

PILBURN, EFFIE.

INTERVIEW

#9306

428

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

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Field Worker's name Elizabeth Duncan.

This report made on (date) November 15, 1937

1. Name Mrs. Effie Pilburn

2. Post Office Address Tonkawa, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month _____ Day _____ Year _____

5. Place of birth _____

6. Name of Father _____ Place of birth _____

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother _____ Place of birth _____

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 11.

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Elizabeth Duncan,
Journalist.
November 15, 1937.

Interview with Effie Pilburn
Tonkawa, Oklahoma.

All history is a fulfillment of someone's vision and early day history of Oklahoma is but a dream come true for all those who pioneered and stayed on through privations to better times. The Roberts' story is only one of many. Their dream began in years previous to 1893; and so strong had their vision become that when that part of the state known as Old Oklahoma was opened for settlement in the spring of 1889, E. P. Roberts, with his father and family and Mrs. Robert's mother and sons, made the race into that section.

Much of that section of Oklahoma was taken by "Sooners" and because of this fact and because of inadequate preparation, this Roberts group failed to secure homesteads in that Run.

After a rather eventful crossing of the "Cherokee Outlet" and an almost equally eventful return, the Roberts family, E. P. and wife, Mary, with their two children,

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Bert and Effie, located on a rented farm eight miles southwest of Caldwell on the Kansas-Oklahoma line, where they lived, waiting the time until the Government would see fit to open this narrow strip of land, known as the Cherokee Outlet or the Strip, to settlement.

During these four years Mr. Roberts made trips through the northern part of the Territory until he was familiar, himself, with the lay of the land and had decided just where he would seek his homestead.

Many herds of wild cattle roamed these splendid grass lands and a longhorn, who knew no fear of man, was a foe to be avoided. In fact, a person on foot was in very great danger and since these cattle did not realize what a fence was, many strayed into the native herds across the border. Mrs. Pilburn recalls very distinctly seeing a child of ten skin up the side of an old fashioned corn crib to get out of the way of an angry old fellow with horns that were fully four feet from tip to tip.

After the bill had passed Congress, declaring the land was to be opened on the given date and President

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Cleveland had signed the measure, those as near as were the Roberts family to the "Strip" itself, felt interested and excited.

Weeks before the Opening day caravans of people began drifting in near the border and camping, to be on hand when the great day arrived. All types of people and in all conditions and circumstances were there except there were none with much money, as the Nation was then in the panic period of 1893.

Many interesting circumstances occurred on that memorable day, September 16, 1893. It had been a season, hot and dry and unpleasant, but on that particular day a cool breeze was wafted across the prairies.

As would be natural where so many and such a heterogeneous group were gathered, early morning found everybody astir and much preparation going on. Men with families and dependents were asking permission to leave all, except one horse or horses which they were using in the race, until such time as they might return. In the last minute preparation a necessary tool was borrowed for which they

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were glad to leave any amount of deposit as a guarantee of return. Bread and any other kind of food easy to carry was eagerly sought by those who had been too late to procure it elsewhere. Canteens and jugs were filled until long before noon the well had yielded its last drop, several different times, only to refill each time.

Men and women on horseback, in buggies, in carts, in vehicles made from the running gears of farm wagons, in every conceivable conveyance all set out in the race.

Soon men were seen leaping from their horses to "set their stakes", that part of their equipment, which with a canteen of water and perhaps a snack of food made up their outfit. Each stake carried a banner on which was the man's name and the planting of it first on any quarter of land made this person the owner of this quarter of land.

Before the afternoon of the day of the Run ended, the first returning land seeker came straggling back in. He had broken the axle of his wagon and had to turn back. Many other discouraged and disgusted citizens of far away parts soon ended their search for fortune in "Fair Oklahoma".

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One group, who seemed to be mostly school teachers, reported, as they were stopping for a cooling drink, that their little old school houses looked better to them than all this vast domain, and they were returning, forever content with their dear old home.

So it went on all through the afternoon and night, and the marvel was that no serious accidents befell anyone in all that mad rush and no one injured, or killed, was reported from among the number.

When Mr. Roberts had gone on the evening of the 15th of September he had taken his stand on the Kansas border a few miles west of Hunnewell and almost due north of the place where he wished to locate. Here he and G. R. and J. B. Cowen, former friends and neighbors, completed final arrangements for the race, which for each of them meant a home.

With a canteen of water, his stake with name attached and a determination to win, E. P. Roberts sat astride a big, bony, iron-gray horse, waiting for Uncle Sam's man to fire the signal. When the pistol shot rang out, they were off.

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The masses kept thinning as one by one the racers dropped until a comparatively few remained to hurry on. One vehicle carried a man and a woman in a red dress, and later developments proved that this woman was racing for the spot on which Roberts planted his stake.

When the banks of the Salt Fork River were reached although they were almost perpendicular and some twenty-odd feet high, these men only looked for a little gulch from which to make the leap. No water, just sand that seemed like rock when the horses hit the earth.

A leap to the earth and a stake with a red flag and the name, "E. P. Roberts" thereon, was placed and a dream of a lifetime for him and his wife was made a fact at about 1:40 P. M. September 16, 1893.

Then followed a seeking out of corner stones, a making sure that no one else was on the same square of earth.

Now came days of waiting and watching, eagerly expecting their number to be called as they stayed in line at the Land Office in Enid, waiting for Uncle

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Sam's O K on their ownership title. After five years all the requirements having been fulfilled, a deed to the Northeast Quarter of Section 14, Township 25, Range 3, in L County, Cherokee Outlet of the Territory of Oklahoma, was handed to E. P. Roberts.

Mrs. Roberts and the children spent the winter of 1893 in Kansas where the youngsters attended school while Mr. E. P. Roberts made ready to move down in the spring. During this winter he had many experiences, driving the fifty miles to and from the claim. Once returning in a blinding snow that covered every trace of road or trail, the horses had only instinct to guide them. When spring came the outer walls of a seven-room house with a stone walled cellar under it, a large barn and a smaller hen house, greeted the eyes of the Roberts family as they drove in in wagons. These people felt some of the hardships of pioneer life immediately, The weather man dated one of the coldest March storms for these days, and they arrived in its shivering blasts. A heater in the cellar with the pipe out the window was a poor excuse

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for a place to keep the body comfortable, but much good humor and sound bodies governed the situation and soon the tide was turned. Oklahoma's sunshine did its work, and in just a few short days real life and growth on these plains wilderness had begun.

The first Summer saw sod broken, fences built and every effort put forth to make a home on this primeval prairie. Many less determined settlers on these lands became discouraged and left for more settled places.

Nothing, however, daunted the Roberts family. When fall came the question of school arose. In the entire district there were about six families spending the winter. There was no school house, no funds, no school teacher--just a need. One of the bachelors, a man near the center of district, offered his house, a dugout, for a school house.

With about eight or ten children of various ages Mayme Burns assumed the responsibility of teacher of a subscription school, terms \$1.00 per month per child, in District #97. This school lasted about four or five

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months with more or less success and when the next year came around conditions were easier to meet but still there was no school house and no funds. Soon there was another dugout fitted with desks and benches, home made, and a teacher, Miss Maude Gautier, hired for a term of five months and a real school was in progress.

Soon Sunday Schools were appearing with an occasional preaching service when some minister happened to come as resident or visitor or on a missionary tour.

The first organization of this type to which the people of District #97 had access was in the Imel dugout, a bachelor's home on the south side of the district. Soon this group moved to the Meece home and then as time wore on school houses were built and these became the meeting places. Dayton built its "soddy" at an early date and there many gatherings were held. The Winter of 1894-95 saw the organization of "literaries" in practically every school house.

School was again held in the Chaney dugout with Miss Dora Beagle as teacher for five months and much was ac-

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complished, but the need for better housing was more apparent and times grew better. The patrons, under the leadership of Robert Mason and some others, built what was termed a "big" school house and it was the center of all social life as well as a school house for District #97. The building was not completed until late winter, consequently a short term of school of three months was held, with Mr. R. L. O'Mealey as teacher.

To supply funds to help in the expense of erecting and furnishing the building several dances were held to which people came from far and near.

The Cowens were in this community from the start, as were the Gilberts, Mrs. Huffman and daughters, Net and Kit, the Masons with their family of Dick, Eve, Blanch. Lou Snyder with her little ones was a later arrival, as was Pole Bunch, whose wife soon passed away, leaving him with three daughters, Eva, Lottie, Helen. The Lynch family came but stayed only a short time. The Burns and Woods families also left early. In the course of time the Serviss, Dixon, Marston families arrived. A

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little later Tom Cobb and his wife and children came into the community. These with the Wooleys made up all our families, but the maids, Zu Gilbert and Dolly Parks, and the bachelors, Charlie and Bill Chaney, Willis Graham, Sam Gilbert, Marion Gilmer and the Lees, all of whom were eager to share in community development.

Soon after the erection of the new school house there came an itinerant preacher and the River Valley Sunday School was organized from which much good came. During some of these winters a most successful literary society was carried on and so these people grew out of pioneer life.