Form A-(S-149)

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

435

PENWRIGHT, LOUISA. INTERVIEW. 9225.

Field Worker's name Anna R. Barry.

This report made on (date) November 10, 1937. 193____

1. Name Louisa Penwright.
2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma.
3. Residence address (or location) 407 North Bickford Street.
4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month February. Day 8 Year 1865.
5. Place of birth Newton County, Indiana.

6. Name of Father Joseph Dunn. Place of birth Kentucky.
7. Name of Mother Malita Michell Dunn. Place of birth Indiana.

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 _____.

PENWRIGHT, LOUISA. INTERVIEW. 9223.

Anna R. Barry,
Journalist,
Nov. 10, 1937.

Interview With Louisa Penwright,
407 North Bickford Street,
El Reno, Oklahoma.

I was born in Newton County, Indiana, on February 8, 1865, the daughter of Joseph Dunn and Malita Michel Dunn, on a homestead located about sixty-five miles from Chicago, near Beaver Lake, at which place I spent my early life. Beaver Lake, when my parents first located in Indiana, contained around four or five thousand acres but in later years this lake was drained and today is good farm land. I attended a rural school about two miles from my home.

I recall that my parents traded at a little country store called the Huft Store; there they also received their mail.

The closest railroad town at this time was Mount Arrow, located about eighteen miles from our home.

There were nine children in our family. My mother passed away when I was nine years of age at which time

Father sent us children to live with relatives. I made my home with an aunt not far from our old home where I stayed until at the age of sixteen I was married on August 27, 1881 to William Penwright. I continued to live on the farm, as my husband owned a farm not far from my old home.

In 1895 our family came to Canadian County and located near Yukon. My first home in Oklahoma was a little two-room frame house; at this time frame houses could be seen on nearly every claim and when a family moved out of the sod house or dugouts the livestock profited by the change. Sod shelters and dugouts frequently housed the livestock. On many claims, shacks were made of frame covered with tar paper and oftentimes the walls of the house were papered a little each week after the family finished reading the newspapers received through the mail. The furniture, like the house, was of the rudest sort. In almost every home could be found home-made chairs or stools, tables, and cupboards; ofter times boxes served as tables and cupboards. Almost every home

had some kind of a cook stove. On many of the farms, when we first came to Oklahoma Territory, could be seen barns made by setting a row of forked posts in the ground about fourteen feet apart, which stood about seven feet high and rails were placed on them. From a center ridge pole rails extended to the ground; these were covered with prairie hay. Also could be seen, corn cribs made of poles made similar to a log house.

At this time, very few claims were fenced; people fenced their fields and the cattle grazed on the open prairie. The calves were penned up while the cows were turned out on the prairie to graze; this was done to bring the cows home at night without the aid of a herder. The calf received a portion of the milk, the milker on one side of the cow and the calf on the other, each trying to get his share. A calf was never fed from a bucket as today.

The settlers quickly realized the need and value of all sorts of fruit trees and on each claim could be seen a few young fruit trees. Oftentimes, during the

summer months, water had to be carried to water the trees. The newspapers at this time urged the settlers to set out trees and care for them and many times friends and relatives from other states sent shrubs and slips to the new country.

The County Fair was looked forward to for months ahead by the whole family. When time for this event, work was laid aside by the whole family who, rising early in the morning, loaded into the farm wagon and jolted over the rough country road. Upon arriving at the fair, held in El Reno, the horses were unhooked on some vacant lot, tied to the wagon and fed. Then the family was ready to enjoy the day. Everyone gathered at noon to eat the good foods taken from well filled baskets and spread on a cloth on the grass, then after noon the people strolled about the grounds, eating candy, drinking red lemonade, meeting neighbors and making new acquaintances. Usually, around four o'clock in the evening, when the last child had been hunted up, the wagon slowly moved on the long trip, sometimes fifteen miles long, back to their little hut on the prairie.

The first year or two the settlers, in most cases, had to get along with the clothes they brought with them. Women wore calico sunbonnets and long sweeping dresses. They usually had an older sunbonnet they wore around the home, then a nice freshly starched one that they wore to church services. Nobody thought anything of a man attending church in blue overalls and jackets; many times the color of the overall had washed out or faded in the sun. Oftentimes could be seen several dark blue patches of new material on the knees or seat. Calico was worth from 5¢ to 8¢ a yard and the women took eggs and butter to the stores and exchanged them for calico.

Many times a women worked a week making one of these calico dresses, oftentimes making the whole garment by hand. Very few women owned sewing machines at this time. Great care was taken to make these long, full skirts and trim them to look beautiful and the waists were high-necked and long-sleeved. Usually, two of these calico dresses were all the dresses a woman expected a year.

The pioneer doctors traveled in the early days either on horseback or in a buggy. The long distances

to be traveled at all hours of the day or night, the irregular hours, broken rest, and hardships of travel usually told on a doctor's health; but he never refused a call. When summoned, the doctor hastened to harness a team of horses to his buggy and speed to his sick patient. No nurses were to be had in those days. When an accident or sickness visited a family the neighbors came in to sit up with the sick. Many times the people lay ill for weeks and the neighbors took turns in "sitting up".

During these frontier days many herbs and home remedies were used in the homes, ginger tea was used for chills; several doses of sulphur and molasses were considered a good blood tonic; poke root covered with some whiskey and allowed to set a week or two, was supposed to be good for rheumatic pains. Bread and milk made a good poultice for boils, as did a fat piece of pork placed on the boil. There were several remedies considered good for snake bite, one of which was to tear a chicken apart while alive and place a part of it on the wound.

Another was to pour turpentine over the wound and give enough whiskey to the patient to make him drunk.

Childbirth occurred often in these homes. The other children were sent to a neighbor's and the doctor was sent for and the neighbor women called in. As the doctor had to come fifteen or twenty miles the baby often came before the doctor arrived but the neighbor women were always ready and helpful in caring for the mother and baby; these women were known as midwives. After the baby was born the neighbor women had to return home to care for their own family of several children. This left the husband to act as nurse, doctor, cook, and washwoman.

The care of the teeth and eyes were not considered essential in the early days. I remember peddlers traveling through the country carrying a quantity of spectacles. Those he found with failing eyesight tried on spectacles until they found a pair which improved their vision and in this way they thought they were really buying glasses that fit. Today people would not think of buying a pair of glasses without an examination by a specialist.

Of all the frontier amusement, dancing held first place. In all the towns, if a new building went up, for dedication a dance was held; this was also true in the rural districts. If a family erected a new house, regardless of how small, sometimes on a dirt floor, the dance was held. When held on a dirt floor they had to stop often and sprinkle the dirt to keep down the dust. Some person made up a collection during the evening for the fiddler; each man was suppose to donate as much as 25¢. With his fiddle the fiddler played such tunes as, "Arkansas Traveler", "Golden Slippers", "Leather Breeches" and "Fisher's Hornpipe".

People for miles around attended these dances, coming in wagons, buggies, and on horseback, and young folks thought nothing of walking three miles to one of these dances. In some communities, where dancing was frowned upon, play parties were held; here the young people went through a certain movement similar to the dance, but without music. In place of the music the young folks sang "Skip to My Lou" and "Miller Boy".

The literary society was usually held during the winter months, generally held at the schoolhouse each Friday night. Here we elected officers every so often and established by-laws. These programs consisted of songs, debates, dialogues, and recitations. The spelling matches were held at the schoolhouses during the winter months, also. Young and old attended these gatherings held about every two weeks. Sides were chosen and the schoolteacher or sometimes the school director gave out the words from the McGuffey's spelling book to the two lines of standing spellers. The words were pronounced and when one missed a word he was "spelled down" and took his seat, whoever stood longest had "spelled down" the crowd and won the contest for his side. Oftentimes one school would spell against the other.

Many surprise parties and taffy pulls were held in the winter at the homes or at a country schoolhouse. Sorghum taffy candy when boiled down thick enough to pull made good candy. Many times a wagon load of young folks made their way across the prairie to some lonely little

house, aroused the family from their sleep and all joined in for a good time.

It was in 1910 that our family left the farm and moved to El Reno. On August 27, 1937, Mr. Penwright and I celebrated our fifty-sixth wedding anniversary and today are proud to say we are pioneers of old Oklahoma.