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AUSTIN, MARY R. . . INTERVIEW

10496

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

AUSTIN, MARY R.

INTERVIEW.

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Field Worker's name Zaidee B. Eland.

This report made on (date) April 20, 1938. 1938

1. Name Mary R. Austin.

2. Post Office Address Altus, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 220 East Broadway.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month February Day 21 Year 1868.

5. Place of birth North Carolina.

6. Name of Father Mac D. Hensley. Place of birth North Carolina.

Other information about father

7. Name of Mother Mira A. Byrd. Place of birth North Carolina.

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

Mrs. Austin's husband, Dave S., was born in Arkansas November 5, 1862. He was the son of William King Austin, born in Oklahoma, and Elizabeth McKinney born in Arkansas.

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Zaidée B. Eland,
Journalist,
April 20, 1938.

Interview With Mary R. Austin,
220 East Broadway,
Altus, Oklahoma.

There was an immigrant train formed in Wise County, Texas, to come to Oklahoma to file on land just after the decision giving Greer County to Oklahoma. There were thirteen wagons and a hack in the train. We intended to take our time and enjoy our trip through for we understood that there was no hurry as there was plenty of land for all but it was late in the year and we began to encounter bad weather from the start.

My husband's father and my own father with several of my brothers and their families were in this train. We all had tents and would camp and pick up pecans or the men would go hunting and we really intended to have a good time. We came into the Territory by way of a cable flat-boat across the Red River. I do not know where it was located but do know it was away east of Duncan. All other streams had to be forded. We did not always camp together

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but tried to not be too far apart. I had two small children at the time and one night we were camping alone. We built the fire in front of the tent so that the tent would be slightly warmed; the tent was always stretched by the side of the wagon. I was nursing one of the babies while the other little fellow was standing by my side and Mr. Austin was currying one of the horses. We had a little dog with us that gave the first warning that wild animal was approaching. It was some kind of a large cat, perhaps a catamount or panther. When the dog barked the horses scented the animal and reared and broke away running. I grabbed the little tot standing by me and got into the wagon, I never knew how, while the runaway horses completely bowled Mr. Austin over. By the time he could pick himself up and got his gun the animal had disappeared into the thick brush. There was no real damage done for Mr. Austin had no trouble in catching his horses again but it was a lot of excitement and scare.

One day we traveled and traveled but could not find water and the night grew so very dark we decided to camp without water. We hated to do this for we knew the

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horses were very thirsty but there seemed nothing else to do so we pulled out of the road in what seemed to be a little clearing. When the daylight came we saw we were camped in an Indian graveyard and our wagon was right over a grave, while only about a quarter of a mile farther was a nice little running creek where there was plenty of water.

At Duncan, we were delayed four days on account of the snow and two of our children took the Lagrippe and came near dying.

We had to stay here so long that we got out of corn, so Horace Jefferson, his wife and two children and Mr. Austin, our children and I decided to drive out into an Indian settlement and try to buy some corn. We found a nice place near an Indian village to camp and the men folks went in to see if they could bargain for corn. We did not expect them to be gone very long but time kept passing; it was getting late in the afternoon and we became very much frightened for fear the Indians had killed our husbands.

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Mrs. Jefferson said to me, "Mary, you stay here with the babies, I am going to see what is wrong with our man". I said, "No you are not; if anything has happened to our men you are going to drive your team out of here and I am going to drive mine and we will at least save the lives of our children". But the men folks came in about another hour. The Indian had been on a deer hunt and brought in several deer and our men were waiting for them to skin the deer so we might have a hind quarter. That was the very best meat I ever tasted in my life. We had fried venison steak for supper and stayed right there all night. They had bargained for the corn, also, so we were very happy.

After we got our dugout fixed and a well dug, my husband went over to Mangum to file legally. It snowed and blew so I thought, of course, that he had stayed in Mangum but he was anxious about us and had tried to get home. He got hopelessly lost in the storm and got frightened, so stopped and camped for the night and he made camp in less than a half mile of our dugout.

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Once when my husband was over in the nation getting wood and I was alone with the children at night, the wolves howled and barked so I became so frightened that I put the children's bed on the floor and nailed the slats from the bed across the dugout door to keep the wolves out. In reality I don't suppose you will have gotten one of those wolves to have come down the dugout steps for anything, although they were free to run over the top whenever it suited them.

SNAKES.

Snakes were everywhere. I was going to the garden one day and heard a rattle. One of the little boys was with me, so I put him behind me for safety until I could locate the snake. Then I got a buffalo horn and killed it and took the rattlers to the house to prove what I had done. We killed seventeen rattlesnakes in and around our dugout the first year.

CHICKENS.

My mother sent me 20¢ in a letter to buy stamps to write to her. We did not live over twenty-five or thirty

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miles apart but did not get to see each other very often. I took that 20¢ and bought calico and made a pretty sun-bonnet which I sold to a neighbor for 40¢. I got pretty speckled calico and kept making bonnets and selling them until I had enough money to get one dozen hens. I paid twelve and one half cents apiece for the hens and the woman I bought them threw in the rooster.

I had lived in this dugout and made down beds for four years and began to wish for a house on the top of the ground. I now had plenty of chickens so I sold some and bought turkey eggs. I raised seventy-five turkeys and sold them for \$1.00 apiece, netting me \$75.00. My husband went to Quanah and bought lumber to build two rooms about the ground which he built just in front of the dugout and I took my \$75.00 and got me some furniture. Did I feel proud! You see the nice brick home I live in now and how I have it furnished but this never gave me the thrill that two rooms above the ground and that nice furniture gave me then.

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CHURCH AND SCHOOL.

We had neither church nor school very near us so the neighbors all got together and made up money for the lumber for a school house that could be used for a church also. Pappy Aaron gave us two acres of land to build the school house on and to use for a cemetery. The house blew away a long time ago and was never built back but they still bury in the cemetery. The first body laid to rest here in the Victory Graveyard was a young man about nineteen years old. He was sick when he came into the country and I do not think that anyone really knew what was the matter with him. The one lone grave was there a long, long time.

Real near us was a bachelor named John White who had filed on land. He was a smallish like man, very quiet but friendly. I do not know just how it happened but I got to doing his laundry when I did mine, for you know men folks don't properly know how to keep their clothes. By and by a man named Roy Newman and his wife came along and filed on an adjoining claim to John White and White and

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Newman worked together quite a bit. They went off down in Texas, as the story went, to see about buying some stock and White did not come back. Newman claimed that White had sold to him all his improvements, including team, etc. The country was pretty well settled up by now; we could stand on the top of our dugout and count the tops of nine other dugouts. The neighbors never thought much about White's disappearance and time went on. I had some of White's clothes that I had to launder when he vanished and Mrs. Newman came over to my house one day and offered to trade me some quilt blocks for these clothes, saying she knew White was never coming back. This struck me as funny, and I said, "How do you know White will never come back?" I thought she acted confused, so when my man came in that night I told him about it and put him up to get another man and go over to the Newman's and ask for Mr. White which they did. As I have said, White was a small man while Newman was a tall man. When Newman came out to see what Mr. Austin wanted he was wearing a pair of White's trousers for he

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could not make the tops of the pants even go into the tops of his boots properly. Well, Mr. Austin did not think he acted very natural when asked about White so they decided to look around a little. The first thing they noticed was a lot of wagon tracks leading from White's well back out on the prairie so Mr. Austin asked Mr. Newman about them. Newman first said people had been hauling water, but when the men looked into the well they saw it had been filled up with rocks so they turned on Newman and he said, "Yes, I have just filled it up; I got tired of people coming in here for water". Well we thought that suspicious, so the next morning several of the neighbors decided they would dig out that well and see just what was in it. When morning came Newman had left the country; his wife said he had only gone to Vernon. Before they got all the rocks out they began to pull out bloody bed clothing, and of course, they found White's body. When they got the body out some one had to go to Mangum to get the officers to come for an inquest. It was in plain sight of my home and I could

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not bear to stay there alone for all the men in the whole community were there so I took my five small children and went over to Mrs. Brisban's and we all stayed in her dugout, making beds down on the floor for the children. Mrs. Brisban said she was glad I came for she did not want to stay alone, either, and didn't blame me a bit for feeling so badly for Mr. White seemed almost like our own kin.

Baylock, our sheriff, started immediately for Vernon after Newman. I do not remember where he found him, but not at Vernon, but he brought him back here for identification and Mr. White's became the second body laid to rest in our cemetery.

When the Welling branch of the railroad was built they made their headquarters at our house. I kept and fed those men for eight months or more. My baby daughter who was four years old carried the stakes just to say she had helped build that road. I do not own the original homestead quarter now but do own several other quarter sections of land in Jackson County. I guess we had some hardships but my life has been full and happy and we have plenty.