HIGBEE, IDA MAY RUCKMAN. INTERVIEW. 12299

Ruth Higbee
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Interview with Mrs. Ida May Higbee
720 South 22d. Street, Muskogee,
Oklahoma.

I was born August 2, 1868, close to Shelbyville, Missouri, in Shelby County, on a farm. There were six children of us, three girls and three boys, I was next to the youngest. We had a typical country home. My parents were moderately well to do. My father, Joseph Ruckman, was a blacksmith by trade, the best there was at that time.

In 1887 I met and married a young man by the name of Louis Higbee. We were married at Shelbyville, Missouri, April 26, 1887. To this union were born seven children.

We came to Oklahoma in 1889 in a covered wagon, the year of the opening of old Oklahoma, and took a homestead near Kingfisher on the Chisholm trail. We lived on this claim of 160 acres about three years. We didn't like it and we traded it to my brother, John Ruckman, for his farm in Shelby County, Missouri.

We only lived on this farm a year when the doctors ordered me to go to New Mexico for my health. We were here about a year camping at various places up in the mountains. My health being so much improved we decided to come to

Oklahoma. We had a wagon and team of western ponies. We drove across the country, camping in a tent. As we came back we crossed Red River at Doan's Ford, I believe the name of it was, we had bad luck crossing. We got stuck about midway of the river in quicksand. We had to unload the wagon and carry the things out on horseback. And then went back for the wagon. We had no more trouble although the roads were dirty and dusty and the Texas plains were alive with long-horned cattle which were very dangerous. We came out on the Table Rock in Texas and headed for Plainview and on up into Oklahoma, heading for El Reno where my sister lived.

We stayed there about two months. My husband got a job working with a threshing crew and while working he met a man named John Willit who told him of a good location for a sawmill. As my husband was a sawmill man and already had the mill, we thought best to try it. It was in close to the Arkansas River, about twenty-five miles north of Sapulpa, in the Creek country.

We leased 160 acres of school land and which had a one-room log cabin on it. We set up our sawmill close to the

surrounding mountains which were covered with timber. We hired men to work at the Mill. Joe Daniels ran the engine, which was a 25 horse-power steam engine; my husband was head sawer, he did all the sawing with a large five-foot circular saw. The other men carried away the lumber and shovelled saw-dust and did the various kinds of work which are to be done around a sawmill.

We got our logs from men who owned land on which timber was grown. These men would cut their trees and haul the logs to our mill, sometimes bringing them five or six miles. We paid so much a thousand feet for the logs. Then, too, we bought our own timber and would hire men to cut it and bring it to the mill. We sold this native lumber to these men to build homes. Before this they lived in log cabins. The men we hired then built their homes near the sawmill. As these families continued to build and more people came to work at the Sawmill, the need of a store arose and so a man by the name of Mitchell put in a store. A postoffice, community hall and cotton gin were added in rapid succession. We furnished native lumber for all of these buildings.

The store and postoffice were together and owned and operated by Joe Mitchell and John Pool. The Community Hall

was where church was held; all different denominations met here for worship; also, other meetings were held here such as the anti-horse thief association. My husband added the cotton gin to his sawmill.

There were six families that lived in this little community. They were John Pool and family, Joe Mitchell and family, and Mitchell's son, Sylvester and his family, Granvile (who was nicknamed Chuck) Stoneman and family, Joe Carr and family, who was Mitchell's brother-in-law, and Louis Higbee and family, or our family.

This town lay at the base of several mountains in sort of a bowl shape. So John Willit named it Basin. We ran our cotton gin and sawmill here for about a year and a half. Mitchell and Pool ran the store for about a year and Mr. Mitchell died and Mr. Pool sold out to Mr. Mitchell's son. He ran it for several years.

We now replaced the log cabin with a house built out of native lumber and bought all new furniture. We went to Sapulpa and bought up-to-date furniture, some of which weretwo white, four poster bedsteads; these beautiful white iron bedsteads taking the place of the old-fashioned cord and trundle beds

of long ago. We bought a new six-hole wood range of which I was very proud, a new sewing machine and other new articles.

We leased 320 acres more in the Creek country which consisted partly of buffalo grass and was located about three miles from where we lived and bought 160 acres of land which joined onto the 160 acres of school land which we had leased. We had several hundred head of all kinds of cattle and lots of hogs. In the fall of the year we would round the cattle up and run them in a corral and cull out the fat ones for market and turn the cows back on the range. We drove our cattle to Sapulpa, where they were loaded and shipped to the Kansas City market. We would hire five or six men to help drive the cattle and it usually took about three days to make the trip. My husband always went with the cattle to Kansas City. We also shipped hogs the same way, they being also driven to Sapulpa.

All of the men in this little community belonged to the Anti-Horse Thief Association. One day some horses came up to our gate and we turned them in our corral supposing the owner would be out looking for them. That night they disappeared out of our corral. The next morning the Anti-

Horse Thief Association gathered at the meeting place and they tracked them for about three miles south to an old abandoned dugout which was on the 320 acres of pasture land we had leased from an Indian by the name of Rider Bruner. They had kept the horses here all night, but we finally lost all trace of them.

Our farming consisted mostly of raising feed for our cattle and hogs, mostly corn. We did take some vegetables to market however, such as blackberries, eggs and chickens. As our trading post, Sapulpa, was twenty-five miles away, our neighbors would all go together and make the trip which took about three days. We would load the wagon the night before and be ready to start bright and early the next morning. Our road, which was little more than a trail, led us across the Timmie Fife prairie. While crossing this prairie you could look off in the distance and see a lone chimney which stood all by itself. Years and years ago an old Indian lived here in a log cabin. The cabin burned, leaving this chimney, which was later called the Lone Chimney and which still stands today. This Lone Chimney is about six miles northwest of Sapulpa.

This little town of Basin was later abandoned and the store and postoffice was moved about thirty-one miles southwest to a place they called Mannford, which was a thriving little town and where we then did our trading. Another small town called Keystone was located at this time about four miles east on the banks of the Arkansas River. These towns had banks and up-to-date stores and did a thriving business of all kinds.

The Cherokee Strip was thrown open to homesteaders September 16, 1893. My brother, Jim Ruckman, made the "Run" and staked a claim about three miles from what is now the town of Marshal and lived on it and reared a family of six children. He died in 1910 on the same place. His daughter, Mrs. Lula Kaffir of Tulsa, still has the stick with which he staked his claim and also the gun which my father carried in the Civil War.

In 1907 we had four children, three of school age. My eldest son had been away to school but as he didn't like being so far away from home we decided to move to Edmond so all of our children could have better educational advantages. We had a public sale and sold everything we had;

stock, household things, land and everything and moved to Edmond, my eldest son going to Northeastern Normal and the other children to the public schools.

CUSTOMS OF 1880 to 1887

In those days the girls wore bustles and hoop skirts. Our dresses had yards and yards of material in the skirts. The bustles were made of wire and could be worn with any dress; they were worn in the back and would hold the dress out; while the hoops, also made of wire and worn under any dress, were large round hoops and held the skirts out all the way around.

We also did most of our weaving. I can remember my aunt weaving cloth and rag carpets. My aunt taught me to weave. My aunt wove material for dresses, trousers, blankets, etc. I never wove anything but a rag rug, which in those days was called a rag carpet. It was thirty yards long and one yard wide, then I cut it in strips to fit the room, then sewed the strips together. I also spun yarn from which we made all our socks, mittens, and stockings. I was only about twelve years old at this time. I went over to my aunt's house to make the rug after I became engaged. I

was 18 then.

We roasted our own coffee. We would buy the green coffee by the pound and roast it in the oven. Then we had a coffee mill nailed to the wall and having a crank on it; we gro nd all the coffee we used. Those were the good old days. People really enjoyed themselves, visiting, log rolling, at quilting bees and taffy pullings.

My husband built a two-room sod house. We plowed the sod which was tough buffalo grass. We cut it in squares about 10 x 12 inches and laid walls about seven feet high. Then we put on what was known as a hip roof out of 2 x 4's, covered this with ship-lap, then with tar paper. They laid a layer of sod all over this. This made it weather proof. The inside was finished with native plaster; this plaster was made out of a certain kind of mud which was dug out of the hills. This mud was mixed with water and it turned white, looking just like the plaster of today. These sod houses were very warm, nothing ever froze in these houses even in the coldest weather. There was lots of game at this time; such as, antelope, deer, elk, prairie chickens, and we always had plenty of wild meat for our table. There

was also lots of wild fruit, choke-cherries, that grew on low bushes, currants, plums and sand cherries.

There were big herds of wild horses in these sand hills. My husband and his brother would catch these horses and tame them. Sometimes they would have to run them three or four days before they were tired out enough for them to rope them. They were both expert ropers. They would bring them home and turn them into a strong corral made out of heavy poles. They had also built a strong chute just large enough for one horse to get in. They put a wild horse in here, where he couldn't hardly even move, then they would rub him (or you might say barely touch him) and talk to him, thus making friends with him. This was kept up for about a week, when the horse was taken out and hitched to a wagon, putting one tame horse and one wild horse to a wagon, and as this was prairie country he was let run to his heart's content. They would run for two or three hours, then they were put in the corral to rest. They would tame in a surprisingly short time. The tame horse seemed to enjoy helping tame these wild horses. I, myself, rode some of these horses and I was considered a good rider in those days.