

IMEL, R. LEWIS.

INTERVIEW.

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Form A-(S-149)

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

Field Worker's name Elizabeth L. Duncan

This report made on (date) November 18, 1937.

1. Name R. Lewis Imel

2. Post Office Address Bucklin, Kansas.

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month _____ Day _____ Year _____

5. Place of birth _____

6. Name of Father _____ Place of birth _____

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother _____ Place of birth _____

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. Continue on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 13.

Elizabeth L. Duncan
Journalist
November 18, 1937

Interview with
R. Lewis Imel
Busklin, Kansas.

We started the store at Dayton, Oklahoma, in November, 1897. We had planned for some little time to start a store here. There was already a blacksmith shop owned by A. A. Langdale and his daughter who lived with her parents and ran the post office in the home.

Not having enough money ourselves, Eli Prather decided to go in with us. He had been in the store business in the east before coming to Oklahoma, where he and his family now lived on the homestead which he had staked in the Strip opening in Kay County.

A store building was bought in Wellington, Kansas, and moved and rebuilt on the southwest corner of Captain R. J. Biggs' place, where the Dayton post office and the blacksmith shop had become a community center. But before the stock of goods was purchased Mr. Prather decided to venture no further.

Then a new deal was planned with Jim Tears as partner and a stock of goods was bought from his father at Bellmont, Kansas.

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I had been sticking around home pretty close, but my wife and I talked it over and decided that it might be safe to make a trip to move the goods if I did not stay too long.

The \$360.00 was dug up and carefully sewed up in an old coat. We arrived the second evening in Belmont. The wagons were loaded the next morning and we started on the return. The two men, who followed each with a load, kept saying "What made you drive so fast?".

In the evening of the fifth day since I had been away from home, we drove up in the yard at my home to hear the cry of a new baby. Our little daughter, Opal, had won the race and beaten me home. And the men that were with me said, "Now we know why you drove so fast."

Mr. Starr proved to be a very helpful partner. His straight-forward, honest method of doing business made many friends. He organized a base ball nine to play at Dayton on Saturday afternoons and also a brass

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band. He got the boys together and taught them music and seemed to have a good time while he was doing it. That was a help to the community.

We could always count on Mr. Burcham, Luke Teachman, Bert Benway and others coming in after their mail about so often and staying for a chat with the crowd.

It was one day when a good crowd was in the store that S. H. Burcham gave this bit of experience. He and one of the neighbors decided to go over on the 101 ranch and plow sod. Mr. Burcham wondered what he could take to eat. That was a question. Finally his eyes fell on the old rooster. The rooster was properly prepared and they started out. They went by the store at Polk and his neighbor bought a twenty-five pound sack of corn meal, divided it and took part with him and sent a part back home, saying "It would have to run the family until he got some sod plowed." They arrived on the ranch, laid off their land and went to plowing.

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Mr. Burcham said he noticed another man, on another plot, who would get up in the wagon at meal time, but would never build a fire. So they went over to him and he was sitting in the wagon, eating wild grapes. That was all he had. Mr. Burcham invited him to bring the wild grapes and come to their camp so they could all eat together. The man said he must finish the land and take the money to his family who were depending on it. And yet these pioneer settlers were hopeful and cheerful.

The demand for goods kept increasing as the people raised good crops and our stock of goods was gradually added to. We had a stock of general merchandise.

Mr. Starr decided to sell his interest in the store and put in all his time on the farm. We took his part of the stock over.

It was at this time that we decided to try a stock of farm machinery. So a car load of machinery was bought in Kansas City, consisting of wagons,

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buggies, harrows, plows, wheat drills and so on.

Our stock at this time invoiced about \$1,000.00.

This car load of machinery sold very rapidly, mostly on time.

On account of my wife's health, we were compelled to move and change climate.

Mr. Eli Prather bought the stock of goods in the Fall of 1899. By the Spring of 1900 we had collected in what was on the books.

We left Dayton, with a warm place in our hearts for the many friends we had made during the seven years we lived in Oklahoma. We are now located near Bucklin, Kansas, on a farm.

I must also mention A. C. Davis as mail carrier. Our mail route went from Folk to Pond Creek, zig-zagging to reach the different post offices. It was, I think, in the winter of 1898 that A. C. Davis (colored) made this trip with the mail to Pond Creek and back in an open one-horse buggy, changing horses twice, as his custom was, in a blizzard with a high wind and snow,

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with snow drifted roads, a distance of sixty-four miles and 20 degrees below zero. M. C. Davis never stopped for rain, mud or snow. He made the trip, sixty-four miles, every day in the week but Sunday.

These names are the folks and families who traded with us at the Dayton store from 1897 to 1900, taken from the ledger used at that time. We still have the ledger.

Allen, Wm	Chaney, Chas	Foust, Geo
Allen, George	Clay, Henry	Fearing, Albert
Bateman, Henry	Carter, A. H.	Fuls, John
Benson, John	Corn, John	Gilbert, Sam
Benway, Bert	Cobb, Thomas	Gilmer, Morrison
Burcham, S. H.	Cross Bros.	Gilbert, Wm
Bobbitt, J. W.	Cruse, Floyd	Garner, Gib
Brown, Tom	Campbell, R. J.	Graham, W.
Booher, T. T.	Collins, W. A.	Gray, A. L.
Baird, A. L.	Caywood, Art.	Huffman, Mrs. Mattie
Brown, N. J.	Dodson, J. T.	Hockman, Lyman
Bobbitt, Howard	Dodson, Geo	Hockman, L
Bobbitt, George	Dixon, Clay	Hockman, E.O.
Briggs, R. J.	Davis, A. C.	Heusel, John
Bland, W. H.	Danford, Lee	Harney, Lee
Burcham, Ethel	Danford, Chas	Henshaw, Lee
Booher, Frank	Danford, Frank	Harney, J. A.
Brady	Dixon, John	Howard, Wm
Bland, John	Dickman	Hoisington, Mrs.
Barmon, Wm.	Dunn, Will	Henshaw, Pearl
Brown, Geo	Dorsett, Elmer	Howard, Lizzie
Barclay, James	Dorsett, J. R.	Harney, A. T.
Cowen, Geo	Edmondson, J. H.	Herron, Clint

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Ingmire, W. M.
 Johnson, J. W.
 Kirkpatrick, R. R.
 Kitte, J. A
 Langdale, A H
 Lee, Mack
 Long, Wm
 Lynch, W N
 Long, A L
 Lusk, M J
 Lansford, A C
 Moulton, Frank
 Majors, James
 Mosher, Henry
 McNeil, J E
 Miller, Eli
 Miller, Jim
 Miller, Wm
 Miller, W S
 Mowbray, Geo
 Martin, W P
 Marston, James
 McAlister, Levi
 Marston, Henry
 Marston, S A
 Majors, E L
 Meece, G M
 Miller, Dave
 Mason, C P
 Miller, Willie
 Meece, Jeff
 Tyree, Henry
 Teachman, Sam
 Vacin, Frank
 Waters, N T
 Wooley, Joe
 Warren, Susie

Meece, Lucy
 Morris
 Null, Rachel
 Noble, H B
 O'Mealey
 Prather, Elie
 Peebler, Herbert
 Pruitt, Walter
 Porter, D
 Porter, Findley
 Porter, Wallace
 Prather, John
 Prince, John
 Race, Chas
 Romine, A B
 Royse, Geo.
 Smith, Wm
 Smith, James
 Snider, Alva
 Shamp, Lester
 Snavely, Levi
 Snavely, John
 Simpson, J A
 Smith, A B
 Starr, J N
 Snider, Glenn
 Steel, P M
 Serviss, Floyd
 Thomas, James
 Utterback, J I
 Vacin, J O
 Woolcot, W.H
 Wade, E W
 Zody, W E
 Hugh Prather

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I was not present when the Sunday School was first organized in the sod school house south of the Dayton store a half mile, but my wife and I did attend after they had it in good running order.

There was a Sunday School in my sod shanty during the summer of 1894, but it only ran through the warm weather. This Sunday School was organized in 1894, in May after the opening of the Strip. One Sunday afternoon a large number of folks, neighbors were in the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Prather. Will, Tom and Anna, young folks in the home, made things very lively and the folks who could sing gathered around the organ and Miss Anna played and they sang church songs. It was very fine. All parts were sung, soprano, alto, tenor and bass.

It was that afternoon that a plan was made to have Sunday School. Then the next thing was to decide where to have it. No school house was yet built and there was no public places of worship.

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Finally, it was decided that they would meet the next Sunday 2:00 P. M. and have Sunday School in my half sod, half dugout, with comb roof, shingled and plastered inside.

So far so good, but how could we seat a crowd. Usually when more than one person came, he or she sat on the bed. I say this was a question on Monday as I viewed the situation alone. No lumber to make seats and over twenty miles to the railroad and no funds to buy with. I looked over the wood pile, selected the best small cottonwood logs, split them in the middle, bored holes and put in legs. They were rough but would beat standing up.

We told everybody we saw about the Sunday School on the following Sunday, which was a beautiful day. The bedstead, table, and so on were moved out and the log seats put in place. A horse was saddled and we rode up the Salt Fork Valley and made a circle swath, going from house to house. The people generally received the news gladly.

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At two in the afternoon they began to come, some walking, some on horseback, many came in wagons, with all they could haul. These were the folks who came to Oklahoma to get homes. They were a fine bunch, mostly strangers to each other. There were no public centers. No place for people to meet and get acquainted and everybody had been busy getting settled. Homes must be built, well dug, sod plowed. Everybody was busy but in all this was the friendly pioneer spirit that is found only in a new country. Folks brought their Bibles, Testaments and song books. No two song books were alike, but we got along with them.

It was at this point that I began to get uneasy. Here were the folks who had been invited out to Sunday School. I had counted on the folks who had helped make the plans to take the lead and carry on the work. Where were the folks who sang so beautifully? I kept waiting and looking for them to come. I became more depressed as they never came but everything

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went on nicely, with the exception that they insisted that I act as Superintendent of the Sunday School. I did not know how to get out with honor, but it was very plain to me I was getting in deeper all the time. Like Sampson, I had pulled the house down on me; I had been converted in December of the winter before but had not done any kind of church work.

One very difficult thing was to get teachers but there was generally a good feeling. It was decided to use Cook's Sunday School literature. A collection was taken up and this Sunday School continued with good attendance until in the Fall when we went back to Kansas. I told them to use the house and go on with it but they did not feel free to do so.

I still remember the last Sunday I knew I would be there. I had the work on my heart. I went down along the draw and knelt there in the tall grass and with tears prayed that God would take care of the work and nourish the seed that had been sown.

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It was in the Summer of 1895 that a man came to our home. (Wife had come to cast her lot with me that March). This man said that he was a Sunday School orgaizer and was planning to organize Sunday School at the Dayton sod school house, but he wanted the privilege of going on record as having organized the first Sunday School in that part of the country. I granted him the request. The people had started the first one, but it was not on record.

In the first settlement of our section there were no ministers and we missed them, but there was a tie, a close friendship, a sympathy for the ones in trouble or sorrow. In time of sickness we helped and stood together going into the homes, sitting up all night with the sick and helping in every way possible.

When death came into the home it was felt by all. In the Summer of 1895, ^{it} was very hot and many children passed away. I well remember a man who came to our place at this time and said, "Mr. Imel, a child has

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died over at a certain place and they want you to conduct the funeral." They were strangers to me, but I said, "I am not a minister." He said, "Yes, we know but we want you to come." I said, "I will go."

Wife and I took the Bible and found some Scripture suitable and went. I was then twenty-four years old, but had attended very few funerals. Mrs. Irwin Utterback was there helping in the home. She was practical. I asked her advice. She told me what I wanted to know. Scripture was read and a very short service and our hearts went out to the father and mother. We wept together and laid the little one to rest, and trusted Him who said "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." After that we were called several times in like manner.