

HUNT, HESSIE

INTERVIEW

#9261

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Investigator, Augusta H. Custer,
November 22, 1937.

Interview with Hessie McClellen Hunt
North Broadway,
Geary, Oklahoma.

Born April 5, 1883,
Selby County, Tenn.

Parents Mack McClellen, Tenn.
Was a slave.
Lou McClellen, Tenn.

I have been a widow for ten years. I came to Kingfisher County with my parents in 1892. I was nine years of age at that time. We came through from the Indian Territory on the first train that came to Kingfisher. There were lots of other people on that train as everyone was getting ready to make the run for land.

I remember the little log house on the claim Father got in the Udora settlement. We did not have much furniture and could not have all got inside the house if we had had many things. The stove and a table and bed for Daddy and Mother and the baby. There was always a baby. Father had fourteen children by my mother and a step-mother.

The house had a roof of poles with dirt on top of them. It made a cool roof in summer but the hard rains came through

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and the centipedes and scorpions worked around in the dirt and sometimes fell through onto the floor. Everywhere you could find snakes around the wood pile, in the corn fields, down along the river, when we went for wild grapes and plums, and they sometimes came into the house.

My father was just like a water dog; he could find water where most people thought there wasn't any. He would notice the willows and coarse grasses and he said those things indicated water near the surface. He dug around and found a good spring of water on our place, not far from the house, and we had plenty of good water.

We had to grub out the yucca or soap weed and we would peel off the coarse rough bark from the root, take it to a gyp rock and pound it up and use that for soap. We would wash our clothes and use this soap for bathing. This makes a nice lather but unless it is strained the water is full of the small stringy fiber of the roots. This fiber would blow out of our clothes.

Then we had what was called "Blue Stripe" and this material would fade. Mother bought it to make shirts and dresses. We would save every scrap of this when garments -

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were cut out and use them in the water in place of bluing when we rinsed the clothes.

We went to the plum patches and gathered wild plums. No did not know what fruit jars were. Mother would cook the plums and wild grapes and put them in buckets and seal them. It was a wonder that we were not poisoned from eating from these buckets. If the plums and wild grapes did not keep well we ate them to get the sugar that was mixed with the fruit.

There was plenty of deer when we first came here and one day I was out in the woods and saw a small fawn. I ran after it and ran and ran and finally after about two hours it ran into some wild vines, it was tired, and so was I, but there was where I managed to get hold of it. I took it in my arms and carried it home.

Mother cried when she saw it and said she knew the mother would grieve over the loss of her fawn. It was the prettiest little animal I had ever seen, light tan with darker brown spots on the sides and a dark stripe down the back and large innocent looking eyes. We kept it for several months and then a white man named Walter Kelley heard of it and came to the house and wanted to trade or buy it for his son to play with. We all cried but decided to take a nice two-year-old pony and \$20.00.

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The boy had harness that they had made for him and he would drive the deer to a small cart. Then one day the deer got scared and ran from some dogs, and fell in a well and was killed.

I can remember that there were lots of wild turkeys, and the wild cats would howl in the night and we children would huddle up-closer to each other as we lay on the floor on a comfort or a pile of cotton.

I remember when we first came, and before Father bought a plow, he made a wooden plow, and my sister and I would drag this plow and he held the handles. Mother would follow along behind and drop the seeds in the furrows and cover them with her foot. That was the way we had to do when we first came to this state.

Indians used to come to our house and we were afraid of them. They would come to beg for food. We did not have any too much ourselves. But when they came in the house we went out and gave them full possession. They would take what they could find and we did not say a word. They rode horses with two horns on their saddles.

When I got older I would go to the Indian dances and then I was not afraid of them any more as I had many good friends among the Indians. The dances were held at night and after dark

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I would put on some moccasins that I had made and wrap a shawl around me and dance with them. The colored folk would say, "Is HESSIE dancing?" To make sure that I was, or was not, they would strike matches and look at our feet; that was the only way they could tell me as my feet were so much longer than the feet of the Indian women. Their feet are short and dumpy. There were always twelve men in the center of the circle beating tom-toms.

I used to catch terrapins and sell them to the Indians; the large ones for 10 cents and the small ones for 5 cents.

When I was older and was staying at Left Hand's, an Indian agent named White came out to visit them quite often. One day they pitched a big feast and had many fat puppies; these were cooked by boiling. They were all out in a brush arbor and part of it was enclosed with canvas tents. I wanted to see what they were doing so I slipped around and just happened to stop behind Mr. White. The Chief, Left Hand, had on his robes and stood and made a speech to which they all listened with respect. Then an Indian took those puppies and quartered them. He had a stack of pie tins for plates, a pan of salt and the soup in a kettle and some light bread. This light bread was

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not sliced, but he broke it up with his hands and served each one a helping of dog meat, some salt, some soup and a chunk of light bread. Mr. White ate with them.

I have seen the Indian women take a small piece of biscuit dough and roll it in their hands, then, they would start to beat it out round and thin by throwing it in the palm of one hand and pressing with the fingers of the other hand. Then they would be sitting down and they would bare one knee and spread the dough over the knee and keep patting it until it was so thin that they could see the color of their knee through the dough. Then they would take a knife and cut in four parts and fry it in hot lard or tallow. This makes a crisp, good bread.