for the cow hands was also built of logs. My father usually kept four cowboys.

The cattlemen were generous and hospitable and a stranger was always welcome.

CHURCH LIFE

We attended church held in a log school house, located in our locality, and at the old Delaware Baptist Church, located near the present site of the Hillcrest Country Club, three miles south of Bartlesville.

The Indians knew little about ^{the} christianity our preachers of today teach, but they were a very religious^{ly} minded people. They worshipped a Supreme Being, and were very sincere in their belief. They prayed to their God for rain, wind, sun, etc., and danced and sang.

My maternal grandparents came to the

Indian Territory, from Georgia, on the Emigration Act..

My Grandmother McCoy, a half breed Cherokee, was a missionary and teacher in Dwight's Mission, located in Arkansas, during the Civil War. She took her children to this Mission, where she and they remained until the close of the war.

EDUCATION

Education was not as easily obtained in the early days as the present time. We had no handsome brick and stone, modern school buildings with steam heat. then, as we have now. The country schools then were not like the present consolidated district schools, with busses to transport us to and from school, but our schoolhouses were built of logs and in some localities school was held in dugouts. If we lived two or three miles

from school, we walked.

The first school I attended was at Lenapah, in Nowata County, and my first teacher was Miss Nettie Rogers. There was a Government school located at Nowata, where I attended later.

FERRIES.

I only recall two ferries in our immediate locality. One was the ferry across the Caney River at the north edge of Bartlesville and the other was ^asmall, one team size, boat, that crossed the Verdigris River east of Nowata, below Alluwe. This boat was operated by a Mr. Wolley.

FORD

The Greenleaf ford was across the Verdigris River. I cannot give the exact location of this ford, but it was not far from our home for my father used to drive his cattle across the

river at this ford.

HORSE RACES

Horse races were a great sport in the early days, and were enjoyed by both old and young.

I attended an exciting horse race near Nowata one time; however, my father took us home at the most exciting moment.

Mr. Beal brought in a horse from Texas, known as Texas Tom. Tyne Walker and Jeff Laffett, local men, owned the fastest horse in the vicinity, known as Popcorn. Needless to say, we were all betting on Popcorn and would have been much disappointed if he had lost. Popcorn seemed to sense this, for he won, with a walkaway.

The two jockeys had an argument about the race and when the Texas jockey accused our home man of being crooked, it was settled

in the old fashioned way, a genuine fist fight. The Texas jockey threatened to kill our man, causing considerable excitement, but the trouble was settled without blood shed.

WILD GAME

A permit from the Cherokee Nation was required to hunt in this part of the country.

There was a great quantity of wild game here in the early days. The deer, wolves, panthers and different species of cats. The smaller game and birds were, the raccoon, opossum, prairie dog, turkey, quail, pheasants and prairie chicken.

ALLOTMENT OF LAND

The United States Government allotted land to each of the Five Civilized Tribes, The Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, Seminole and Cherokee Indians.

The land was first appraised according to
and
the location of the land, the valuation.

Each individual was filed at different
locations assigned, the roll was made and
the land allotted accordingly. My allotment
was 80 acres located northeast of Ochelata,
in what is known as the Johnstons bottom.
I was filed at Vinita.

In 1898 the Cherokee Strip land was
sold and I received my payment at Vinita,
in I think about 1902 or '03.

PEN INDIANS

There was a secret organization among
the Indians, known as the "Pen Indians."
They were a wild bunch who committed many
bloody crimes about the time of the out
break of the Civil War.

My great-grandfather and his two sons
were murdered by these demons. My grand-

father was district sheriff. His father-in-law owned a store where this fiendish murder took place. When he found that he was surrounded by the Indians, he crawled under the house, where he hid until he had an opportunity to run across the short passage between the house and store. He and his two sons fought a
/loo sing fight and were murdered.

The Pin Indians were Republicans and after this murder, my ^{great-}grandmother and all the generations in our family, up to the present time, have been Democrats.

During the war the "bushwhackers", another out-law gang, and the Pin Indians caused much suffering among the people by robbing them of their stock, food and anything else of value. The Bushwhackers came to my grandmother's home, seized her feather beds and pillows, ripped them with a knife and opened

them to the wind.

My grandmother was a nurse among the Indians. I remember when I was a child I was very much interested in watching her make teas and medicines from herbs, roots, barks and leaves.

The Indians children on the reservations and in Indian settlements wore loose dresses and shirts, all made alike. They all wore long hair and it was difficult to determine the boys from the girls. The boys were called "shirt tail boys".

I knew the late Uncle Bud Ledbetter, who was an outstanding United States Deputy Marshal of the Indian Territory.

RAILROADS.

One of the most colorful episodes of the Indian Territory was the building of the railroad, or "the Iron Horse," so called by the Indians.

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Two railroads were allowed to build their lines across the Indian Territory, one running east and west and the other, north and south.

The Government did not want to show partialty, so established a rule, that the first company to complete the construction of a railroad up to the border of the territory should gain the right-of-way. Several companies had applied for the privilege and an exciting race followed.

The Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad, and the Missouri River, Fort Scott and Gulf Railroad entered this exciting race. Many laborers pushed ahead with enthusiasm, and the entire Nation showed interest as the work progressed.

In the summer of 1870 or 1871 the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad completed their line to the border, where

the Neosho River crossed the northern boundary of the Indian Territory, giving them the privilege to construct their lines through the new country.

About one year later the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad, later known as the Frisco, entered the state from east to west, joining the Missouri, Kansas and Texas at Vinita.

The Santa Fe Railroad was built from Caney, Kansas to Collinsville, Indian Territory, in the late 90's and my father worked on this line at Ochelata in 1899.

The Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad completed their road to Oklahoma City in about 1903.

My husband, Thomas J. Ellis, Jr., is also of the pioneer stock of this great state. The town of McAlester was named in honor of his grandmother's people.

COMMENTS.

Mrs. Ellis has spent her entire life in the Indian Territory and Oklahoma, and has seen some thrilling sights here in the wild untamed country, before the grazing land was fenced and ^{where} men made their own laws and lived by their skill with a six shooter.

She has lived the greater part of her life in Washington County, and now resides in a beautiful home, in Ochelata, twelve miles south of Bartlesville.

Mr. Ellis has been Chairman of the Democratic board in Washington County for several years, and has played a prominent part in the political affairs of this county.

Evelyn, the youngest daughter, of the Ellis', taught school for several years in Dewey and two years at Fishcreek, a country school 7 miles south east of Bartlesville,

before her marriage.

Mrs. Ellis relates this story from her heart and is proud of the fact she is a native of such a great state, and that her ancestors were of the pioneer Indian stock. By giving this story, she hopes to show the younger generation what a great nationality the Red man is, and the struggle the pioneers suffered to make this the fine state it is to live in.