

McMAHAN, MARGIE PARKER

INTERVIEW 8918

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FIELD WORKER ZAIDEE B. BLAND
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INTERVIEW WITH MARGIE PARKER McMAHAN
Altus, Oklahoma
501 North Main Street.
Born August 5, 1859, Texas.

Father's name Lawson Parker
Born Tennessee.
Mother's name Elizabeth Airs
Born Tennessee.

Mr. McMahan and I were traveling around over the country for his health and it was a mere accident that we stopped at old Frazier and became helpful in the building of this country.

We had our wagon all shipshape for living and even had our Jersey cow always tied to the back of the wagon so we could have milk where ever we might wander.

This was a beautiful country. The grass was luxuriant and the land was getting pretty well dotted with dugouts, when we began a trek across it one Spring.

We crossed both Red Rivers and made a camp near a mountain not far from where Granite is now. Here

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we lingered for several months but as the fall of the year drew near we decided that we had better start south again for the cold months.

As we neared the crossing of Salt Fork of Red River one of our horses seemed very ill.

We camped near a school house and the horse died and ^{we} were delayed until we could get another one.

In the meantime, school time drew near and it was learned by some of the men who lived in this vicinity that Mr. McMahan had been a school teacher in Tennessee. So, he was approached by one of the trustees of the neighborhood relative to teaching the school for the winter. There was little money to be had from the state of Texas but they agreed that if Mr. McMahan would stay and teach the school the citizens would supply enough with the public money to make the salary \$200.00 for a six month term of school and furnish a little house for us to live in. We agreed and there we camped for that six months and at the end of the school term we bought out a little

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stock of drugs which a doctor had and added a few groceries and some dry goods. I do not remember how many terms of school Mr. McMahan taught.

We filed on land a mile and one half north of the school house and built a house. We added to this house until it became a nine room house. The house still stands although we do not own it at this time.

In the time of the great flood our house was on a little higher ground than the houses around us and was used as a refugee station. There was not standing room either up or down stairs during that night of horror and in the morning there was not a building left standing in the little town called Frazier. Every one escaped with their lives in our community, however. It had not rained so much here but the cloudburst was farther north and when morning came there was an expanse of water

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four or five miles wide across the oily Red River rolling and tumbling toward the south. As we watched this water; small shacks, stock, horses, mules, cattle and hogs would float by and pieces of furniture, ^{and} mattresses/~~an~~ occasional human face would show above the water. For three days and nights this flood swept by before people could wade into the mud and seek their personal belongings amid the debris.

Already a few houses/^{had} been built together on Baucum Heights and this little settlement was commonly called Altus because it was on higher ground. No one thought of trying to build again between Salt Fork and Bitter Creek. The men got together and talked over what was to be done. All decided to build where it was higher and a town was laid off in the middle of a section and every one got busy moving wrecks of their buildings to the new location. We moved our store building but never did move our farm home. Mr. McMahan bought this entire block, however, when the town was laid

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out and when we got ready to move our family over, we built a new house in which we lived until about fifteen years ago when we built this brick house.

Mr. McMahan was always teaching or trading or holding some public office so perhaps I did not know the real lean days which some of the other pioneer women did. Our house was always open to the needy or stranger for food or shelter.

I usually managed to send out to Fort Worth for our clothing and I bought the first sewing machine that was ever sold in this locality. It was a Singer. There were a few sewing machines which people had brought with them but mine was the first sewing machine the agent sold when he came through.

Calico, shirting, needles and thread were about all the dry goods we carried in the store and Blue mass calomel and patent medicines were about all the drugs. Mr. McMahan had to compound all his drugs. He even had to make his own laudanum.

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The only epidemics I remember were fever and smallpox. I had a neighbor who had five children and he and his wife and all the children were sick at one time with the fever with no one to wait on them but me and in the midst of their troubles one of my daughters came down with fever. The fever was supposed to be caused by polluted water. We had nothing but shallow wells and cisterns to drink from.

The drug store was a gathering place for all the people to come to on winter evenings to talk and sometimes they would come for miles. The ones who only lived a few miles away would always trot over for a visit and the mail.

There was a camp of cowboys in the hollow near town that was reported to have had a case of smallpox but as they only remained there a few days it was treated as a rumor.

One night it was rather cold and a little stray kitten about half grown wandered into the store for warmth. Everyone around the fire patted it a little for it was a friendly little

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kitten. In about nine days every one who was there began to come down with smallpox. It was thought that this kitten had scattered the germs of smallpox.

There was a hard snow storm while Mr. McMahon was teaching. No one was expecting it and some of the children had their ears frozen and a lot of people got their hands and feet frost bitten. You could not see ten feet in front of you when the snow storms would come.

The children used to fix a dead-fall for the birds when the ground was covered with snow and then we would always have bird pie. The children would sweep clean of snow a place the size of a heavy plank. Then take a stick about three inches long, tie a string to the stick and prop one end of the plank up on the stick, put meal or a little grain under the plank ^{and} get back into the house with one end of the string. I would usually let them have a window up a little

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to have the string through. When birds would go under the plank to eat, the string would be pulled and the plank would hold the birds until the children could go out and get them.

We could buy all the wild turkeys we wanted from the Indians for twenty-five cents. I always fried the breasts and would make a stew of the bony parts. Lots of times the turkeys would be so young and tender that we could broil them.

Children came ten miles to school in wagons and sometimes on horseback. Once the school house was blown away and we had to teach in the back of the drug store for awhile.

After Greer County became part of Oklahoma, Mr. McMahan was so anxious for a new county to be formed that he bought a new buggy and two little mules and went all over the country lecturing and telling people the advantages of having a county seat where we would not have to go twenty-five miles and more

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every time court convened. Mr. McMahan was the first Justice of the Peace in the new county.

The first couple who came to him to get married found him on the north side of the square. There were no sidewalks nor buildings. They stopped him and asked him if he would marry them. It was all so new to him, he had the book in his pocket with the order of procedure in it. So he reached into his pocket and pulled out his book and said "Yes". He proceeded with the ceremony and when he had finished the bridegroom reached his hand into his pocket and asked, "How much do I owe you?".

Mr. McMahan replied, "Whatever you want to pay; the county allows me one dollar and one half". The bridegroom pulled his hand out empty and said, "If the county allows you a dollar and a half that is enough for marrying any man so I am not going to pay you anything."

Once after we had built a school house here in Altus and were still living on the farm,

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a bad sand-storm came up that the children could not see a yard in front of them. The teacher told them they could all go home. My oldest daughter had invited several girls home with her to spend the week-end and because of the dust they were afraid their parents would not let them visit us. My daughter and her friends all cut out across the prairie to our home.

They were so long getting home that we were afraid they were lost; Mr. McManan had already come home from the store looking for them. The sand blew for two days and nights so that you could not see across the lane. When the children would wake up in the morning their ears would be full of sand. The girls had a good time but they could not go out of doors.

There were no flies in those days and we could kill a beef and cover it with a cloth to keep the dirt away and hang it on the north side of the house

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and it would not spoil even in the hottest weather.

We never had ice or lemons or oranges to help out when we were not feeling well and we had to keep our milk cool by keeping wet cloths around it. Later I had a kind of frame built with shelves to put the milk on, and I kept a bucket of water on the top shelf and let the sides stay wet for the wind to blow over and in this way the milk would keep sweet all day and the butter would stay firm.

The funniest sight I ever saw was when an old Comanche horse we had would balk and lie right down in the street or river or anywhere he happened to take a mind to and bawl. If you never heard a horse bawl you have no idea what a distressing sound it is. This horse would usually gather a crowd in a few minutes to see what was the matter, for a stranger would always think that someone was being beaten.

Mr. McMahan was often referred to as the daddy of Jackson County.

SUPPLEMENT TO THE McMAHAN STORY.

When Mr. McMahan died a few months ago he lacked

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only a few days of being eighty-two years old, although he had come to this country seeking health and he was always lame from a fever that had settled in one leg before he came to Oklahoma.

He was accounted the richest man in Greer County at the time of his death.