

MUSCIE, M. H. R. S. T.

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RUSSELL, MARGARET.

INTERVIEW Form A-(S-149)

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WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION  
Indian-Pioneer Historical Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name John F. Daugherty

His report made on (date) August 27 1937

Name Mrs. Margaret Russell

Post Office Address Davis, Oklahoma

Residence address (or location) Route 2

DATE OF BIRTH: Month August Day 1 Year 1853

Place of birth Choctaw Nation Indian Territory near Deer Depot

Name of Father Ashley Wright Place of birth Texas

Other information about father Shoe maker during Civil War

Name of Mother Arabella Howell Place of birth Mississippi

Other information about mother Age-sixty-eight, Choctaw Indian

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 \_\_\_\_\_.

John F. Daugherty  
Interviewer,  
August 25, 1937.

LIFE OF A PIONEER WOMAN  
Davis, Oklahoma

My father was Ashley Wright; he was born in Texas and my mother was Arabella Howell Wright, sister of Doctor F. F. Howell. She was born in Mississippi. There were six children in the family.

I was born August 12, 1857, in the Choctaw Nation near Old Boggy Depot. My parents came to the Indian Territory between 1840 and 1850, and settled near Old Boggy Depot. When the Civil war began Father joined the Confederate Army under General Cooper and became a shoemaker, making shoes for the soldiers. He died a short time after the close of the war and we moved to the Chickasaw Nation near Old Fort Arbuckle to which place Uncle John Howell came in 1866.

There was a standing army at Fort Arbuckle when we moved here. The buildings were built of oak logs and lumber, and there was a large spring from which they secured water. We moved into a log house with no windows and a puncheon door. We had a terrible time trying to

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live. Mother could not shoot a gun and were often without food.

I was always glad to see cow men coming toward our house, for I knew that meant we would get some biscuits. They carried flour on pack horses, and they often stopped at our house to have Mother make biscuits for them. They always wanted some coffee parched. I always did that.

I would put the coffee in a Dutch oven and stir it with a paddle to keep it from burning, while Mother made their biscuits. These men always wanted two or three flour sacks full of biscuits and they would leave some for us as pay. Then we would have a feast for biscuits were a rarity in those days.

One day Uncle John brought us a quarter of fresh beef. Mother hung it up in the house, and that night a panther came and tried to steal it. He climbed on the roof of the house, and screamed hideously all night. We were frightened almost to death. Mother kept a fire in the fireplace all night with a pot of boiling water to scald him should he try to come down the chimney.

She had a pitchfork and axe to use as weapons should he manage to pull the boards off the roof. When

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daylight came he went away, and we still had our fresh beef.

The Comanche Indians often camped in the foothills of the Arbuckle mountains near our home. They would not camp in river or creek bottoms. They preferred high ground so they could see for miles as a protection against enemies, also they were afraid of being washed away by high water if it should rain during the time they were camped.

Each evening we could see the smoke from numerous campfires. Many times I have seen Indians shooting buffalo calves. The old buffaloes would get after the Indians and they would be forced to leave their horses and fall off a bluff or climb a tree. They had a hard time getting something to eat. They often stole cattle and horses.

One night they made a raid and took every horse that Grandmother Howell had except a borrowed cow pony which was hobbled near the house.

One day John and the Colbert boys dressed like Indians, put poke berry juice on their faces and rode

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into the camp. They spoke the Comanche language, and their disguise was so good that they recovered part of the horses without being harmed.

The Indians, however, would not let them have any of the young horses. Only the oldest horses could be gotten, and the older horses were never any account afterward. Each one had been shot with a poisoned arrow in the forehead, and a running sore came on the head of every one they brought back. They stole fifty head of horses from Uncle John one night. He went in pursuit of these horses but did not recover one.

We raised potatoes which we ate most of the time instead of bread. These were stored in a cellar or hole which we dug under the bed. We kept potatoes from one year to the next this way.

The Comanche Indians used to go to Pecan Grove, Texas, to pick pecans. The white people would fight with them, killing many. One night we heard some one moaning and groaning pitifully in the brush near our home. Upon investigation we found an old whitehaired Indian woman who could not speak a word of English, lying there badly

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cut and slashed. We took her into our home, and kept her for a month, at the end of which time her wounds were healed. We found out that she had been in Pecan Grove when one of these fights occurred and had barely escaped with her life by hiding and by creeping cautiously through the brush. She slept on a buffalo rug in the corner of the room and each night some of her tribesmen came and peered through the cracks in the door to see that she was safe. My stepfather wanted to kill her but Mother begged him to spare her life. The Indians would probably have burned our home and killed all of us, had the old woman been killed. Mother fed and cared for her during the month. One night we saw her go out and look at the stars. She stood there for a long time making peculiar gestures. Then she came in and went to bed on the buffalo robe. The next night she crept stealthily away while we slept, and we never saw her again.

Our first washboard was made of a thick oak board with grooves cut in it with a pocket knife. My uncle John made it for us. The first jars we canned

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fruit in were large stone jars with lids which we sealed with sealing wax.

Later, I married Perry Russell, a ranch man. He owned a great deal of land which he rented, and had wheat planted. When this wheat was ready, it was threshed with an old horse power threshing machine. Then the wheat was hauled to Byrd's mill and ground into flour. This flour was traded for yearlings and thus my husband got a start in the cattle business. I had a blue duck riding skirt and I wore this when I rode with my husband to round up cattle and horses which had wandered off. I rode the range for seven years after we were married. We were married on Oil Creek under the Chickasaw law. My husband paid fifty dollars for our license. The Chickasaw tribe had a law requiring a white man who wanted to marry an Indian girl to get ten or twelve signers to a petition stating that he was a desirable citizen before clerk or judge could issue the license to wed. Their fee was ten dollars.

A few years after my husband and I were married an incident occurred which I shall never forget. There was an old mine prospector named Joe Arnold in here.



He often came to our house and played cards with my husband, Uncle John, and Uncle Matt Wolf. One day the old prospector disappeared, and Uncle John dragged a dog which had died with the cholera down to the Washata River, tied a pole to it and threw it in. When they told the neighbors that somebody had murdered Mr. Arnold and buried his body in the Washata River. They took several people to the place where the dog had been dragged, showed them the blood, and made them believe that Mr. Arnold had been murdered. One day some officers rode up to our house and arrested my husband for the murder of the missing Arnold. It was in the spring and I had just gathered a bushel of June apples. The officers ate freely of these apples and when they left most of the apples were gone. I was very angry about losing my apples and having to stay alone while my husband was a prisoner. They chained him to the wagon and drove away to arrest Uncle John, leaving me in tears. They did not arrest Uncle Matt, but told him he must produce Mr. Arnold or they would all three have to be tried. Uncle Matt was wondering what to do when my aunt told him she had a letter from Joe Arnold and he was in Montague

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County, Texas. Uncle Matt lost no time in going for him, and found him. He brought him back and they overtook the prisoners wagon just before they got to Fort Smith. The marshals and the prisoners were just getting ready to eat when Uncle Matt and Arnold rode up. Arnold said, "well, do I look like a dead man? Uncle John and my husband were released and they all returned home laughing about their joke which had almost become a serious affair.

We had fifteen to twenty-five ranch hands, and I cooked for them. Our home was a stopping place for travellers. My husband went to Sherman, Texas and bought twenty-five cots for travellers to sleep on. In the summer they would sleep out of doors, and in the winter cots were put around any where in the house. Sometimes, there would be fifteen cots in one room. I served five gallons of coffee many a time for one meal. I am the mother of ten children.