

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

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OLSMITH, EMMA

INTERVIEW

8535

Field Worker's name Elsie A. Norris,

This report made on (date) September 17 1937

1. Name Mrs. Emma Olsmith

2. Post Office Address Guthrie, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 415 South Elm Street

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month June Day 17 Year 1362

5. Place of birth Millersburg, Ohio

6. Name of Father Christian Isely Place of birth Switzerland

Other information about father Came to America when 17 years old.

7. Name of Mother Augusta Scheurer Place of birth Winesburg, Ohio

Other information about mother _____

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 _____.

Field Worker, Elsie A. Norris,
September 17, 1937.

Interview with Mrs. Emma Olsmith,
Guthrie, Oklahoma:

My husband, Frank Olsmith, came into the Oklahoma Territory April 22, 1889, from Paris, Texas, on the first train that crossed the line. He had intended to stop in Oklahoma City but at that time it was thought that Guthrie was to be the capital; he thought it might be a better place for business so he filed on a lot at Division and Harrison Streets in Guthrie and prepared to open a sporting goods store which he called the Olsmith Arms Company.

A friend of ours, Mr. Deihl, who was also from Paris, Texas, built our store and a two-roomed house on the lot. Our house was a rough frame shack but was better than the average house at that time.

Mr. Deihl built a cupboard, a nice wide shelf between the cupboard and the stove, and a clothes closet in the other room. I was quite proud of these conveniences and they were great helps to me.

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I, with our two children, Vernon, four and one-half years, and Edwin, six months old, arrived in Guthrie early in June and I went about making a home in the two rooms. I had sold our furniture thinking I could buy more in Guthrie, but I found there was very little in the stores and I had to make out the best I could.

We had made several moves before coming to Oklahoma and I was so tired of moving that I told Mr. Olsmith I would move to Guthrie but that that would be the last move I would make. He agreed and so it turned out to be.

After we had lived in the little two-roomed house about five years we bought four lots at Elm Street and Perkins Avenue, with a three-roomed house facing on Perkins Avenue. This we added to as the family grew. Two girls, Bessie and Mary, were born in Oklahoma.

When we outgrew the cottage, we built a two-story, frame house, facing on Elm Street where I am still living. After living on this corner forty-five years, no other place could seem like home.

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Although there were some bad years throughout the country, generally due to drought, the store was a successful business. Mr. Olsmith operated it about twenty-eight years, then sold out to Fred Michaels, an employee. The store is now owned by Joe Miller and is still located on Harrison Avenue, a block west of and across the street from its first location.

At first the children and I attended the South Methodist Church on South Broad Street, as it was nearest and we had no way to get about except to walk.

There was a nice membership of South Methodists and we had good times working together.

There was quite a sprinkling of North Methodists in Guthrie. They did not have a church until long after ours was built so they worshiped in our church.

The women gave suppers, dinners, got up programs, helping in every way we could to raise money to build the church. In 1906, I changed my membership to the Christian Science faith in which I have been quite happy.

Mr. Olsmith made no profession but he read the Bible and many books on Christian Science. He had little time

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for anything but business as the store was kept open seven days a week. He had planned to devote much time to reading and study when his term of office as postmaster had expired. But his plans were never realized as he met sudden death in 1922.

Our first school was a private one taught by Mrs. Rossen, a friend of ours. Vernon was not yet of school age but we allowed him to attend Mrs. Rossen's classes. The next year he went to the public schools.

Miss Margaret Byrne was one of the first teachers. She is still active in the work as principal of Banner School in West Guthrie. She has instructed all of my children at sometime in their school lives, either as teacher or principal.

During President Wilson's administration, Mr. Olsmith was appointed postmaster in Guthrie and was rounding out his second term as postmaster when he was struck by a car and killed while crossing a street on his way home to lunch.

For many years Mr. Olsmith was Police Judge in Guthrie, and served the town as mayor and in many other ways was a helpful citizen.

OLSMITH, ~~FRANK~~. INTERVIEW.

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An interesting incident in connection with Mr. Olsmith was that he got his name changed without his knowledge. Before I knew him his name was Frank Oliver Smith. He came to the Oklahoma Territory during President Cleveland's first term as a clerk at the old Sac and Fox Indian Agency in what is now Lincoln County. He served in that position from 1869 to 1878. There were no towns nor post offices. At times mail was brought in by stage or by special carrier on horseback.

It happened that farther east in the Verdigris River bottoms there was a negro citizen whose name was also Frank Oliver Smith and Mr. Olsmith and this colored man often got each other's mail. Mr. Olsmith had many friends in Topeka, Kansas, who were prominent around the state house, especially during legislative sessions. In a letter to one of them he mentioned the trouble he was having as a result of getting his mail confused with that of the other Frank Oliver Smith, and jokingly added, that he was thinking of having his name changed.

About that time the Kansas legislature was convening. The idea struck this friend of Mr. Olsmith's who discussed

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it with other friends of having a bill introduced to get the name Frank Oliver Smith changed to Frank Olamith. They did this and Mr. Olamith knew nothing of the matter until he received an official letter informing him that "henceforward and forever" his name would be Frank Olamith by action of the Kansas legislature.

My husband had undertaken to write his own biography but died before he completed it.