

NILES, MARGERY R. FOLEY

INTERVIEW

#8202

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

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Field Worker's name Mrs. Lora Lorrin, El Reno, OklahomaThis report made on (date) August 12, 19371. Name Mrs. Margery R. (Foley) Miles2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma3. Residence address (or location) 811 South Hadden Avenue4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month July Day 21 Year 18835. Place of birth Porter County, Indiana6. Name of Father Frances K. Foley Place of birth PennsylvaniaOther information about father Died January 27, 19077. Name of Mother Elmina C. (Jackson) Foley Place of birth Ohio. August
9, 1839Other information about mother Died September 1, 1909

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 _____.

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FIELD WORKER NORA LORRIN
Indian-Pioneer History S-149
August 12, 1937.

INTERVIEW WITH MARGERY R. (FOLEY) NILES
El Reno, Oklahoma.

Mrs. Niles came to Oklahoma, October 18th, 1890, with her parents and family, three boys and two girls. They came in three covered wagons, and they had three teams and a cow.

On their way down here from their home near Great Bend, Kansas, they stopped at Caldwell, Kansas, and they discovered that they had lost their dog somewhere on the back trail and the children set up such a howl that the three wagons back trailed until they found the dog. They traveled through the Salt Plains and made one of their camps where Enid now stands. There was no town there at that time so they made camp at the springs. Mrs. Miles ^{says} that there were four different kinds of water flowing from those springs but at that time they were just open springs or holes. These springs are inside the city limits of Enid now, in one of the parks, and all are connected with hydrants, etc.

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When they came to the Cimarron River near Kingfisher it was necessary to detour five or six miles up the river in order to find a safe crossing.

Mrs. Niles' father was a soldier in the Civil War, serving from 1861 until 1865, Mrs. Niles still has the bridle bit and spurs that he used while in the army. He obtained a farm in the Spring of 1890 in Oklahoma. He filed a soldier's declaratory; he did not have to make the run for his farm.

It was a claim that had not been taken in the run of 1889, and was located twelve miles northeast of El Reno. Mr. Foley filed on the claim, built a house, and the family moved there in October, 1890.

Mrs. Niles was seven years old when they came to Oklahoma. Her half brother, Mr. Frank Folsom, made the run in 1889 and got a good claim.

Their sod house was twelve by twenty-six feet with slabs from a saw-mill for the roof and with red clay put on top. There was just one outside door;

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one big ridge pole and foot wide pine boards were used for the floor. Their furniture was brought with them from their home in Kansas where they had lived on a farm near Great Bend.

Their barn and hen house were built of poles and hay. The poles were set in the ground with heavy corner poles and poles here and there on the sides and ends. These poles were set in the ground double about twelve inches apart and there were a lot of little poles nailed to the straight up and down poles and the twelve inch space between was filled with prairie hay, tamped down.

The roof was made of hay. This roof would leak if there was a good hard rain but it made a pretty good shelter for the stock in winter time. Later, these hay and pole barns were built all over the country except that wheat straw was used for the filler instead of hay as soon as the straw was available.

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When the Foley family first moved on their claim it was necessary to haul their water. They used a barrel on a sled and they had to haul the water about a quarter of a mile. As soon as possible they dug a well which was about forty or forty-five feet deep and five feet in diameter. There were two wooden buckets and the water was drawn up with a rope and pulley. It also had a wooden platform and curbing. The water was extra good. Their trough that they used to water the stock was about fourteen feet long, made out of foot wide boards so the trough was a foot wide, a foot deep and fourteen feet long. For fuel they used wood, cow chips and brush, or anything they could find to burn.

Mr. Foley broke the sod and planted and raised some cotton, oats, corn and later wheat. Their main food was meat and bread, coffee, sugar, ^{and} sorghum. They raised their own cane, took it to a cane mill

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that was run by a man named Ewing who lived a mile away. The cane was run through the mill which was operated by horse power, that is, a horse hitched to a long pole and driven around and around the mill; then the juice was put into a vat, boiled and skimmed until it was made into sorghum.

Mrs. Niles used to stay with a married sister when she was small and the married sister's husband worked out at the Fort and of course Mrs. Niles would hear the Indian news.

There was an Indian scare while she was staying with her sister and they all took to the hills, spending a night concealed in a cannon on John's Creek that is located twelve and a half miles northeast of El Reno.

They used to go to see the beef issues at Darlington and it was interesting to watch the Indians coming in from every direction, some on horse back, some in wagons and some in spring wagons. They would start putting up their tepees as soon as they arrived and the squaws would come with their papooses on their backs, all

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eager to be fed.

At Darlington was a big Indian school as well as an agency.

As for game, there were lots of rabbits, prairie chickens, sage hens and quail. There was also plenty of fish,

She and Mr. Van A. Niles were married January 9, 1898. They have had nineteen children, twelve of whom are living.

Mr. and Mrs. Niles and their children moved to the Niles store on the 5th of March, 1902. Mr. Van A. Niles' father established the store and Mrs. Van A. Niles and her husband helped him. Mrs. Niles' father-in-law was appointed postmaster. He later sold the store to a man named Walter Hayes and it was moved to its present location, two miles south and two miles west of its original location.

Mr. Hayes managed this store for about a year and then sold it to C. D. Garvin. Garvin was appointed postmaster and he managed the store for three years.

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and then sold it to Charley Booher who conducted it about a year; Mr. Van A. Niles bought it back on March 24, 1908.

Mr. Van A. Niles was then appointed postmaster and his wife was made his assistant. They sold this store in 1911 and then moved to a farm a mile south and a mile east of Niles, which they rented from the Reeser family and stayed on this rented farm a year; then moved back to their own farm, a mile east and a mile north of Niles. They built a new house on it in 1913. Mr. Niles father owned three forty acre tracts, and they owned the hundred and sixty acres they lived on.

In 1903 Mrs. Niles and her children were with her father-in-law- and Mr. C.A. Niles, her brother-in-law, and a man named Rollia Blevins, in a wagon with a load of groceries and merchandise. They were taking the groceries and merchandise to their little store; they came to the crossing at the South Canadian River when it was dark. The river was "up" and they waited un-

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til the next afternoon to attempt to cross, at that time it seemed to be low enough to be safe so they started across.

One of the horses had a habit of lifting her forefoot high when she was in deep water and she threw her foot over the neck yoke and threw herself in the water. The delay caused the wagon to get stuck in the quick sand. The water was about up to the hubs of the wagon when they drove into the water but it began to rise again while they were stuck. They tied a rope to the tongue of the wagon and fastened it to the bank and the men unloaded the wagon by carrying the groceries and other merchandise out on their shoulders. Mrs. Niles got into the water to hold the rope up out of the water and it broke and wrapped around her. It was a hard twisted wet rope and it stuck her hard, skinned her in spots and left some black and blue marks on her. They did not lose anything except a snap off their harness, however.

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They tied a rope to the wagon box when they got it emptied and floated it down stream to the bank. The water rose fast and by the time this was done the water was almost covering the rear wheels of the wagon. They hitched the team to the running gears of the wagon by means of a long rope and then pulled it out.

Mr. and Mrs. Niles were in Geary when the Geary people were putting up their first houses. Her husband was working with the crew that was building the Choctaw Railroad and they camped and moved as the road progressed. She was in Geary and danced in the first set that was ever danced in the city of Geary. It was in a store building and the studding was up and the floor laid so they held the dance in the unfinished building.

Mr. and Mrs. Niles also camped near Bridgeport where she cooked for the boys, her husband and brothers.

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There was a toll bridge at Bridgeport operated by a man named Keyes. There used to be a trail, that was said to be a buffalo trail, south of Geary between Geary and Bridgeport.

There used to be lots of camp meetings around the country. A Reverend Mr. Thompson held one at Niles about 1914.

There was a ranch owned by Clark Watts called The Clark "atts Ranch located two miles east of Niles. He had six sections of land under his control. It was fenced and he raised cattle, goats, and hogs. It had a large log house of five rooms; three down stairs and two upstairs. There was a large frame barn and some frame sheds.

The ranch was started about 1902. Some of the land was school land and some of it was obtained through relatives.

The first school houses were for the most part made of sod and the "soddy" served as a church house and for religious and other activities.

The church she attended was twelve miles northeast of town. It is now called Pleasant Valley. The seats

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in this church were made of squared logs with holes bored in them and logs driven into the holes. The desks were also home made.

Mr. and Mrs. Niles were acquainted with Deputy United States Marshal Chris Madson who lived about a quarter of a mile from them when they were first married.

Mrs. Niles' mother used to take copperas, dissolve it and boil the goods in the copperas water for about half an hour and then dip the cloth in a strong hot lye solution. It made a lovely soft yellow that would not fade as long as there was a piece of the goods left.

Another yellow dye is made by taking a lot of onion peelings and wood ashes and boiling them together; then she would strain and boil the goods to be dyed in the liquid. It makes a nice yellow dye, and for green, she would use green wheat stems and leaves and wood ashes, going through the same process as was used with the onions.

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This is an early day method of obtaining lye: take a bucket of wood ashes and pour a bucket of water over it and let it stand awhile; the resultant ^{liquid} is lye and you can use it just as you would any other lye. This lye, together with grease, will make a good soft soap.

They used to make Ash Leach in the early days; take a wooden barrel, bore holes in the bottom with a brace and bit, set the barrel slanting on a good flat board that is as wide as the barrel. Run the board into a receptacle. The barrel must be braced so that it will not slide off; fill the barrel with wood ashes, wet the ashes well and keep pouring on water until it drips into your receptacle; the resultant liquid is lye. Mrs. Niles has made soap, both soft and hard out of this kind of lye and grease. She has made it by the barrel.

People used to grow gourds and use them for various things; there was one gourd that had a large bowl and a long handle. They would saw off a portion of one side of the bowl and clean it out and use it for dipping water,

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lye and soap and any use in which a nice, large dipper was needed. Another kind of gourd grew almost as large as a small pumpkin. The top of these gourds were sawed off and both top and bottom cleaned and these were used for salt and sugar and various other things. For these gourd receptacles the top was saved and made a perfect fitting lid.

Their illumination was, for the most part, coal oil lamps, but when they had no coal oil they would braid three rags tightly together, place them in a saucer or other receptacle and pour grease or lard over them, letting one end stick up over the side of the saucer, light that end, and occasionally we would pour some of the melted grease up on the wick to keep it from burning too fast.

There was a ferry at Caddo Jake's Crossing twenty-two or twenty-three years ago. Mr. and Mrs.

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Niles were out there recently and learned that the ferry was washed away with the high water about two years ago.

After Union City was built they often went there to trade.

Of the early day cemeteries the only one Mrs. Niles remembers much about was the Old Frisco Cemetery which she says was a mile and a half north and a half mile west of Old Frisco.

They moved to El Reno on December 23, 1923, and have owned the place where they now live for about fourteen years.