

HUFFMAN, MATTIE ANN.

INTERVIEW

#8995

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

Field Worker's name Elizabeth L. Duncan

This report made on (date) October 19, 1937

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1. Name Mattie Ann Huffman
2. Post Office Address Wichita, Kansas
3. Residence address (or location) 1554 South Water
4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month June Day 15 Year 1865
5. Place of birth Platte City, Buchanan County, Missouri

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6. Name of Father David Nelson Gilbert Place of birth Taylorville,
Spencer County, Kentucky.
Other information about father Stone man, farmer, stockman.

7. Name of Mother Mary Martin Place of birth Washington
County, Kentucky.
Other information about mother Housewife.

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 _____.

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Elizabeth L. Duncan,
Journalist.
Oct. 19, 1937.

An Interview With Mattie Huffman,
1554 South Water, Wichita, Kansas.

Mattie Ann Huffman was born in Platte City, Buchanan County, Missouri, June 15, 1855.

When Mattie Ann was nine months old her parents moved to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and took a homestead some eighteen miles west of Leavenworth. The way in which her father secured the land was that at a certain time the State would hold the land open to bids. The party could go and bid this land in, that he was living on, at 25 cents an acre and her father in this way acquired a hundred and sixty acres.

Fort Leavenworth was headquarters for the soldiers; they got their mail from the Spring Dale Post Office which was a Quaker settlement and Mattie Ann spent a happy childhood among these God fearing people.

Mattie attended school with the Dunkard children and they were good to her.

The Dunkards took care of the women who were left behind while the men were at war. The Dunkard faith forbids fighting with arms, so the Dunkard men were left behind to care for the women and children.

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In 1879 Mattie was married to Henry McCamant and they moved to Caldwell. Two children, Myrtle and Kittie, were born to this union.

In 1881 Henry McCamant died, leaving Mattie with two children.

Mattie was then married to Charles Huffman and they moved six miles west of Caldwell and lived on Bluff Creek.

Mr. Huffman^{died in 1890} and his family moved on the bank of the Chikaskia River one mile from the line of the Cherokee Strip and on the main road at that time from Caldwell to Hunnewell where they were to learn of a great many people and their ways when the opening of the Cherokee Strip was declared for September 16, 1893.

There had been no rain all summer and drinking water and water for the horses was at a premium. Each morning early they filled their buckets, tubs and cans to have water for the family use. Then the wells were pumped dry by the campers who were in the groves, orchards, barnyards and all along the roads. There was one "water hole" and many horses were brought there from several miles to get a drink and for the exercise each horse needed to be ready to make the race.

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Each person expecting to homestead had to register at one of the Government booths along the line. The Huffman booth was at Hunnewell and having to stand in line for hours was very tiresome. There were many things to be doing; horses to care for and exercise, vehicles to be looked over or made ~~from a~~ pair of wheels and a few poles, canteens bought and tested and large cans with tight taps made ready to carry a few gallons of water for the teams after the long dry trip.

The ones who made the trip down here from the Gilbert family were Mattie Huffman, Sam, Will and Zula Gilbert, and Marion Gilmer, a neighbor boy.

The morning of the race was a busy time with five rolls of bedding to do up, five lunch boxes to fill and a canteen of water for each, so each one could spend the night by himself or herself.

They had lunch at 11 A. M. Then they drove to Chaney's on the state line, where they were joined by Charlie and Bill Chaney, Willis Graham and Pete Hoffman.

There were many teams and many people on horseback. A few minutes before 12:00 o'clock, everybody got in position for the start. There was not a sound anywhere.

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Soldiers were to give the signal by firing a gun at Hunnewell. Bill Chaney was standing on the cart seat watching. He said, "There they go", and they all were off. The phaeton, that was once the proud possession of Mattie, was turned into a cart. The team they were driving was a bay team. Will, Mattie and Marion Gilmer were the ones to drive the team. They were afraid some of the horses would be frightened but everything was all right. Sam advised them to shut their eyes if they thought anything looked too scary.

Bluff Creek with very high banks was but a mile from their starting place. There were two crossings. Bill Chaney led for the main crossing and the others followed. Charley Chaney went to the other crossing and crossed without trouble. There was nothing then but the sound of the horses' hooves on the sod. By this time people were locating on claims on both sides of the Gilbert claim.

About five miles south of Bluff Creek they crossed a cow path. It was so deep and narrow that it gave them an awful jolt, but things were all O. K.

Deer Creek Crossing was not bad. Zula looked at her watch and it was one o'clock. They had come sixteen miles in that hour.

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When they reached the high banks of the Salt Fork, Mattie had to shut her eyes. Soon the horses splashed through shallow water, a stream about twelve feet wide.

One of the horses was young and began to lag going through the sand south of Salt Fork. Marion said, "Hit him a lick, Will, we must be almost there". That was the only time the whip was used. They had stakes with their names on them. Mattie staked the Northeast quarter of Sec.15, Twp.25, R.3, and the others, Marion Gilmer and Will, staked near there. Mattie spent the rest of the afternoon watching her neighbors locate corner stones.

After they reached their claims, Marion went to Nelson's Spring for water, and a wheel dropped off of the wagon. How it had lasted so long over the rough ground was a mystery.

Just before dark the drivers of the rigs all came to stay all night with Mattie. Everyone ate supper out of his or her lunch box. Then they spread their bedding on the ashes of the "burned" prairie. It was not the first time they had slept on the ground.

The next morning about day light Bill Chaney called to Pete Hoffman "pen your hogs". Some one had been

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thoughtful enough to bring kindling and wood, so Graham made a fire. He told Mattie he was the first one to build a fire on her place. They fried bacon and made coffee. They visited and then looked over their possessions till the wind blew the ashes so that they had to leave.

They joined many other people on the Salt Fork and had a picnic dinner. They left the rest of the food with Sam and Graham, as they were staying. The crowd went to Kansas to bring tents and supplies to live on while building their houses.

Monday, Zula and Mattie went with their father to Enid on the train to file but could not get to file that day. So they all came back to Kansas. In December they came back to Enid to file. Mattie still was holding on to the \$20.00 gold piece her father gave her as that was her filing fee.

Soon after they all had gone back to Kansas, the boys went to South Haven to get the lumber to build the houses. Mattie's house was twenty-four feet square.

Men with families made their home there the first Winter and a subscription school was started. A

subscription school is one to which a few people who could afford to contributed to pay a teacher, or to help to keep up the school. The first school was taught by Miss Mayme Burns in Will Graham's residence, a dugout. A ruling was that there must be three months of school and thirteen pupils before a school could be started.

In March, 1894, Mattie and her sister Zula came down to live on their homestead.

In the summer of 1894, a meeting was called and the school district was organized with Mr. Mason, Mr. Burns and Mattie elected as directors. Later Mattie resigned in Mr. Robert's favor. Two terms were taught in Bill Chaney's residence by Miss Gautier and Miss Beagle. The new school-house was named River Valley, District No. 97.

Beginning at the extreme north of the district lived Pole Bunch and family, Art Kaywood, Mr. Mason and family, Mr. Snyder and family, Mr. Lynch and family, Bill Chaney, Willis Graham, Will Merritt, Tom Cobb and family, Ed Lee, Mr. Dixon and family, Charley Chaney, Mrs. Mattie Huffman and family, Mr. Walcott, Zula Gilbert, Sam Gilbert, George Cowen, Mr. Serviss, and family, Sam Marston, Mr. Hall, Bert Moulton, Mr. Imel, Marion Gilmer, Will Gilbert and family, Joe Wooley and family, Ryree and family.

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Everyone was determined to make a home on a barren piece of land; all were ready to help a neighbor and the harmony was wonderful. The social gatherings are memories not to be forgotten. Many have left their homesteads, but the experiences of living in a new country not too productive for lack of rain during the first few years, miles from a railroad to supply provisions, lumber and fence materials, and getting the mail once a week, are tests of strong character.

The early postoffices were Tilden, Golden, Osburn, Albert and Dayton.

They also had church and Sunday School whenever a minister came that way.

SNATCHES FROM NOTES WRITTEN by Kittie McCamant to her sister Myrtle. A few of them were dated. The first one was a large sheet of very heavy brown wrapping paper.

McCordia, O. T.

March 4, 1894.

Sister:

Please excuse my writing paper as I have no other. We planted potatoes here and at Marion's today and got the

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ground ready for Sam's. I am getting used to Oklahoma ways. Tell Zu I like my new dress very much and my shoes are nice. Mamma says, "Tell Zu to get us nice sunbonnets to wear in society". Marion laughs at Mama's and she says she knows it won't do to wear any place. I am going to Utterback's one day this week.

Charley Chaney has had the grip. Some one has taken his Bible and he doesn't know what to do.

Graham and Marion are working on the well and I got some water in a cup and let it settle and drank some and it is all right. Then I put some salt in it to make Sam think it was salt water. If you want to see me come down.

April 6-1894.

I went to "Tail Holt" or Lamont with Mr. Robert's little girl. She can tell more jokes than any one I ever saw. I want you to send my fishing pole so we can go fishing. Tell Grace to write to me.

It was too funny yesterday. Net went over to the post office and stopped at Charley's. Billy Fox came

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over and he said to Charley, "Are you a married man?" Charley said, "Oh yes, I have four of the prettiest kids. There is one of them"; and he pointed to Net. Jones came to tell us good-bye. Said he was going to get a squaw.

Sam and Lee have gone across the river to get wood. The dry weather and cut worms are hard on gardens. The turkeys do not run off any more.

April 27-1894.

Zu and Net are visiting at Uncle Will's today. 'Bina is one year old. Graham gave us some candy and I sent part of mine to Bina. Zu and I slept in her house last night. Tell Bun I would like to see her. Mama says for you to raise a nice garden.

June.

Net went to Rose's and stayed last night. The rain didn't help the garden much. I was glad to get the aprons. We canned the cherries you sent. I baked a cake for Net's birthday. We took some little chickens off the nest today. A little prairie chicken hatched but a turkey killed it.

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Killed two snakes last night. I will try to come up the last of the month and stay most of July so Zu can come homestead awhile.