

McGINTY, THOMAS R. (Mrs.)

INTERVIEW

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224

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

Field Worker's name Elsie A. Norris

This report made on (date) September 7 1937

1. Name Mrs. Thomas⁴, McGinty

2. Post Office Address Guthrie, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 1809 West Cleveland

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month January Day 4 Year 1857

5. Place of birth Glasgow, Kentucky

6. Name of Father George T. Clack Place of birth Baron County, Ky.

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Pamelia Ann Settle Place of birth Glasgow, Ky.

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 _____.

Elsie A Morris
Interviewer,
September 7, 1937.

An Interview with Mrs. Thomas R. McGinty
18 9 West Cleveland, Guthrie, Oklahoma.

When we heard that the Indian Territory was to be opened to settlement we were living in the Red River Valley, near Bonham, Texas. The climate was very unhealthful and not one of the family was well. We had lost one child and if the rest of us lived we must leave there at once. We had nothing to lose, so why not take a chance on securing a claim in the Indian Territory?

Loading a covered wagon with things that would be most useful to us, we started northward with our three children hoping to reach the line in time for the "Run". We drove a stout team of horses to the wagon and a light saddle horse was taken along. On this saddle horse my husband, Tom, was to make the race for a claim.

On account of the poor health of the family much time was lost on the way and we reached the line the day following the big "Run". Disappointed but still hopeful, we pushed on northward until we reached Oklahoma City where we camped two weeks and looked for a vacant claim on which to file.

2

Finding none, we continued northward to Guthrie and camped on the banks of the Cottonwood River, about where Cleveland Avenue crosses the river. By this time we had but twenty dollars left and it would take most of that to file if we found a vacant claim.

While in camp in Guthrie Tom learned from mutual friends that his brother, Pat McGinty, whom he had not seen nor heard from for more than ten years, and W. W. Fry, a boyhood friend, had taken claims northwest of Guthrie on Rock Creek. To find them was the next step. There were no roads nor land marks to guide him but he saddled the pony and started on his journey.

After many weary hours of riding, aided by the directions given him by a friendly cowboy who knew the country well, he finally found Fry's camp on Rock Creek only to find him gone. He learned that some news-carrier had told Pat he (Tom) was camping in Guthrie and that very morning Pat had saddled his mule, Betsy, and with his pack mule, Bid, following was on his way to Guthrie to find us.

Pat stayed in Guthrie and Tom at the Fry camp a few days, each thinking the other would return. Finally, Pat having an opportunity, sent word to Tom that he would stay in Guthrie until Tom came back.

3

Bright and early the next morning Tom started on the return trip to Guthrie, reaching camp soon after noon, and what a reunion they had.

After a few days we moved out to Pat's claim. There were two vacant claims in the same section with Pat's, so we picked what we thought was the better one and after several trips to Kingfisher and waiting in line at the land office for hours, Tom finally succeeded in filing on our claim June 5, 1889. Once, after standing in line a long time, the window closed with only three ahead of him. This meant another trip.

In the meantime a long dugout had been dug into a bank with the back part of the dirt roof on a level with the higher ground and the door on a level with the lower land in front. We divided this into two rooms by hanging canvas curtains made from an old wagon sheet. The floor and walls were dirt and a blanket was hung up for a door.

We were in constant fear of wild animals and Indians; although we were never molested by either.

One day a man came to the door and asked if we had a gun, saying he had seen a mountain lion stretched out in the warm sunshine on an old dead log a short distance down the

4

creek, if he could borrow a gun he could kill it. But as we had no gun the lion finished his nap in safety.

Another anxious moment came when several cowboys came along the trail, which passed just back of our dugout, with a herd of cattle. When they reached the crossing on our side of the creek the cows refused to cross and began milling. It was some time before the cowboys could get a leader to cross the creek so the rest would follow. Our dugout being on a level with the ground there was great danger that they would run over the dugout and break it in. The cowboys were very careful that this did not happen.

During this time the men had managed to break about forty acres of sod on the two claims. A part of it was planted in corn which made a fair crop. A few pumpkins and cucumbers were also planted. These were planted late but we had some pumpkin pies, pumpkin butter and pickles anyway.

By this time our food supply was getting low so Tom and Pat had to go away and find work. They worked for the railroad company at Kingfisher awhile and another time at Guthrie where there was much building going on. The children and I went with them to Guthrie and camped out, cooking our food on a campfire.

Later in the fall they went to Kansas to shuck corn. While there they used corn for fuel. This seemed very wasteful to us as we had very little grain in the Territory.

That year the blue stem grass grew higher than a horse's back. Before the men went to Kansas they had put up a nice stack of hay for winter feed. While they were gone a prairie fire swept across the country, burning everything. My sister and I got the children into the back of the dugout but we nearly perished from the heat. The children were frantic while the fire was passing over us.

Prairie chickens and quail were quite numerous that fall. A neighbor invited us to eat a wild turkey dinner with them on Thanksgiving Day. We gratefully accepted the invitation. On Thanksgiving morning we started out early to walk the two miles to the neighbor's home facing a cold north wind. My sister and I took turns about carrying the baby, a sturdy boy three and a half years old. The other children walked. It was a hard, cold trip, but we made it. All day we hoped that the men would come by from Kansas and pick us up for the trip home. But they didn't come and we walked, starting early enough to make it before dark. Going home was not so

6

bad as the cold wind was at our backs. A few days later the men came home bringing with them two butchered hogs and other food supplies together with feed for the teams and thus we got through the first year.

We saw wild deer at different times that first year but I do not remember that we ever killed one.

The following spring a neighbor, Mr. Armstrong, whose first name I cannot recall, let us have a dozen hens to raise what chickens we could. I cannot remember how many we raised but in the fall we gave him back his hens, a half dozen chickens besides and had a nice start of our own for the next spring.

We got our start of cattle by taking three cows to feed and care for. We got half of the increase and the milk and butter was a great help to us. The cows belonged to Mrs. Poindexter who had a claim on the section east of us.

The fall of the second year the sod which had been turned the first year was replowed and harrowed down and twenty acres planted in wheat. We bought ten bushels of seed wheat from a neighbor, G. G. Morris, and ten bushels from the railroad company for seventy cents per bushel. We gave a note payable from the crop. The wheat was broadcast

7

on the ground and harrowed in. It furnished some pasture and when harvested and threshed averaged about sixteen bushels to the acre.

During the second summer my husband and our second child, Nora, took ill with typhoid fever. Miles from a doctor with no telephones or conveniences necessary in caring for the sick, this was a serious matter. The only way to get a doctor was to leave the name and the numbers of the section, township and range of the land at the doctor's home about ten miles away. As soon as he could, the doctor would start out to find the place. Dr. Lawhead made three trips to our locality before he found us. He was about to give up finding us the third time when he heard a mule bray. Going in the direction of the sound he found the dugout, hidden in the tall grass on the hillside. He examined the sick, left a supply of medicine and after a time both recovered. I do not recall that he made a second visit.

As soon as it was possible we moved out of the dugout into a log house, consisting of one large room. We lived about eight miles from timber. Tom would go early in the morning and work all day cutting and trimming trees. At night he brought home a load of logs for the new house or

wood for fuel. When he had enough logs ready we took two wagons, he driving one team and I the other, and brought them home.

Then the logs had to be hewn and notched and with the help of the neighbors the logs were laid up into the walls. This was called a "house raising". The walls were chinked, that is small chunks of wood driven between the logs, and plastered. The plastering was made of gypsum, a white substance found in layers in the red hills a few miles west.

After every rain this had to be repaired as the rain washed it away, leaving holes in the walls. The roof of our house was made of clap-boards, rough boards a little larger than shingles and much thicker. At first we had no floor but a little later one was laid of rough boards.

We finally got a rag carpet by tearing old garments into strips tacking the strips together and winding into balls. When we had enough we bought the warp, took the balls and warp to a carpet weaver and had it woven into a carpet all in one long piece, a yard wide. This was cut into strips the length of the room, the strips sewed together, and the carpet stretched on the floor, with straw under it to keep the rough boards from wearing it out and tacked to the floor all around the walls.

Our beds were of straw or corn husks for a long time. We finally started raising geese and made feather beds and pillows. When the girls married, each was given a feather bed, a pair of pillows, and a cow.

Our first school house was a log one. The people donated their time and labor to build it. The seats were rough boards placed around the walls. The books were nearly all different, having been brought from many different states. Our first teacher was Mrs. Cora Hougland, whose husband had a claim near the school house. And I don't think any school ever had a better teacher.

Sunday school was held in the school house and every Sunday the children and I went to Sunday School. About once a month a minister came and held services. Reverend McNally was the only preacher near and his services were required in other communities, too.

We bought what clothing was necessary. Some relatives in Kentucky, where I was born, sent us a big box of clothing. Besides the ready-to-wear there were yards of muslin, outing, calico, with thread, buttons, etc., to be made up. This was a great help in solving the clothes problem.

Our nearest post office and store, then known as

10

Columbia, Indian Territory, was seven miles southwest. Many times I have mounted our faithful sorrel horse, "Dow", with the baby in my lap and another behind me, and made the round trip bringing home things we needed from the store. Once I took a bucket with me and brought home a setting of turkey eggs by hanging the bucket bail over my arm.

The only newspaper we had was the twice a week "Republic".

Year after year went by, all about the same. Gradually we became a little better fixed, moving from the log house when we were able to build a two-room frame house and adding to it as we needed more room for a growing family.

Four more children were born to us, one girl and three boys, one boy dying in infancy. That left six children to be fed, clothed, and educated. They were Elsie, Nora, Clarence, the three we brought with us, and Florence, Erle, and Bryan who were born in Oklahoma.

We sent them to school but at first there were only terms of three months, then six and finally seven months. We sent Elsie to Junction City, Kansas, to stay with Tom's sister for one year's schooling. To give the children better school advantages we sold one eighty of our land, bought a little house ^{at} Mulhall and the children and I moved to town. Tom

1A

would come after us on Friday and bring us back to town Sunday evening or Monday morning. The distance was fourteen miles, quite a trip in a wagon.

After a year in the Mulhall school Elsie began teaching and the following year Nora was ready to teach. This helped out a lot. We went back to the farm and sent the younger children to the district school. When Erle and Bryan were ready for a better school we moved to Stillwater, where they entered A. and M. College. After that was over we returned to the farm and carried on until we had to give up hard work.

We lived in Lovell awhile, moving from there to Guthrie, about 1915. We are now living at 1809 West Cleveland, Guthrie, in a five-room modern bungalow. A maid does the work and cooks for us, as I am almost blind and Tom's eyes are not much better. But with a radio, a telephone, a few callers (we have lovely neighbors) and the children's visits, we manage very nicely and are thankful for what we have.

We still own eighty acres of our homestead and eighty acres in section 9, just east of our homestead, which replaced the eighty that we sold to send the children to school.