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INTERVIEW WITH MRS. LAURA OWENS
1604 E. 2nd St., Tulsa, Okla
(Came to Guthrie in 1889)

FIELD WORKER EFFIE S. JACKSON
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GUTHRIE AS I KNEW IT.

I was born in Southern Ill.-1865-moved to Kansas in 1872- married and lived in Arkansas City, Kansas until the "opening" in Oklahoma, 1889. My husband, who was a contractor, planned to make Guthrie his home. He left three weeks before I did, driving through. The trip was one of rain and mud. Small streams became torrents. He said that every possible plan was used to cross these streams. Those on foot walked railroad bridges. The most "wicked" stream he crossed was Salt Fork. In order to make it he and his companions had to fell trees, make a raft, put the wagon, tools and other equipment on it and then fasten the raft to cables they had already stretched across the stream. My husband got a nice residence lot in Guthrie. Building was so urgent that men worked day and night.

When I came to Guthrie three weeks later, there wasn't a house in the place. Everybody lived in tents and some in covered wagons, "over jets", they called them. There were no roads, no fords and no bridges. The streams were treacherous from quicksand, so temporary bridges were built. There were

no streets surveyed at first, we just followed beaten paths. Later when roads were laid out they were only one way, having double roads at various points to allow wagons to pass each other. I have gone into deep gulleys and into deep canyons, down one side and up the other, places it seemed almost impossible to travel.

My first home was a tent in which I lived six weeks. It rained a deluge, I thought I had never seen so much mud in my life, Nobody got discouraged though. People laughed at inconveniences and took it all in good sport. My next home was a frame building 14 by 18. We dug the first well in Guthrie, it was such lovely water we let all the hillside use it. People depended on springs for water or used it from the river. There was a good deal of typhoid fever and a dysentery that seemed worse than the fever. It seemed to attack the men mostly. There were so many men who teamed the Santa Fe was the only railroad, so teaming was a great business. Teamsters were obliged to drink water wherever they found it and it was far from pure. Water was so scarce at first that it actually sold for 5 cents a drink, that muddy river water. The teams would always go in groups so as to lend aid in crossing streams or overcoming any other difficulty that might arise.

Everybody worked to establish homes. The friendships made then have been everlasting, the tie seems stronger than the friendships formed later. The outstanding thing was the beautiful friendliness and the deep interest which people felt for each other. There was no strangeness, people were acquainted immediately. It was a matter of common conversation to know where people came from, their purpose and view point in coming. Everyone was kind, the best was what was offered.

After the rains, as soon as the ground could be plowed, the women made the gardens, such wonderful gardens and vegetables. Everything was there, ready to make a town. The ice plant went up as the town built. Produce men came in from Winfield and Arkansas City. People brought their cows or bought them shortly after.

The town was always full of Indians. We didn't pay much attention to them. They loved to visit other tribes and would go and stay six months sometimes. They traveled in groups and sometimes it would take a whole week for them to pass. The women were the burden bearers and always walked while the men rode. They used some kind of cloth as large as a bed sheet and it was filled with a load, seemed to me

it was enough to kill a horse. It was fastened to a band on the head. Before the Indians bought wagons they used thongs to make a collar for the horse and to it tied twelve foot poles, one on either side. Then cross poles were tied, nails were never used. This was used to carry heavy things that the women could not manage. When they made camp, the women built fires and sat around and mixed food and bread.

When the Indians bought their meat they tied it unwrapped to their saddles and would beg salt from us many times. I have seen them eat the meat raw. If they ate vegetables it was because they patterned after the white people. They were as lazy as could be but were kind and affectionate to their children and the women were especially pleased when the babies were admired. They were such round fat little babies. The Indians always had strings of dogs and it was a common thing for them to come in town and try to sell a beautiful fawn for a pet.

The first three years two companies of soldiers were stationed in Guthrie. There was a good deal of drinking and carousing. Every available space was taken up by gambling.

My husband built the first two-story building for Dick and Bill Reeves. Every inch of space was sold before it was finished. The men worked in fevered haste day and night to finish. As soon as the roof was put on gambling paraphernalia was moved in. The floors were finished last. There must have been 500 men in the place. My husband was putting locks on double doors when shots began to fly. He got down off the ladder and crouched near the floor. The silver dollars were stacked two feet high under the tables and a man had grabbed a box of money. He ran through the ladder on his way out though and was caught immediately.

On the lot next to this building, two women, one an old lady and the other about 30 years of age, lived in a tent. They had a table, two camp chairs and cots, lived very quietly and never spoke to any one or bothered any one. A man living back of them came over and began to dispute their claim. The women were smart enough to know that the board of arbitration would likely give the decision to the fellow who had the most money. The young woman without more ado picked up a piece of bad lumber, a one by four, six feet long and laid him out. He hit the ground hard, much to the amusement of bystanders. He never bothered the women again.

They sold their claim later and moved away.

It was just a common thing for the cowboys to ride up and down the board side walks and shoot out signs.

The first newspaper was established by Frank Greer in a tent.

I remember the night I got off the train, three weeks after the opening. Rain was pouring down as usual, nothing but a sea of mud. Cottonwood creek, a small but treacherous stream, flowed through the heart of the town. I had to cross it and the fear I felt still stays with me. The men had felled trees and made pilings on each side of the bank and in the center of the stream, then used larger trees as "stringers" and heavy native lumber for flooring. There were no side rails. It was not much better than a foot bridge.

"Lot jumpers" and "white cappers" added to the lawlessness. An old lady and her husband, name of Sheffer, located on a downtown lot near the Santa Fe tracks. They put up a shack to feed people and had so much trade they kept adding more to it. A group of four men wanted to buy them out, but the old people would not sell. One night this group seized the old couple and bound them, then proceeded to destroy everything in the building.

Men working nearby notified the troops. Before they got there the ruffians had been seized and almost lynched. In keeping with the Guthrie spirit of friendliness, people pitched in and helped restore the place and the old people served breakfast as usual next morning.

The "whitecappers" were the worst kind of lot jumpers. It was a secret band of 12 or 15 men. One lot they especially wanted was owned by a man named Spence. He had a little hardware store on it. They got Spence, tied his hand and foot, flagged an out-going train and said, "Here's a fellow we want to get rid of". Spence begged so hard to be freed and so convinced the trainmen of what had happened that he was freed. He returned and with help of officers got his claim. This revealed who some of the "white cappers" were and the band was soon broken up. A large banner was stretched across the top of the bridge across Cotton wood creek with the words, "Death to the white cappers."