

BIOGRAPHY FORM
 WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
 Indian-Pioneer History - Project of the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs

Field Worker's name Dovey P. Heady

This report made on (date) May 9, 1937. 193

1. Name Fritz Sittel

2. Post Office Address McAlester, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 20 West Seminole Street

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month January Day 25 Year 1863

5. Place of birth Germany

6. Name of Father Ed Sittel Place of birth Germany

7. Name of Mother Lena Sittel Place of birth Germany

Other information about mother Born May 22, 1842

Died at the age of 86 years at McAlester.

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.

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Dovey P. Heady
Field Worker.
May 9, 1937

Interview with Fritz Sittel
20 West Seminole,
McAlester, Oklahoma.

I was born in Germany, I do not remember the name of the town, on January 25, 1863. My father, Ed Sittel, was born in Germany May 5, 1841, and died at the age of eighty-five in McAlester, Oklahoma. My mother, Lena Sittel, was born in Germany May 22, 1842, and died at the age of eighty-six in McAlester, Oklahoma.

My parents left Germany when I was six months old and went to Baltimore, Maryland-- that was in 1863. My father left us there and said he was going west in search of work and he was gone seven years before we heard from him. My mother thought he was dead and taught us children so. After seven years he wrote my mother to come to him. He was working as butcher for the employees of the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railway Company at McAlester, in the Indian Territory. In the meantime my mother had been working at the Blair Meat Market for a Mr. Kermmel.

Indian Territory

In about 1871 we left Maryland, by rail, to McAlester, Indian Territory. I do not know just how long we were in making the trip,

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but I do know we were many days. When we reached McAlester and my mother saw the little 6 X 10 ft. box depot and how wild and uninhabited the surroundings looked, she told the conductor to put her trunks back on the train-- that she was going back to Maryland to a civilized country. The conductor knew my father and he held up the train and talked to her until my father got there. Of course, after he arrived everything was all right and she didn't return to Maryland. She was the first white woman to land in McAlester. The Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad only went south to Stringtown at that time.

My father and James J. McAlester were batching at that time in a little shack made of scrap boxes and sticks, covered with brush. After my mother came Father built a one-room house of logs, scrap lumber and boxes, covered with clap-board shingles, and a shed or porch covered with brush. (I have the picture.)

My mother baked bread for the Missouri, Kansas and Texas employees. My father put up a sign, "Elk House" and this house was gradually added on to until it was a twenty-four room hotel called, the Elk Hotel. It was located at North McAlester, where the Doc. McAlester home place is now.

Railroad Lines and Coal Mines.

My father came to McAlester, Indian Territory, in 1870. The Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad Company built its line through the Choctaw Nation in 1872. By building the first North and South line built through the Indian Territory the company, by act of Congress, obtained large and valuable grants of land in the way of right-of-way and lands adjacent to this right-of-way. Soon after the building of its line, a station was built in what is now the northern portion of the present city of McAlester. This station was just a one-room box house about 6 X 10 ft., located where the present depot is now in North McAlester.

The town was named McAlester, after James J. McAlester, who had the first store here and was a prominent, intermarried citizen of the Choctaw tribe at that time. I would like to tell you here how J. J. McAlester was about to be tried by the Indians in about 1878--I am not sure of the year, but I know I was just a boy when this happened.

My parents were operating the Elk House. A group of Choctaw Indians were gathered there talking; I could understand the Choctaw language well enough to know that they were going to do something awful to Mr. McAlester. I told

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my father that they were going to do something to Mr. McAlester, so he sent me out the back way to tell him. As soon as he heard the news he left on horseback to Reams, and caught a train and went to Missouri to Saint Louis, and I don't know where to from there. He was a white man but had married a Choctaw Indian woman, after which he was under the jurisdiction of the Choctaw Nation. One of their rules was that no land or any property of the Choctaw Nation could be sold or leased. Mr. McAlester had sold or leased to the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railway Company the right-of-way for the Wilburton Branch-- a railroad running East from North McAlester to the mines at Krebs and on to Wilburton. That was why the Indians were about to try him in court. Before he returned to the Indian Territory, he took the Oath of Allegiance and the Indians were afraid to try him in court after that. However, that did not release him from his Indian rights but he was no longer under the jurisdiction of the Choctaw Government.

Of course, it was known when the Missouri, Kansas and Texas built its line that there were valuable coal deposits in this vicinity. And at once, after the railroad went into

operation, coal mines began to be opened and at Krebs large coal mining operations were begun and carried on for many years. People began to settle around the little depot in what was then McAlester, now North McAlester. After a few years, the mineral deposits in the Choctaw Nation began to attract the attention of capital.

In about 1885 a party of men from Minneapolis, Minnesota, came to the Choctaw Nation for the purpose of hunting the game which was so plentiful at that time; also, to look over the country with the view of investing money. With this party came Edward D. Chadick, a wonderful executive and promoter. Before the party started on this hunt they made inquiries of persons familiar with hunting and the country and I accompanied them on the hunting trip and pointed out the coal deposits and explained their value and extent.

The party of capitalists were so enthused by what they saw that they at once conceived the idea of building a railroad East and West through this country; and after two years they organized a corporation for that purpose and obtained a charter from the Congress of the United States giving them the right to build such a line.

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They had the idea of a line running from Memphis, Tennessee, to Albuquerque, New Mexico, connecting there with another line. This corporation formed and was given the right to lease coal lands and to operate mines within the Choctaw country. Edward D. Chadick was sent here to determine the route of the railroad, the idea being to build the first link between Wister, (Oklahoma) Indian Territory, on the Frisco line and McAlester on the West, connecting with the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Line. Mr. Chadick employed me to take coal leases here; of course, the leases had to be approved by the Choctaw Government. This was in 1887 and I received \$150.00 per month and my expenses. After the leases were made, satisfactory arrangements could not be made to enter the town, because Mr. J. J. McAlester had about two hundred acres fenced off between North McAlester and the present McAlester and he wanted \$10,000.00 for the line to come through his land. Finally he reduced the price \$4,000.00 and Mr. Chadick took up the matter with me as to whether to pay the price asked or to change the survey. I told him that the company could have a right-of-way through my ranch, which was all of where South McAlester is now and I also gave the location for the

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depot. I was then living in the first house built in South McAlester but I built a house in second ward and gave my house-- known as the Green House-- to Mr. Chadick for his office. The Chadick Park was named after Mr. Chadick.

In 1889 the first work on the line was begun and I was employed by the company, which was the Choctaw Coal and Railway Company. I had the contract for all the bridge lumber and ties through the Choctaw Nation; I paid the Choctaw Government 7¢ for each tie and the company paid me 39¢ each tie. The bridge lumber was paid for according to specifications. I had about three hundred contractors and laborers working for me and I operated a large commissary to furnish supplies to the employees. My ranch (Sittel Ranch) was soon a town of tents; this was after the opening of the Oklahoma land to white settlers in 1889. Then came boarding houses, stores, and the Choctaw Railway Company began to build what was then the largest building in the Indian Territory which was called the Kail-Inla building. This building was where the Enloe Hotel now stands.

In order to take care of my mercantile business I had to build a larger building, which was a one story frame building with a shed-room. In the latter part of 1889 and the early part of 1890 the courts established by the United States Government had begun to function in this country and the lawyers and doctors were coming in but before they could stop here they had to obtain a permit from the Choctaw Tribe. There were no buildings to accommodate them so I gave them the shed-room. They all huddled together under this roof, except when either lawyer or doctor had a client or patient; at such times the others politely absented themselves until the conference or treatment was over.

The growth of the town was rapid but financial difficulties overtook the railway company and for two years trains were run from McAlester to Hartshorne and from Wilburton to Wister-- the line was incomplete between Hartshorne and Wilburton and passengers were carried in wagons between those points. The coal mining business progressed rapidly and to protect shipments of money and to police the coal mines-- there was established the Choctaw Coal and Railway Police.

It was a fine looking set of men, who guarded and protected the properties--and whose chief was a tall and elegant Choctaw,

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of the name of Jack Ellis. Jack Ellis has been to my house many times; he has borrowed a buckskin Indian jacket from me to wear to many Indian plays and conventions. I still have the jacket which was made by an Indian in about 1854.

The town of South McAlester outstripped the old town of McAlester. Streets were laid out and finally the two towns operating side by side, under the laws of Arkansas then in force, consolidated by permission of the Government of the United States and since the town has been known as McAlester. Most of the population live in what was formerly South McAlester, on the Sittel Ranch, and in most deeds, property is described as lying in the south portion of McAlester, according to the Government plat of the city of McAlester.

The Choctaw Coal and Railway Company went broke in 1894 and was immediately taken over by the Rock Island Company. At the time the company went broke the line had been completed from McAlester, west to Oklahoma City and east to Fort Smith, Arkansas. I lost \$ 182,000.00 and in 1895 I went to New York and brought suit against

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the Choctaw Coal and Railway Company. They offered to compromise for \$175,000.00, but my lawyers advised me not to settle without the full amount. They took the case to Supreme Court and I didn't get anything. I suppose the lawyers were bought off.

I married Melvina Pitchlyn, Choctaw, September 3, 1883. She is the daughter of Captain William B. Pitchlyn, who was the nephew of Peter P. Pitchlyn, who represented the Choctaw Tribe for many years in Washington.