

SIMPSON, MELISSA.

INTERVIEW

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Form A-(S-149)

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

Field Worker's name Zaidée B. BlandThis report made on (date) March 16, 1938 19381. Name Mrs. Melissa Simpson2. Post Office Address Altus, Oklahoma3. Residence address (or location) 936 E. Cypress4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month December Day 27 Year 18525. Place of birth Illinois6. Name of Father Alvin Sanders Place of birth KentuckyOther information about father Lived to be 96 years old7. Name of Mother Cloie Hill Place of birth KentuckyOther information about mother Lived to be ninety three years old

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 8

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Zaidee B. Bland
Journalist
March 16, 1938.

Interview with Mrs. Melissa Simpson
936 E. Cypress, Altus, Oklahoma.

I came from Illinois with my parents to Wilbarger County, Texas, when quite a small girl. My oldest daughter is sixty-five years old and I have lived every one of those sixty-five years on the plains of northwest Texas. My man was mostly a farmer and I have lived all over this west between the Red Rivers in dugouts, log huts and tents. We never owned much of a home as houses go but always had plenty to eat and raised a happy, healthy family. I sometimes went on the train when we were moving but mostly in a covered wagon we would go from place to place. I remember one time we were moving when my oldest daughter was about three years old. We were sleeping under the wagon that night. When morning came there was a big white frost over everything.

Once we lived in a log house daubed with mud between the cracks of the logs. The house had two big rooms. We lived in one room and Mr. Knight and his family lived in the other room. I had a dirt floor but Mrs. Knight had a rock floor.

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My husband was always a great hand to stay at home at night but once he had to go to Vernon and I was left alone with four little girls. It began to rain and as I remember it rained for about three days. We were living in a two room log hut again. But we were alone this time. The roof was dirt and grass. The children slept on trundle beds. The water began to trickle down through that roof of grass and dirt. I got up and stretched a wagon sheet from the top of my bed over the childrens' beds, slanting it so the water would run off and they could sleep.

Then I thought about the cows and little calves. The house set on a knoll near a slew that we had heard would often get out of its banks. The slew was southeast of us and there was a creek on the west and often the water backed up and reached out over everything except the highest knolls. We had our cribs and house built on high knolls but I was afraid for the little calves. We had about twenty calves and I was afraid they might get drowned but knew the old cows would have sense enough to seek higher ground. So I went out and turned out all the cows and calves together. I went back to bed and as daylight neared I could hear water, slosh, slosh, slosh. When day-

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light did come the floor was all covered with water. I had a safe with all my dishes in it. In the bottom part of this safe I kept my garden seed. When I opened the safe to see about them all the seed floated out and were ruined.

We began to get frightened and did not know what to do. We wanted to get out but how? My oldest daughter went out and climbed up the corner of the house on those logs and when she got to the top she began to scream. Our nearest neighbor heard her scream and answered. There was a young man staying at the neighbor's house. This young man and my neighbor came to us as fast as they could waded in the water. They carried a stick in their hand to feel out the way before them and to test the depth of the water. They thought surely some of us were drowned because of the screaming. My neighbor and the young man carried us out on their backs. We put our arms around their necks and our legs around their waists and held on while they put one hand under us to steady us and with the other hand felt out the ground with sticks.

They carried us to their house to breakfast and when we went in our neighbor was crying for she was sure some of us were

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drowned. But we were not. All were safe and it quit raining about ten o'clock and the sun came out and we went back home for the night after the water had run down. We did not lose a chicken or a hog. I can remember now how those cattle looked away over on the hill out of the water with all the calves hovering near them. The calves would have been sure to have drowned had I not put them with their mothers.

I have lived in some awful rough houses but I always managed to keep them clean and I raised my daughters to be clean. My daughters were always such good obedient children too. They never teased to go or thought of disobeying me.

We always had a lot of fat hogs to kill for meat and lard. I never bought a gallon of lard in my life in all the years I kept house. Nor a bar of soap. I always made my own soap. My babies were all washed with my nice white home-made soap, and they every one have nice, white, smooth complexions. My man had a sorghum mill and every one of my girls learned to feed the mill at sorghum making time or to drive the team round and round. My husband ground cane and made the sorghum for other people too. When he would cook out a barrel of syrup

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for somebody he would take so much syrup for toll to pay him for his work.

One time we were moving to a new place a long ways away - about a hundred miles. We carried water in a keg on the side of the wagons. We thought we knew where there was a place between the place where we started and where we were going where we could camp and get water, but when we got there there was no water and we had to keep on travelling. Night came on and we could find no water anywhere. We drove on and on at last we came to a herd of cattle. Now you know cattle usually bed down near water. We could only find some cow tracks and horse tracks which the water had come up into and we got our dipper and dipped the water out of these tracks and drank it and cooked with it the next morning, making coffee and everything. It tasted good to us. We did not know what kind of water it was but it was good.

Furniture.

We moved too often to have much furniture. I cut rags and wove my own rugs. I washed, carded and spun the wool into thread, and then wove all our blankets. I had my blankets white

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when I was married but as the children came on I gathered walnut leaves and put sulphur with them and made pretty grays and browns for the blankets. I knitted all our stockings and socks. For beds we had straw ticks and feather beds. Every year the straw ticks had to be emptied and washed and filled with new straw. No one was allowed to sit or wallow on the beds in the day-time for that would have broken up the straws and made the beds dusty and hard.

My daughters never wore hoops but were not allowed to go out without from three to seven petticoats on to make their dresses stand out. I had one daughter who wore seven petticoats all the time. These petticoats were made full five yards or more around the bottom and gathered to belts that tied around the waist. Dresses were not starched much but the underskirts were always as stiff as we could starch them. We made our starch in roasting-ear time. We grated the corn off the cob, scraping it good. Then we would add water to float off the husks and let the starch settle down to the bottom of the pan. We would then pour off the water and let the starch dry and would break it up and put it away for use and make it with boiling water just as

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you make starch now. We sometimes made starch out of flour but that was not so good and the continual use of flour starch would make white goods yellow. All my daughters wore corsets and corset covers. Their beaux usually came for them with two horses. Sometimes the young men would have their own side saddles borrowed from their sisters or neighbors and sometimes they would come leading the horse without a saddle and would have to saddle up after they got to the house. My girls always rode horseback to school, two girls to each horse. They would carry along a little feed to feed the nags at noon. The boys would often meet them and tie up and unsaddle the horses for them and feed the horses at noon too. Lots of times the horses were mean and contrary and the girls would get thrown but they were never hurt.

I would ride any horse in whose mouth you could put a bit. I have had to have horses blindfolded for me to get on them but I would ride them. I have had my husband cover the horse's eye with one hand and help me onto the horse's back with the other hand and then hand up the baby to me and I would ride that horse to church. My husband always raised his own horses, keeping ten or fifteen head all the time and a herd of about a hundred cows.

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I have made hundreds of pounds of butter and I used it for seasoning everything in my cooking. I never owned a dresser in my life but had a little looking glass that always hung on the wall; we kept our clothes in trunks. About the happiest time I can remember was when I lived in a dugout 16 by 16 feet and cooked and ate in there and had two beds up. It really was not so hard to keep house in a dugout with dirt floors for we could sweep them with brooms made of broom weed. When I got a machine every one thought we were rich because we had a sewing machine. The greatest thrill I remember was when I was nine years old and the teacher offered a prize for the best speller in the class I won and he gave me a dime. I bought me some rattan to go in the tucks of my underskirt to make me look like I was wearing hoops. Whooping cough was the most dreaded disease I knew of among children.

The biggest wheat crop we ever made was one when after all expenses were paid and we still had twelve hundred bushels left in the granary and wheat was worth \$1.10 a bushel. We really felt rich. I took one of the children and went back to Illinois for a visit of six weeks. I had not seen my mother in sixteen years so I thought I deserved a visit.