#6342

Sexton Lily Ann, Interview.

Form A-(S-149) 415

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

Field Worker's name Comer Gower

This report made on (date) June 21 1937

1. Name Lily Ann Sexton
2. Post Office Address Heavener, Okla. Star Route
3. Residence address (or location) Near Hodgen
4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month November Day 13th Year 1863
5. Place of birth Pushmataha County, Oklahoma

6. Name of Father Nail Perry Place of birth ?

Other information about father Died 1904

7. Name of Mother Ann Eliza McCurtain Place of birth Choctaw Nation

Other information about mother Died 1888 Born 1837

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 10

INTERVIEW WITH LILY ANN SEXTON, (NEE PERRY)
HODGEN, OKLAHOMA.
FIELD WORKER GOMER GOWER.
June 21, 1937

The subject of this sketch was born November 13th, 1863, on Cedar Creek, in what is now Pushmataha county, and was truly a child of the forest, having been born while her mother, Ann Eliza Perry, the wife of Nail Perry, accompanied by other refugees, was on her way to a concentration camp on Little river.

Her parents, on both sides, were progressive to the extent as to almost merit the appellation of radicals; carrying their progressiveness to the point that all conversation in the home was conducted in the English language and the children were permitted to attend English schools, only. From this it is evident that the Perry and McCurtain families, her forebears, had fully realized, even at that early period, it was useless to live any longer in accordance with the customs and traditions of a bygone tribal existence and that their children should, by example and precept, be taught along lines which would better fit them to become a part of a more advanced civilization and culture. The high standard of education and consequent culture attained by their children attests the wisdom of that realization.

At the close of the Civil War, the families which had been at the concentration camps and of which the mother of Lily Ann was one of the number, returned to their homes in what is now LeFlore county, and took up the broken threads of life which had been severed in defense of the Confederacy.

On reaching scholastic age, Lily Ann attended an English school near her home and later was sent to school at Hartford, Arkansas, for two years, after which she studied for four years at the New Hope Female Academy, at Hood Spring, near Skullyville, under the superintendency of a Mr. Shepherd. At this Academy due regard was given to the development of the spiritual as well as the intellectual life of the students. Religious services were held each Sabbath and prayer meetings were conducted each Wednesday evening.

On September 12th, 1886, she was united in marriage with George Sexton, now deceased, and whose accomplishments have already been recorded in the "History of the Indian Territory". They began their married life on Conser creek, not far distant from the home of her father, Nail Parry, where her husband was engaged for some time in carrying the mail, on horseback, between a small post office, situated just across the Arkansas

State line, and Summerfield, which was quite near their home.

The building of the Frisco Railway through the then Sugar Loaf county, in 1886 and 1887, brought with it a brisk demand for timber in the form of railroad ties and for country produce for the sustenance of the workmen employed in its construction. Consequently, an industrial activity was ushered in which formerly had not been dreamed of, isolated as it was from any railroads. A new era and a degree of prosperity was enjoyed by the people. Vast quantities of suitable timber grew on hill and dale and the axe of the woodsmen caused the welkin to ring with its sharp, staccato notes. Added to this was the pleasant sound of the cluck-ity-cluck-cluck of the huge wagons while engaged in hauling the product of the forest to the new railroad. Milking pens which had been built for the accommodation of two or three milchcows, enough to supply the needs of the home table only, were enlarged so that other cows, which had been permitted to roam the range with their calves at their sides, were brought in and converted from wild undisciplined animals into tractable milch cows. The difficulty and oft-times humor accompanying

this conversion can only be fully appreciated by those who have been fortunate enough to witness it. A kick by "old Sukey" would sometimes send the milking pail and its contents fair into the milker's face, from the effects of which the unhappy milker would present an unsightly appearance, evoking mirth on the part of a spectator but not on the part of the unfortunate milker. On the open range it was the custom, after the morning milking, to turn the cows out, leaving the calves in the pen during the day. After the evening milking, the calves would be turned out and the cows kept in the pen during the night. This afforded an opportunity for both the cows and the calves to enjoy a period of grazing on the lush grass which grew abundantly at that time. Snubbing posts were set at convenient points in the milking pens, to which the calves would be tied after they had "brought down the milk" and remain tied until the milking of the cow was completed. It was sought to leave half the milk for the calf. When more than half was taken, the act was designated as "knocking the calf in the head with the churn dash". It was when it came time to separate the cows from the calves when turning them out to graze that aggravation entered into the proceeding, as the calves, quite naturally, stayed close

to their dams and would sometimes elude the watchfulness and agility of the good wife, who usually did the milking, and escape with its dam out into the open range, where the separation of the cow from the calf became almost a matter of impossibility, oftentimes requiring the assistance of the husband and his good horse to drive the cow and calf back into the pen, where the effort to separate them would be renewed.

The musical k-ling-k-long of the cowbells which at that time could be heard in the vicinity of every isolated home, and which served the purpose of indicating the location of the cows when it was desired to find and bring them in for milking, is now missed as one of the pleasant memories of that time, by those who were familiar with and enjoyed their enchanting notes, ranging in tone from a deep bass to a high treble, according to the size of the bell. The astounding ability of the owner of a belled animal to recognize, unfailingly, the sound of his own particular bell even when mingled with the sound of several other bells of similar tone, has ever attracted attention and surprise on the part of those unlearned in that art.

All this activity attendant upon the construction of the new railroad through a locality which, prior to that time was at a distance of some fifty-five miles from the nearest railroad point - Fort Smith - was but a prelude to a greater activity which followed when with shipping facilities supplied and just a short time afterward another railroad, the Kansas City Southern, constructed, together with an abundance of good hardwood timber and an excellent quality of short-leaf yellow pine adorning its hitherto quiet and peaceful hills and valleys, ready to be cut down, the exhilarating drone of the sawmills were soon heard on all sides and with it all the hustle and bustle which inevitably accompanies live industry.

Shipping points on both the railroads were easily accessible to all parts of the valley in which the Sextons lived.

Thus was a quiet community of people, located far inland from railroads; living close to nature undisturbed; with nothing but an occasional visit of relatives and neighbors; periodic religious services and campmeetings to cause a slight ripple on the sea of their quiet lives, trans-

formed into a hustling, thriving, and very prosperous group launching out into a new era with well grounded confidence that the added opportunities which the railroads had placed in their laps would bring with them remunerating rewards and conveniences.

With this background, it is understandable that this community, situated on the Poteau river and traversed by it and its tributaries, Blackfork, Conser and Fourche Maline creeks; with the Winding Stair and Kiamichi mountains on the south, the Cavanal mountain on the north; the Poteau and the picturesque Sugar Loaf mountains on the northeast; with a fertile valley extending between these limits, should and did become the home of people who led in spiritual, educational and cultural development. The McCurtain, the Perrys, who are the forebears of the subject of this sketch, Lily Ann Sexton, the Sextons, Harris Folsoms, LeFlores, Bentons and the Jeffersons, who were formerly called Hontubbee. Each of these families contributed in a very large measure to the promotion of all efforts to advance the civic and spiritual standard of their community, and have provided the Indian Territory and later the State of Oklahoma, with men whose names stand high on the roll of those who have merited public esteem and confidence.

The spiritual life of these good people was, and still is, of that type in which the home training of the children is made an adjunct of the Sunday School, and of this, Mrs. Sexton relates that the families attended religious services en masse and that all, from the youngest to the oldest, were required to observe the most rigid decorum. The Methodists predominated and, consequently, in conformity with the custom of that faith, campmeetings were frequently held. Adherents coming from a distance would prepare to stay several days and a spiritual feast, as well as a physical, would be enjoyed by all. It was at these meetings, only, that loyality to the language of their forebears would be indulged. On occasions the services were conducted in the Choctaw language in deference to those who were still unlearned in the English language; a condition, however, which has now practically disappeared. Lily Ann Sexton, being a devout and consecrated woman, has the ability to lead devotional exercises in both the Choctaw and English languages, having learned the Choctaw language after completion of her studies in English. It is said of her that on occasions when both races would be present at a meeting, the two languages would be used, thus: when the

prayer was begun in the English language, it would be closed in the Choctaw language and vice versa. She now makes her home with her daughter, Mrs. Fine Davis. Aside from impaired sight, she is hale and hearty and still reflects that mark of extreme refinement which is bestowed only upon those who, through rigid training, have subordinated worldly allurements to a more noble purpose in life.

The same tribute is due and is now paid all the ladies of the families before mentioned and, without seeking in the least manner to detract from the good qualities of the men, it must be said that, without the assistance and cooperation of the good women in their homes and in the churches, it is doubtful, indeed, that the task of winning a living from a primeval forest and transforming a virgin territory into one of the most beautiful; most prosperous and the most enlightened communities in the state, and, at the same time, being elevated to positions of trust and honor in their tribal and state councils, could have been so successfully accomplished. So that noble band of Choctaws, whose names have already been mentioned, which laboriously and

tragically made its way from Mississippi to the Indian Territory in the eighteen thirties and settled in this beautiful valley, became the nucleus of a community than which no better can be found. It bequeathed to its posterity all the priceless elements which enter into an abundant life; the foremost of which bequests was a true reverence for the name of our common Creator; and to that was added that of industry and, above all, they were taught to love their neighbors as themselves. With this array of noble attributes, it is small wonder that the setting of this narrative is regarded as being the site of all that is elevating and ennobling in LeFlore county. The principal character, Lily Ann Sexton, was selected as being typical of the general standard of those who are its products. Truly a high class of citizenry; descendants of a noble race, established in a fruitful land; a combination in which there is so much good, that good, alone, is reflected in the entire surrounding.

Gomer Gower