

SHELTON, FLORENCE

INTERVIEW

9278

301

BIOGRAPHIC WORKS
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

Ind. Pioneer Hist. Project for Oklahoma

SHELTON, FLORENCE INTERVIEW #9278

Field Worker's name Zaidee B. Bland

This report made on (date) November 24, 1937

1. Name Mrs. Florence Shelton

2. Post office Address Pampa, Texas.

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month October Day 24 Year 1871

5. Place of birth _____

6. Name of Father Gabe L. Mass Place of birth Kentucky

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother America Jane Cox Place of birth Indiana

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. Continuation on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets

attached 13

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Zaidee B. Bland
Field Worker
Nov. 24, 1937

Interview with Mrs. Florence Shelton,
Pampa, Texas.

My husband and I came up to Greer County, Texas in 1887 to visit Mr. Shelton's brother. We brought Mr. Shelton's mother and sister with us in a covered wagon. We only stayed about three weeks, but in that time we decided to file on a quarter-section of land joining that of Mr. Shelton's brother. We could only file papers and take out a right to file, for the land was in dispute as to who owned it, Texas or Oklahoma.

We left Mr. Shelton's mother and sister here for a more extended visit and went back to Cleburne County, Texas, to gather our crops and bring on our stock and household goods. After getting back home we decided we would not be in too big a hurry to come to the new country and live in a hole in the ground as every one did. Brother was building him a house and had the foundation laid and all the walls up; when there came a little cloud in the sky. This occurred while we were visiting him. We never thought anything

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about being afraid, but when the little cloud passed over there came with it a little twisting wind and the lumber in the house was so scattered that not all of it could be found. So brother just dug himself another hole in the ground and walled the sides up with the salvaged lumber. There was a wagon that camped on an adjoining quarter while they dug their home. The people saw the cloud and were wiser than we, for they went to a dugout. But there was not even a wheel of their wagon left to be found when the wind was gone.

So we really waited until Fall 1888 before we came out. When we did so, it was in a covered wagon. No incident worth narrating occurred until we got to the Red River. Here the river was so high that I begged not to cross, and we camped to wait till the night was over. There were a dozen wagons waiting to cross.

With the light came the mail hack and drove right in to the water without hesitating. So the waiting men got together for a consultation and decided to drive in, pro-

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mising to help one another if they needed help. One of the men had crossed a good many times before so he went first and my husband drove in right behind the first wagon. When the horses began to swim I got so scared that I jumped over the spring seat and covered my head with a quilt so I could not see. Mr. Shelton was sitting on the dashboard whipping the team across for you could not let them hesitate for a minute for you would bog in the quicksand. Just as we started up the opposite bank there was exposed the sheet and bows of a wagon that had tried to cross the night before in the dark and all were lost. It was frightful. We never knew how many were in the wagon or if any of them got out or not.

We got to brother's home without mishap and stayed with him until we could file and dig our own dugout.

We planted wheat and failed and did not get our seed.

We did have a good team and Frazier was only four miles away. Mr. Braddock had a general store there. He did not carry much of a stock, but there was a little freighting and Mr. Shelton freighted quite a bit. It kept us from going

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hungry.

Nothing of note happened until 1891, then the big flood came. I think it rained for nearly a week, but we did not feel alarmed. One night we waked to find our dug-out half full of water and we had to go to brother's house. He was higher and had built himself a room above the ground.

All Frazier was under water. The town never built back but moved about three miles back east on higher ground. We had a very much beloved Cumberland Presbyterian preacher, Brother Neal, who named Altus. He preached the first sermon in the school house after the water had subsided and the citizens decided to move to higher grounds. So he was invited to name the new town and called it Altus, meaning higher ground.

I would not go and look at the flood waters, but the menfolks did and they reported that it looked very angry and there were wrecks of houses, carcasses of horses, pigs, cattle, and debris of almost everything you ever saw, floating in the water. It was indeed a sad sight. Lots of lives

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lost and homes washed away.

Prairie Home and the schoolhouse were nearly two miles from Red River, and there were people there who had a loft in their house and all got into the loft and the water got up into the loft. They had to be rescued by raft.

I brought twelve hens and a rooster from Texas.

One bright moonlight night we went to Prairie Home to a preaching, and when we got home the chickens were scattered all over the yard—and we wondered what had frightened them so. We gathered them together the best we could and went down to bed. We had not been in bed very long until we were awakened by wolves running over the dugout. The next morning we had two chickens.

We made such failures with our crops that, when we had lived all the time required to prove up on the land we went back to Texas. We stayed until the land was given to Oklahoma by the Supreme Court. Then we gathered our crops and, together with two neighbors, we chartered an emigrant car, loaded all the stock and household goods that it would

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hold, billed the car to Quannah. That left three wagons to be driven and only two men to drive, one of whom was a Mr. Adams; so I had to drive one. I had two small boys, two and four years old. I had to walk a good deal of the time to keep warm. When we got to Quannah we were delayed two days, because of the high water, and when we did get started we were driving quite a bunch of cattle. We left town about two in the afternoon and, before we had gone ten miles, there came up the bluest norther I ever saw. The wind was terrific and so cold that I preferred to walk. We camped for the night just across the river on this side, but the wind was so high we did not dare build a fire, so went to bed too cold for words. We took the three sheets off of the wagons and, putting up one for a windbreak, we spread the other on the ground, using so many quilts that we could scarcely turn and the other sheet on top of that. The next morning it was too windy to have a fire. So we started our days travel without a warm morsel to eat or drink. About noon we stopped and built a fire under the

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banks of a ravine and heated rocks to pile in with the children to keep them from freezing. Some of them wanted to make camp, but I said, "No, let's press on to brother's before night." I walked that entire thirty-five miles to keep from freezing. I will not say to keep warm, for I was not warm, but did manage to keep from being frost-bitten. It was not unusual for people to have their ears, feet, or hands frost-bitten in those days and have to put icepacks on them or rub them with snow to keep them from being so.

I have seen the snow so deep on the level that it took a horse two hours to get from home to brother's, a distance of less than one mile. The first years we were out here, we had to haul water, but now Jim and Jack, two of the Shelton boys, dug a well and we had an abundance of water, and it was sweeter water than the average in the country. In fact, the well became quite famous in the country for its sweetness.

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My boys were now large enough to go to school.

There came a snow storm while we were uneasily watching for them. Two neighboring boys, the Brunk brothers, came over for water, and one of their ears was frosted, and as we were working with it, the oldest boy came running through the snow and said the other boy had gotten so cold that he had sat down in the snow and refused to come on. So the men folks had to get blankets and go out into the storm and hunt him up. When he got home, I had to put him into an ice water bath to keep down pneumonia.

I had a ten-gallen can of water sitting out near the door of the dugout, and it froze solid before dark and burst the bottom out of the can.

Sometimes these blizzards were not accompanied with any moisture, but dust so thick that you could not see across the road. We had a windbreak built for the stock, but a dust storm came that strangled all our hogs to death even after they had gotten behind it.

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It was always an anxious time for us when our men-folks went for wood into the Indian Reservation. But they always took some money with them and paid off, if the Indians came upon them. It did not take much money. I do not think the Indians really were willing for the white people to settle this country.

The prairie dogs gave us a lot of grief, eating up our crops. Lots of people suffered for something to eat. And their children had to go barefooted all the winter. Some people went across the river west and grubbed for wood.

I had a neighbor who had several children. She had to wash without soap, and her children went barefooted all the winter and had very little to eat but mush and milk, but still they always looked rosy-cheeked, healthy, and clean.

Sunday School and Church.

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church was the first to be organized at Prairie Home and Altus. It was moved to Altus, I should say. I taught in the Sunday School for six straight

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years and never missed a Sunday. It was a Union Sunday School and we used Cook's Union Literature. Everybody went in wagons or on horseback, and we bundled the children and babies up in the winter and took them just the same as we did in the summer. We never missed preaching, but did not get to have it every Sunday as we did Sunday School.

Clothing.

No one had a sewing machine. We all sewed on our fingers and made every garment that all the family wore. I never needed a pattern. All I needed was a picture and, sometimes, I would just make up a pattern in my head for a dress for myself or some of the neighbors. We neighbors would all gang up at one of the homes to do our sewing, and all the hoods and mittens, stockings and socks were Knitted. After mother died, father sent me mother's machine and it was the only machine in the country for a lot of years, and every one came to use it for years. We made our hats of velvet or goods, like our dresses for winter, and in the

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summer we wore bonnets or made straw hats. A straw hat would do us for years; we would simply put a new ribbon or flower on it and change it from time to time.

There were few doctors in the country and we had to learn to attend to our own families. It used to be said no one ever died in the county, that you had to kill some one to start a grave yard, and it is a fact that about all the old graveyards I know of had the first grave made for people dying because of accidental deaths.

I cooked on a fireplace at first, but when we came back the second time to stay we brought with us a wood stove. One of the legs never fitted well and was always wobbly. My sister and mother were visiting me and my five year old son was playing around the stove one night, while I was waiting supper for Mr. Shelton. I had a big pot full of boiling coffee, a teakettle full of boiling water, and a pot full of soup. As his father came in to supper he jumped up right suddenly and knocked that crazy leg right out letting the contents of all the vessels spill, over him, as well as the coals

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out of the stove. We all grabbed at him trying to tear his clothes off. But with the clothes came all the skin and in some places the flesh. It was night. Someone had to run a horse for a doctor. At Frazier.

All the doctors were away at a doctors' meeting some place except a young physician who happened to be visiting. He came of course, but, when he saw the child, he said that when two-thirds of the surface of the body were burned and without skin there was no hopes of saving the life. There was only a little skin left on his chest and stomach. A neighbor had some morphine tablets. We cut them in fourths and gave him a piece every hour to quiet his screaming. And left word at the drug store with Mr. McMahan to send Dr. Fowler as soon as he came home. The doctor came up, nearly forty-eight hours after, on a running horse. The horse was covered with lather and blowing so we heard before he got to us. Dr. Fowler brought a half gallon of ointment something like this ungentine and had us keep the child covered with this and roll him in a sheet every little bit. We roll-

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ed him to keep him from sticking to, the sheet. He said if he could keep him from taking pneumonia for three days, he could save him. The doctor stayed with us those three days, and the boy lives yet.