

SMITH, MAUD E. (RICE)

INTERVIEW

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

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SMITH, MAUD E. (RICE). . . INTERVIEW.

Field Worker's name Mrs. Nora Lorrin El Reno, Oklahoma

This report made on (date) June 29, 1937. 1937

Name Mrs. Maud E. (Rice) Smith

Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma

Residence address (or location) 319 North Rock Island Street

DATE OF BIRTH: Month October Day 25 Year 1881

Place of birth Greenwich, Missouri

Name of Father Mr. T. B. Rice Place of birth October 17, 1839  
Bath County, Kansas

Other information about father Died July 25, 1911

Name of Mother Elizabeth M. Ridenhour Rice Place of birth April 29, 1849  
Wabash County, Indiana

Other information about mother Died April 13, 1929

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 \_\_\_\_\_

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Field Worker, Mrs. Nora Lorrin,  
June 29, 1937.

Interview with Mrs. Maud E. Smith,  
El Reno, Oklahoma.

I was born in Greenwich, Missouri, on October 25, 1881. My father, Mr. T. B. Rice, was born in Bath County, Kentucky, near Frankfort, October 17, 1839, and died July 25, 1911.

My mother, Elizabeth M. (Ridenhour) Rice, was born on the Wabash River in Wabash County, near the city of Wabash, Indiana, on April 29, 1849. Father and Mother were married August 9, 1869. It was an elopement and the couple were married in the middle of a big road near Sedalia, Missouri.

They met a stage coach there and stopped it, asking if there was a minister aboard it and there was. He got out of the conveyance and performed the ceremony in the middle of the road, just at sunup. In those days the elopers did not need a license; all they needed was a minister.

I lived with my folks at the place of my birth until I was five years old, then they moved to Kingman, Kansas, arriving there on October 5, 1886. My father was a carpenter

and builder and Kingman was a boom town so there was no dearth of work.

My chief ambition, when I was a little child, was to marry a rich man and Father thought it was funny for such a little girl to think of such things, much less to cherish such ambitions and he liked to tease me. While we were living in Kansas the proclamation was made opening up Oklahoma for settlement and Father told me that Oklahoma was the place for me to come, that I could come down here and marry a rich Indian chief and I took it in earnest and thought that would be all right.

We came to Oklahoma by covered wagon, bringing our cattle and belongings. We had two covered wagons and a buggy and a herd of registered short horn cattle. The cattle all died with the "Texas fever" after arriving here all right. There were about twenty-five cattle in the herd.

Before coming to Oklahoma, we moved from Kingman to Morton County in western Kansas, so we came into Oklahoma through the Panhandle or No Man's Land as it used to be called. We came through Beaver City and

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then through a deserted city, which had been quite a good sized town. I remember its empty buildings and remember that no one was living there.

A short time later we had an encounter with a band of Indians. There were some buffalo running with the cattle out there and the Indians were hunting them. The Indians stopped the travelers and talked awhile. There was a negro among them about thirty years old. Father talked to him and the negro told him that he had been taken captive when he was a little child and knew no people other than the Indians among whom he was raised. He did not know who he was. He had married an Indian squaw. Among this group of Indians was a small boy about my age and the Indians wanted to get the two <sup>of us...</sup> to shake hands with each other. Father induced me to shake hands with the boy and the Indians made the little boy shake hands with me, but both of us cried loud, long and copiously and the Indians thought it was funny and chuckled over it.

We came slowly, stopping and camping here and there to wash and iron. All this time I was on the look-out for my Indian chief. As we were nearing Camp Supply, Father looked up and saw three Indians on ponies dressed

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in their feathered regalia and he said to me, "Baby, here comes your Indian chief." I was so frightened that I was sick in bed for three days and right there gave up my ambition to marry an Indian chief. I was seven years old at the time. We passed through Supply and Woodward and came to a place they called Cantonment, and went on down to the river and found the most ideal place to camp. We arrived there a short time before sundown and there was plenty of water, nice trees, but the place where we camped was as bare as your hand. After making camp it was only a short time when the Indians began drifting in and settling for the night, they kept it up until there were a lot of them there on the camp grounds. We had camped inside the Indians "Stockade." Father was uneasy and put his wagons in a circle and placed our camping equipment and other belongings inside. We got our supper and then the Indian chief came over and extended his hand in greeting and said "How!"

Father took the Indian's hand and said "How John!" Any Indian whose name you did not know was called either John or Mary. The chief had his pipe and he offered it to Father, who accepted it and smoked with the Indian. We asked the Indian to have supper with us and he accepted and ate

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with us, but we were uneasy all night and the next morning went to Cantonment to get some supplies and the people where we bought the supplies told us that we need not have feared the Indians at all.

When those Indians smoke the pipe of peace with you, you are as safe as you would be anywhere. Safer than you would be in some places with white people.

We remained in the Stockade for three or four days. We kids played marbles with the little Indians and had a grand time. The Government had that country patrolled pretty thoroughly, having soldiers stationed about every ten miles for the protection of the white people.

On June 10, 1889, we landed at Kingfisher on Uncle John's Creek. In the fall of the same year, we came to El Reno, which had just one building, the oldest part of the Anstine Hotel. Across the river to the north was a very nice little town called Reno City. The first store building to go up in El Reno was a little red front grocery store, owned by the Campbell brothers, called the Red Front Store. It was just across the street south of the Anstine Hotel. When El Reno first started, the cowboys used to ride into the

restaurants on their horses and shoot the globes off the lamps while the people were eating their meals.

There was a seventeen year old cowboy who got into trouble here and shot the marshal and killed him and in the melee the young cowboy got shot in the arm and they put him in jail and he not only took the typhoid fever but his arm became infected so badly that it had to be amputated and it was removed by the simple process of sawing it off with a meat saw. He was sick in bed at the jail for weeks and weeks.

Father felt sorry for the boy and brought him half a gallon of milk every day and the boy lived to be sentenced to the penitentiary.

The Northern cattle would be brought down here and would invariably take the Texas fever and die. They died by the thousands. The Indians would take those dead carcasses and eat them and would sicken, break out with horrible sores, and the Indians died almost as fast as the cattle did until the Government took charge and put a stop to it. The Government feared that an epidemic might break out among the white people, too. Of course the white people did not



eat any of those dead cattle, but the Government feared disease among the Indians might become contagious and turn into an epidemic.

The Indians would build a fire in the center of the tent and then they would all sit around it.

The early settlers often went into the Indian camp sight-seeing (especially on Sundays) and to trade with the Indians. The Government would issue blankets, clothing, shoes, men's shoes, never women's, and it was legal to trade the Indians out of them if you could, also easy, because the Indians liked the white man's food, so my folks and lots of other people would cook up a lot of food, after these Government issues, and go to the Indian camps with it. It was no trick at all to trade for all the shoes, clothes, blankets, etc., that we needed and we got nearly all of our clothes that way. The Government issued a lot of cloth that they called Linsey and I have worn dresses made of it.

The Government issued the stuff to the Indians and the Indians were free to do what they pleased with it.

While I was in one of these camps one day, I noticed a couple of squaws, tending a large round iron pot that was

over a fire. I wondered what they were cooking and stepped closer to see. It was a pot full of beans and there were two bones sticking out of the pot, and one of the squaws took hold of one of the bones to stir the beans and she lifted the bone out and it was the shank of a horse with the hoof attached. These Indians were seasoning their beans with a couple of horses hooves, the piece which she had was a horse's hoof and the leg about up to the knee.

Another incident that occurred in El Reno happened in the little Red Front Store. A squaw had been coming there frequently, and she was bad to pilfer; she wore one of those large enveloping shawls and she would steal things and hide them under it. The men in this store decided to lay a trap for her so they set a bucket of jelly out enticingly and loosened the lid. We used to be able to buy a sort of synthetic jelly by the bucket; it was good and I don't know why it went out of style. The Indian squaw they were "laying for" came into the store and it wasn't long until she spied the bucket of jelly and slipped it under her shawl and headed for the door.

One of the Campbell boys yelled at her, "Hey! Mary!" He took after her, she ran and the lid came off the bucket of jelly and when they caught up with her she was a sight, with that jelly all over her; she couldn't very well deny the theft.

The boys didn't do anything to her, just scolded her and told her not to do it again.

It was a common sight to see the Indians sitting along the sidewalk, picking lice off of each other's heads; sometimes there would be a whole string of them at the same time and often they would sit there for half a day.

Father had a bottom farm with lots of trees and plenty of water.

There was lots of malaria in the early days; people were always having chills.

A squaw stopped at our house one day; she had a buckskin money-bag about eighteen inches long and just big enough around for a silver dollar to slip down in good and easy, and this bag was filled to the brim with silver dollars. She told Father that she wanted to buy a "Buck", meaning a white man. My twelve year old brother was standing near

taking it all in and he playfully snatched at her money-bag and got hold of it. My brother had no more than touched the squaw's money-bag than the squaw had a tomahawk brandished over his head. We never knew where she had the tomahawk hidden. Brother turned as white as a sheet: the squaw gave him a vicious look and left immediately, forgetting the "Buck" she was so intent on buying. My brother went to town later in the day and encountered her again in town. She again brandished her tomahawk at him and he came home and did not go back to town for several days.

Another time an Indian rode into the lot where Father was milking the cows. Father had an old hound dog and he asked the Indian if he wanted the dog; the Indian indicated that he did and my father gave the dog to him. The Indian took his lariat and tied it to the dog and then tied the other end of it to the pommel of his saddle and went lickety split for camp, sometimes the dog was on its feet and sometimes it wasn't. After he had gone, Father got curious about it as he had heard that the Indians would eat dogs. The Indian camp was over west of the railroad tracks, and there were no houses on either side of it for quite a

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distance so Father sent some of the children over where the camp was and they went close enough to the camp to see what had been done with the hound dog. It had been dressed and the Indians were preparing to cook it for supper.

In about 1893 Father and Mother took a trip through the Kickapoo country on our way to Shawnee and while on our way

Father said to Mother, "Look! there is a sight I want you to see." Out in a patch of stumps an Indian was plowing

with one horse and a double shovel plow. It was the way

he was dressed that was the sight. He had on a black Stetson

cowboy hat, a bright red shirt, with a man's vest buttoned

tight over it, making a sort of ruffle at the bottom. The

shirt was short; he had on a pair of high heeled boots and

not one other thing. Mother said it was about as funny a

sight as she had ever witnessed.

Father and Mother came here with us six children; we

gathered cattle bones and buffalo bones and trapped quail,

and would go to Kingfisher once a week to dispose of them.

There was a good market for them. We would trap the quail

and keep them alive until the morning of the day we intended

to sell them then we would pull off their heads and pack

them ready for market.

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I never got my rich Indian Chief, but I married Jack Smith in 1900. I lived here in El Reno, keeping the home fires burning while he was running his ferries and attending the business end of our partnership.