

PEARCE, ANNIE HUTCHINSON

INTERVIEW

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

Field Worker's name Anna R. Barry

This report made on (date) July 20 1937

1. Name Annie Hutchinson Pearce

2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 235 E. 4th Ave

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month November Day 23 Year 1856

5. Place of birth Harris County, Georgia

6. Name of Father A. F. Hutchinson Place of birth Harris County
Georgia

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Martha Hutchinson Place of birth Harris County
Georgia

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 .

Interview with Mrs. Annie Hutchinson Pearce
El Reno, Oklahoma

I was born November 23, 1856, in Harris County, Georgia. My father owned a large plantation and nearly four hundred slaves, when the slaves were freed in Georgia.

In 1878, I came with my husband to Dallas, Texas, coming by rail. We lived in Texas until 1888. On September 10, 1888, we pulled out of Dallas; our wagon loaded with bedding, furniture, cooking utensils, in fact everything we could pile in and leave room for my husband, four children and myself. We were bound for Oklahoma, the land of opportunity. We traveled uphill, down canyon, crossed rivers without bridges, and then the wide open prairies with the cattle roaming over them. We came by what is now Lone Grove. After we had traveled some three or four miles from Lone Grove, I think it was northwest, we came to a large grove of trees and as it was getting late, my husband suggested we camp in this grove of trees, as several other wagons were already camped there. We pulled into the grove, unhitched our horses, cooked our evening meal and that evening we campers gathered together to talk and visit. One

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man told us about a mob of white people hanging a negro who had committed rape on a young girl whose family was camped in this grove some six weeks previous to this, and he showed us the limb where they had hung the negro, and it happened that we had camped under this very tree. As our wagon was so crowded and piled up, each night we always made our beds on the ground. This night after our beds were made, I couldn't go to sleep; I kept thinking about what the man had told us about the negro and each time I opened my eyes I could see this negro. We all spent a very restless night, and were up early and glad to be on our way once more.

We came to Ardmore, in Carter County, then moved out twenty-seven miles southeast of Ardmore on a farm, where my husband went to work for twenty dollars per month; then a sad accident happened. My husband almost went blind; the doctor said it was caused from the dye in his hat. Previous to this he had been caught in several rains the hat getting wet causing the dye poison to get in his eyes; therefore, I had to help the children make a living. Mr. Smith was kind

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enough to let us live on this place, and built us a little rough log house, twelve by fourteen feet, the children and I cutting the timber, then taking a long rope and dragging the logs to the spot close by on which to build a little hut.

We built an open fire-place out of native rock at one end of the room; at the other end stood two beds and in the middle a table and three chairs and on the log walls hung a rifle, a shot gun, saddle, coats, pants and children's clothes and from the rafters hung dried strings of onions, peppers and two sides of home cured meat. This was what we had to start with in a new, undeveloped country. The ordinary diet year in, year out ^{of} the settlers was corn-bread, mush, rice, home cured meat, beans and wild fruit if you were lucky enough to find any. We found plenty of sadd plums. As I scarcely had any fruit jars to can with, I took an old tin pan, punched holes in it, making a colander. Then I put these cooked plums through this to remove the seed. I then took this plum butter, put about a cup of sugar in it, then spread it on boards to dry in the sun. In a few days this hardened and we would cut it in strips, put it in a flour sack and hang it on a rafter for winter use. My children would call it wandy and they really enjoyed it

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as much as the children of today enjoy candy. My closest neighbor woman was two miles distant. She had two small children and she didn't know how to make home made light bread so about twice a week early in the morning I could look down across the prairie and see her coming horseback with one child riding behind her, the other in front of her, a bag of flour tied on the saddle horn. She would stay all day, helping me with my work and I showing her how to make her bread. This day she had come up early to help me with some sewing. We had both worked hard all day and she was getting ready to go home, when all of a sudden I smelled smoke and rushing out of the house to see what was on fire, I saw a prairie fire coming toward our house and corn field and it being late in the fall I knew the corn would burn. I quickly grabbed an old quilt tore it half in two, dashed the pieces into a tub of water, called for Clara to come get on the horse, and we were off to fight a prairie fire; we fought this fire to save our corn field and our house. The smoke would almost strangle us, but we fought like mad men. At times it looked as if we would

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lose, then I would think about our little children we had left crying at the top of their little voices, scared to death. The rows of furrows that we had ploughed around our field was all that saved us. After the fire had died down, we looked at each other, both just as black as could be, our hair had come down and our dresses were almost torn off of us.

People from every direction were pouring into this country, gradually each year. They came from every direction, in buggies, wagons, on horseback. People were very kind, and always willing to lend a helping hand to one in need. My husband being almost blind, people would come in and help us plant our crop and if we needed winter wood cut, every one in the neighborhood came bringing axes and saws and when the sun was going down we would find a large pile of wood, cut and hauled into the yard.

The houses and improvements were beginning to be of better structure by this time. There were some houses with two to four rooms, divided in the middle by an open hall-way, extending the whole width of the building. The walls were rarely plastered being only chinked with mud, and the rafters formed the ceiling. Many nice comfortable sod houses were built,

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the walls were usually one foot in thickness and the roof shingled, doors and windows were set into the walls.

When my youngest child was about eighteen months old, every night for about a week she had fretted. Our beds set up against the wall near a window. I thought she wanted me to get up and rock her, ^{but} /this I refused to do. I didn't light the lamp the first few nights but each night she cried louder and longer and this night I did every thing I knew to stop her and finally got up, lit the lamp, took it over to the bed, drew down the bed cover; there laid a big snake coiled snugly under the arm of this child. I certainly seized that child out of the bed. Of course that frightened the snake; it slowly crawled into a hole under the window frame and I just stood there with the lamp in one hand and the baby in the other. It took us about a month to get a chance to kill this snake, and I can say I didn't have a good nights rest until we killed that snake. One day as I sat quietly sewing, the children were all in the yard playing, I saw this snake coming from

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the same hole under the window. This time he went under the bed on the springs where it was cool, I quickly slipped up, got a corn cob placed it in the hole, then called to the children to come and help me kill it. Two of the boys came rushing in with sticks; we finally found the snake and killed it. When we had finished the house looked as if we had had a battle and we really had.

As my husband was becoming discouraged with this country and we were having such a struggle to make a living, we decided to leave and go to El Reno in time for the opening, April 22, 1889.

Again, on April 15, 1889, we made ready to start on a journey to seek a home. This time we loaded two wagons with everything we owned, from bedding to farm implements. We came up hill, down canyons, crossed rivers and creeks and over the old cattle country. We came to Pauls Valley and here my husband became very ill; we stayed in Pauls Valley two months; we arrived in El Reno about June 10, 1889. We were too late for the opening in 1889. We rented a claim six miles east and two north of El Reno, with a little frame

shack twelve by fourteen feet and I again started a home. This little hut had two windows, one in the south, the other in the west, the door was in the east side. In summer we built a brush arbor, We placed our beds under this and it made a very comfortable place to sleep in summer. We broke out patches of sod, but it was so late in summer we couldn't plant anything except some June corn and a fall garden. The second year we did better. We had our own corn and cotton seed that we had brought with us. That summer I saw my own field of cotton bud and blossom and burst into fluffy white cotton. My children all worked hard, coming home from school to help pick cotton or to help get up wood, but they seemed to enjoy it, and were always glad when school was out, so they could be of more help.

In later years, I had a daughter who lived up near Binger. A number of Indians lived in this same neighborhood. One time while I was up there visiting an old Indian died, and all during the night we could hear tom-toms beating and some of the most pitful crying and yelling. Next morning they buried this Indian and that evening we went

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to the grave-yard just to see this Indian grave. On this grave they had placed everything this Indian possessed, even to his saddle. While we were in this grave yard a lot of these Indians come back, set fire to these things and burned them, leaving them on the grave during the time they were burning. This was a Cheyenne Indian who died.

Another thing I have witnessed among the Indians is the corn dance. I couldn't say which tribe, the Cheyenne or Arapaho, but these Indians all gathered together, during the summer when the corn is in the roasting ears, and they would put on big tubs of this corn to cook. As they danced around these tubs of corn, they would take the corn out, and eat it, all the time dancing. The young braves and young maidens joined the elders, as this green corn dance got into full sway.

We reared our family in Canadian County; we faced many hardships, but we dreamed as we worked. There was no home but what had some heartache or distress. My husband passed away a few years ago.

Although it was a struggle to keep my little family together, I today feel proud that I am a pioneer of Oklahoma.