

SEGER, BESSIE L. (MISS) SECOND INTERVIEW 8663

308

INDIAN-PIONEER HISTORY PROJECT FOR OKLAHOMA
WORKS PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

SEGER, BESSIE L. (MISS) SECOND INTERVIEW 8663

Field Worker's name Ida B. Lankford,

This report made on (date) September 9, 1937

- 1. Name Miss Bessie L. Seger,
- 2. Post Office Address Colony, Oklahoma.
- 3. Residence address (or location) Watan Avenue
- 4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month March Day 2 Year 1880
- 5. Place of birth Darlington, Texas.

6. Name of Father John H. Seger, Place of birth Cleveland, Ohio.

7. Name of Mother Mary E. Nicholas, Place of birth Oakland, Pennsylvania.

Other information about mother _____

Notes or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and history 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 9

SEGER, BESSIE L. (MISS) SECOND INTERVIEW 8663

Ida B. Larkford,
Interviewer,
September 9, 1937.

An Interview with Miss Bessie L. Seger,
Watan Avenue,
Colony, Oklahoma.

Mr. Seger started his first work among the Indians in what was then Darlington, Texas, in 1872. Mr. Seger first came to Washita County in 1883. As the cattlemen had all of the Indian land leased in Custer County, Roger Mills County and Washita County, it was understood that the Indians were to do the fence building, so they might be able to obtain work. Mr. Seger was to have charge of the Indians. The first thing to do was to find a place to take his family. He made the first wagon track through Custer County and Roger Mills and Washita Counties and came to Seger Colony. He found a large grove of trees, and as he loved a forest, he, with the help of some Indians and cowboys, soon had cottonwood logs to build a house with a dirt roof, which the cowboys declared would not leak, but this proved untrue.

At that time my mother was the only white woman and her five children, Neatha, Jesse, Bessie, John and Andrew, were the only white children in Washita County. Mother's hardships

SEGER, BESSIE L. (MISS) SECOND INTERVIEW 8663

-2-

were very trying, but she never let her feelings be known. She always had a smile for every one as she was busy from four o'clock in the morning, preparing meals which consisted of fat salt meat, pork, white gravy, coffee, and biscuits. The dinners were beans, fat meat, sour dough fried, and coffee. With all the care of her children, mother never ceased to sing during the day. Most of the cowboys were away during the day. Some were building miles of fence, some caring for the large herds of cattle.

There was little communication with the rest of the world. I am Bessie Seger, a daughter of John and Mary Seger. At that time I was only a little girl three years of age, but now I remember of going to the place where the boys did their cooking. They had a house made of pickets. In this house was a fireplace. They would have on hand a sack of flour. When they were ready to make bread, they would make a hole in the flour, put baking powder, salt and water enough to make dough enough for their staff. Then they would have a long stick which they would wrap the dough around and then hold it over the fire. They would have another stick that they would

SEGER, -ESSIE L. (MISS), SECOND INTERVIEW 8663

-3-

put a piece of bacon on. They would hold this over the bread and the drippings from the meat would fall on the bread, as it baked, to season the bread. They would have tin cups for their coffee. There was no need for knives, forks or spoons. They could put sugar in their coffee and stir it with a stick.

Our nearest railroad was Caldwell, Kansas. Burlington was the nearest trading point and it required one man to haul provisions on which we lived. We had the South Canadian River to cross and there was no bridge.

In 1885, Grover Cleveland who was President ordered all the cattlemen out as they did not live up to their contracts. They were to give the fence building to the Indians but they had only a few Indians. They had given most of the work to the whites. Mr. Seger then moved his family to Caldwell, Kansas, where he had planned to make his home. He came back to settle up his business and then leave Oklahoma for good. Mother, however, had lost her little boy, Andrew, the winter we were in Caldwell, and she was not content to stay there. Jesse M. Lee who was then military agent of the Territory was

SEGER, BESSIE L. (MISS) SECOND INTERVIEW 9663

-4-

looking for a person who would take about five hundred of the most backward Indians away from the trading post. Mr. John Murphy told him there was only one man who could do that and that man was Mr. John H. Seger, and he would be coming through there that day. Mr. Lee said to send Mr. Seger to him. Mr. Seger went to see what was wanted of him. When Mr. Lee told him of moving the Cheyennes and Arapahoes away from Darlington, Mr. Seger said, "No; I am leaving the Territory to find a place where my children can go to school." This band of Indians were considered the most backward Indians in and around the Agency, but Mr. Lee was willing to return whatever the hardships might be. So in 1880, we returned to Cobb Creek to the old log house which had been our home. I had no playmates, but my brothers, so I loved to play with the squirrels, trying to whistle like the birds and to imitate other creatures of the forest. In front of our house stood a large walnut tree, whose limbs with their leafy coverings afforded a favorite place for the birds, squirrels and the turkeys; in the generous shade the deer and coyotes stopped to rest and the wandering Indians

SEGER, BESSIE L. (MISS) SECOND INTERVIEW 9663

-5-

from time to time, as they chanced to pass would halt a while beneath its shady branches.

The Indians whom Father brought from the Reservation were placed on a tract of land where they raised herds of cattle, wheat and corn and cotton. The nearest place to market these products was Wichita, Kansas. There were times when Father would be in the Wichita Country for weeks at a time showing the Indians the white man's way of farming. They had few teams of horses, but they learned to farm with oxen. They had no thrasher at first, but they used wagon sheets and some even used sticks to pound the wheat out.

Often Mother would not see the face of any white woman for as long as six months. I remember that on one occasion my father and the Indians had gone to Darlington for food, and upon their return they found the banks of the South Canadian River full and had to wait there. Mother became worried as our store of groceries was very low and almost a week passed before the river could be forded. One morning Mother called and said, "Children, there is nothing in the

SEGER, BESSIE L. (MISS) SECOND INTERVIEW 9663

-6-

house to eat". It was not long until an Indian on horse-back rode up to see if we were all right. Mother said, "Oavo, you go see if you can find Mr. Seger. We are without anything to eat." Oavo obeyed and reached the river by noon. The water was going down, so he swam his horse across the river during the night. He returned to our house the next night with Father.

In the year of 1892, came the opening to the white man, and a great change came. It seemed as ^{if} every one was poor and some very poor. If it had not been for the Indian school, just being built, many of the claim holders could not have stayed. The Seger Training School then had a sawmill to which they brought cottonwood logs to cut up into lumber. Some of the homesteaders had no teams and lived in dugouts. Father gave work to as many as he could. Some would walk as far as five miles. The school first started with one building, made of brick that were made from the clay on the banks of Cobb Creek. This school took in about fifty children. The employees' salaries were from \$25.00 to \$50.00 per month. Many families lived on corn bread and water. At the time El Reno was the

SEGER, BESSIE L. (MISS) SECOND INTERVIEW

9663

-7-

nearest trading post and Minco was next. The farmers raised wheat, corn and cotton. They had to haul it to El Reno. Corn was 10 cents, eggs 7 cents, chickens 25 cents a piece when they could sell them. All of this produce was hauled by team to El Reno and Minco. It would take two days to make the trip.

One year Mr. Seger raised thirty wagon loads of produce to haul to El Reno. One white man went with the twenty-nine Indians to sell the produce raised on Government land. The clothing the people wore those days were made from a 10 cent calico. The girls made their nice dresses from pale green, blue and pink cheesecloth that cost 5 cents per yard and from 3 to 4 cents worth of lace to trim them. I remember my father gave me a \$5.00 bill to spend for wearing apparel. I got a pair of shoes for 1.00, a sailor hat for 50 cents, stockings 20 cents, shirt waist 1.25, and a brilliantine skirt for 2.00. I came home very happy over my wearing apparel. Very few ladies wore hats. Sun bonnets were worn.

The farmers had mostly ponies. Feed was very scarce through the farming years. The ponies had nothing to eat

SEGER, ESSIE L. (MISS) SECOND INTERVIEW 9662

-8-

but the grass. The first school for the white children was in Dr. Ballard's dugout, one mile and a half from Colony.

In the winter of 1884 they had a schoolhouse built one mile west. It made a very good school room the first winter, but standing through the hot Summer the boards warped through and the next winter this schoolhouse was very cold. The wind would come through from the north and make it very hard to keep warm.

Mrs. Seger was the appointed postmistress. Fr. Cole moved the post eight miles west and broke Seger Colony into towns. Seger was three miles west. When my brother returned home from Stromsburg, Nebraska, where he had been attending college, he decided to start a store in Colony in 1897. This he did, and he was appointed as postmaster. The offices were moved from the Seger school to his store, and my brother was in the store business from 1897 to 1905. Steward Lumberger had the first blacksmith shop. A cotton gin was started in 1890. Dr. Robinson was the Government doctor at that time.

He ran the first drug store in Colony. Colony church was built as the results of the efforts of Reverend Frank Wright

SEGER, BESSIE L. (MISS) SECOND INTERVIEW 9663

-9-

in the Seger community in 1896. My father, after talking to Mr. Wright, decided that it would be an excellent thing to build a church in the community as there was none nearer than the Mennonite Church at Shelley. Many whites attended the Seger School.

Father wrote to the Indian department securing consent to lay off a piece of the school land for a church. It was not long until the church was built and here the Indians, cowboys and farmers came to church. In 1905, the first bank was started and by this time there were two stores, barber shop, two blacksmith shops, a livery stable and a hotel.

In those days of school, the girls had two school dresses and two aprons for school wear. The apron was worn a week. When we reached home we would change our dresses, hurry up and put on an old dress to work in and a pair of shoes had to last the winter through. In those days we had to help our mothers and do as they said.