

SMITH, JULIA ANN

INTERVIEW

#4944

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Form A-(S-149) 4944. 205

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

Field Worker's name Anna R. Barry,

This report made on (date) July 9, 1937

1. Name Julia Ann Smith.

2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 506 South Miles St.,

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month April Day 21 Year 1854

5. Place of birth Sigourney, Iowa.

6. Name of Father Burford Clark Place of birth Kentucky

Other information about father Buried in Kansas

7. Name of Mother Amenda (Samson) Clark Place of birth Ohio

Other information about mother Buried near Ringwood, Okla.

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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Anna R. Barry,
Interviewer,
July 9, 1937.

An Interview with Julia Ann Smith.
506 South Miles, El Reno, Okla.

I was born April 21, 1854, in Keokuk County, Iowa, and at the age of seventeen I married and with my husband moved to Cloud County, Kansas, in 1871. Here we engaged in farming until the news spread over the Nation of Oklahoma being opened for settlement.

On September 1, 1893, we loaded our two wagons with a few necessary things that we would need, such as bedding, cooking utensils, clothing, a few farm implements. We also brought four head of horses, a cow and a hound dog. Traveling with our family were two other families. We came by the way of Salina, Kansas, on down to Kiowa then into Alva, where ^{we} homesteaded.

September 16, 1893, the day of the run for the opening of the Cherokee Strip, my husband thought it

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wise not to make the run; he felt he would be able to file on a claim after the run; therefore, after the run we staked a claim of one hundred and sixty acres of land, seven miles west of Alva.

On our way down to Oklahoma, my husband was offered twenty-five dollars for our hound dog, I felt as though he should take it, as twenty-five dollars in those days was a lot of money, but he refused, saying wild game was so plentiful that he could make quite a lot, hunting with the dog. The first evening we camped near a small creek. After making camp we turned the dog loose as he had been tied during the trip, and when untied he ran for a mile or two and during this time he ate some poison that previously been placed out for wolves. After a few hours the dog died, this was our first shock of the many hardships we later faced.

When I came to the Cherokee Country it was a new and undeveloped district; the plow had not turned

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the furrows in the fields, and the work of improvements had scarcely begun. We lived in a tent until we could build a dugout by digging in the side of a hill; the front of this half-dugout was built with cotton wood slabs, and it was then covered with one inch boards and these were covered with sod with a foot or so of stove pipe protruding from the roof.

This house was only twelve by fourteen feet with a small window in the north side. This was a little extra to what some had at this period. A two room frame house was considered a fine home.

We lived in this half dugout two years; then the third year we had begun to prosper a little, and we added to the front of this dugout by erecting walls of sod on the sides and putting in a new front, the old one serving as a partition between the two rooms. This was considered a swell dwelling. A very modern organ stood in one corner of the parlor. This organ and a fiddle made the music for our dances. The day before the dances someone would ride through the country, telling

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the young folks about the dance and when the dance began the clay floor speedily responded to the cawing of the many feet, and there arose a cloud of dust, but we didn't mind; we enjoyed ourselves just as much as the young people of today, who dance on polished floors and have the most perfect system of ventilation.

In the summer late in the evening, after supper dishes were washed the family usually gathered in the yard to spend the evening. We lived near a small creek and from a tree on the creek below a screech owl sent up his long quavering call, a bat darted past in the dusk, and away over on the hill, a hound bayed.

By this time lumber had been shipped into Alva. We bought enough of the very cheapest lumber to build a fifteen by eighteen foot room. We also built a barn. I want to say that I was more proud of that one-room than I was of our five room house in later years.

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We had church every so often, usually at a neighbor's home, about twice a month. After we moved into our little frame shack, church and school were held in this half-dugout for two years. The schools when first established usually lasted a three month period, but as people became more settled and homes were established, they became more interested in schools and churches. The first two years every child just brought what books he could find around the home; the terms of school then began to last over a period of six months.

It was very common to find a woman and her children alone and unprotected holding down their claim while the husband and father was off at work in some sawmill or freighting. Sometimes the man would be away as much as six months at a time and his family would be several miles from the nearest neighbor. To be sure, women and children were always armed and knew how to handle a pistol, but they rarely had a more deadly use for a gun than the killing of a jack-

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rabbit or a prairie dog. We usually complained more of loneliness than of fear. We were provided with ponies and thought nothing of a horse-back ride of ten to twelve miles.

Water in this community was very scarce. We dug a well one hundred and twenty feet deep; the water in this vicinity was mostly all gyp water and people would come for miles to haul water from this well; it also was a good camping place for people traveling through the country and driving cattle to market. People would come to this well and bring their family washing to launder. After the survey was made, it was found that this well was in the center of the road and later they put a large tank and this was considered a community well. My husband's name being Smith and since there were several other "Smiths" in this same neighborhood he was called "Middle of the Road Smith."

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During the year 1893, many poor emigrants and settlers came from Kansas, with nothing but an old wagon a worse span of horses, a large family of helpless children, a cow or two, and a few dogs- nothing else, no money, no work of any kind whatever to be had; most of the game was all killed off, except the quail and rabbits. Our first three years were especially dry ones and it looked at times as if starvation was staring us in the face, but in later years most of us prospered, although some became dissatisfied, mortgaged their homes and later sold out and left .

We bought six milk cows, three of which died with Texas fever and we had one team, twenty-five chickens and twenty-one dollars, with seven in the family to feed and clothe. The first year we raised citrons, stock-beets, beans, turnips, we raised some sweet potatoes by soaking corn cobs in water wrapping the sweet potato vines around the cobs and placing

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them carefully in the ground to grow. We sold one of our teams and bought cattle with the money.

While on the subject of food, in the early days it was usually a temptation (especially to young children) to eat the seeds and fruits they found growing wild and the pioneers had a saying that one only needed "a rifle and a sack of salt", to live comfortably in the wilderness, as far as food was concerned, perhaps a good many did not have even the sack of salt.

There were, of course, numerous wild growths, like mushrooms and many varieties of wild berries, most persons are familiar with walnuts and beech-nuts, chestnuts and in many places, chinquapins. I hear all of you saying "and hickory nuts!" for they were always favorite nuts. But I can't forget how many pecks of "pig-nuts", my children lugged home thinking they were hickory nuts, only to have them thrown in the fire because they were too bitter to

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eat. So I know we don't all know our hickory nuts. Various oils such as beech, butter or walnut fats were pounded out in the old mortars and used by the Indians as we used olive oil. They also ground chestnuts into a meal, to be mixed into tamales with cornmeal, and baked them in the corn husks under a bed of hot ashes. Acorns were fed to the pigs, because they are too highly seasoned with tannin to be eaten. It is probably necessary to mention the persimmon, though those of us who have puckered our mouths trying to eat them will not be interested. Persimmons must be entirely ripe and good. My children used to like the little red haws that had to be nibbled away from a hard center seed. The wild cherries and plums were usually very sour. Wild crab apple were fine for jelly and preserves. The mulberry on the other hand, is too sweet and sticky and must be used with other tart fruit, but as the years passed people began to plant orchards and cultivate them. Therefore, we don't notice wild fruits nearly so much, nevertheless, they seemed like a life-saver to us in the

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early "90's".

In later years we built a nice five room house on our farm, fixed nice out buildings, a good orchard.

In 1905, we sold our farm and since my husband's death, I have been living among my children.