

McWATERS, RITA.

INTERVIEW 12783

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

Field Worker's name Hannie Lee Burns

This report made on (date) January 19 1938

1. Name Etta McWaters

2. Post Office Address Miami, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 501 F. Northeast.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month October Day 7 Year 1886

5. Place of birth North of Fairland on Hudson Creek.

6. Name of Father Amos Berry Place of birth Fairland

Other information about father Born October 12, 1860

7. Name of Mother Elmeda Rhonemus Berry Place of birth Indiana

Other information about mother Born in 1858.

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 8.

Nannie Lee Burns
Investigator
January 19, 1938

Interview with Etta McWaters,
501 F. Northeast, Miami, Okla.

My grandfather, Martin Berry, was born in Dent County, Missouri, and came to the Indian Country and settled on Potato Mound just south and east of Fairland, before the Civil War. He married Mary, a Cherokee woman, and they had four boys and one of them was my father, Amos Berry, who was born here October 12, 1860. In 1884 my father married Elmeda Rhonemus, a white woman, who was born in Indiana in 1858. I, their only child, was born on Hudson Creek, north of Fairland October 7, 1906.

My grandmother died before the War and that left Grandfather with his boys to raise and during the War he kept them together at his home on Potato Mound, with their help doing all the necessary home-work. He had built a log cabin here which was their home. As he had his small children to look after, he did military duty in the Militia connected with the Southern Army, and was not often far from home many days at a time. I have often heard them talk of the bushwhackers and how they tried to get my grandfather.

Father and Mother, after they were married, lived in a small house on Hudson Creek one-half mile west of the Brack Weir farm

until I was four years old. Father had farmed and now that he was getting a start, he decided to move over on the Neosho River north and east of Fairland and on the land that adjoined Uncle Frank Connor's land on the east.

Here about a quarter of a mile south of the Neosho River, on a hill facing the south, with the timber and the river back of the house, and near a large spring, at first Father built a two-room box house, and later, as he could, he added to it until he had completed the house as it now stands, which I would call a four-room and attic house. His barn and other outbuildings were built of logs and these buildings are still standing and are still used by the persons who now live on the place. They are in poor condition, however, and today include the log barn, another small log building in the barn lot and also ^s poultry house which stands southeast of the house.

The Berry Ferry.

About a half a mile east of where the Connor Bridge now crosses the Neosho River and north of the house, my father put in a ferry-boat which was run by pulleys and a cable. This boat was large enough to carry two wagons at one time. The old Military Stage had been abandoned before this and now there was so much more

travel in this country than there had been and the ferries were so far apart in those days that many people crossed here, especially those coming from the Ottawa Nation as far away as Baxter Springs, Kansas and eneca, Missouri. The ferry closest to us on the river above us was at Miami at that time. Once, I remember, the Miami Ferry Boat got loose at Miami and when the river was high it came on down the river past Father's and caught in the trees on the bank only a short distance below Father's place. Father's boat got away twice during the time that he ran it. Once he was on it when it broke loose and I cried when I saw him going down the river on the boat and Mother tried to comfort me and to tell me that Father would be all right and would be caught somewhere along the banks, but I was not convinced and replied, "Well, I wish I had put a biscuit in his pocket so he wouldn't get hungry".

The ferry was caught and lodged just west of Eyandotte above where the Spring and Neosho Rivers flow together. Father ran this ferry at this place nine years. By this time roads were more numerous and some bridges were being built so Father discontinued the ferry and gave all of his time to farming and the raising of cattle.

In the Berry Cemetery there were som markers which were quite old for during the Civil War some soldiers were buried there, who had been killed in a skirmish near there and in those days they had no cemeteries as they now have so when some of the folks who were living near lost members of their family t.e relatives brought the bodies there and the cemetery was started in this way. While we lived there my father always looked after this cemetery with the help of the neighbors whose folks were buried there. AS it was kept up and looked after it became the main cemetery in that part of the Nation, the next large cemetery being at Ottawa over in the Ottawa Nation. It continued to be the largest one until the cemetery was started at Fairland. The one at that place had a good road to it and as the older people changed, the Fairland Cemetery was the better cared for so people began to go there. Also the road from the old Connor Home east to the Berry Cemetery would get so bad and muddy sometimes that it was very hard to get to the cemetery.

When Father took his allotment, knowing that this cemetery was then large and hoping to see it continue, he threw out the ten acres on which it is located, but a Too-Late who perhaps did not know that the cemetery was there, allotted it* though it

has been fenced from the rest of the ten acres and it is still used and some bodies have been buried there this winter, but since the place has been fenced and the country sectionized, you have to go through the barn lot and around the field and through the woods to get to it now.

Picnics.

There was a nice grove on the hill near the ferry and here many picnics have been held. Especially on the 4th of July, the neighbors would all bring their dinner in great big baskets and tubs. They would bring the entire families and they would drive here either in a wagon, a hack or once in a while some would come in a buggy or surrey. They would come early, and at noon the dinner would be placed on covers on the ground, often many families putting their dinners together and you would see the men and children either standing or sitting together in groups until the ladies would have everything ready and then most often they, the ladies, would pass piled up plates around for people to help themselves, or perhaps some of the ladies would give to the children their part of the food. Some would bring their coffee but most people secured their drinking water from the near-by spring in a bucket that they had brought for that purpose.

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Swings, merry-go-rounds, sack, and potato races etc., provided amusement for the children. The ladies would perhaps gather together in groups visiting and also keeping an eye on the younger children. There was generally speech making by some person or persons to entertain the men. Often the speaker would be someone from our own neighborhood and perhaps several men would talk during the day. If we children got home-made ice-cream and lemonade, we were happy.

Again on Decoration Day, there was an all picnic here and then in addition to the dinner on the grounds we would have a program, and some people would decorate around the graves, but the day was spent together and the whole neighborhood looked forward to it and enjoyed it. They did not have the opportunity to visit as the folks have today. Most likely the man was using the horses on the farm and if the lady could spare the day to go visiting, she would usually have to walk to the neighbor's and carry a small child.

Another yearly event that was looked forward to here was the ten-day yearly camp meeting held here in this grove each August. This was held by the Latter Day Saints and folks would come each year from a long distance, bring their families with

them, their tents and supplies and camp here and stay until the meeting closed.

The men would build a large Brush Arbor and place boards here for seats. These seats would have no backs and it was just too bad if you got sleepy as you had no back to lean against. There were services each day and the service at night was often a long one. The younger children could not keep awake and when they would go to sleep would be taken to their tents and put to bed and the parents of the children, who had just driven over for the meeting, would find a place for them to sleep and often this was on some clean straw over which they would spread covers. We had no electric lights and the arbor was most often lighted by lanterns.

I started to school at the nearby Ogeechee. That was before the town was moved to Fairland and then we had a school building, a couple of stores, a post office, a marble factory, a black-smith shop and several houses close around there. In those days this little village of Ogeechee shipped much wheat, corn and oats and hay, as well as some cattle.

On December 8, 1907, I was married to John H. McWaters who had come to this country from Fayetteville, Arkansas. We were

issued one of the first marriage licenses granted in this state after statehood and were married in Miami at the home of Stephen Briggs, a block south of the Catholic Church. We lived with my parents but a short time until we moved to Fairland to make our home. Two years after I was married, my parents moved to Fairland where my father died about four years ago but my mother still lives there. We then moved to my farm and stayed a while and after trying Fairland again, we moved to Miami, many years ago, where we still continue to live and where our eleven children have gone to school.

* Mrs. McWaters is probably misquoted in saying a Too-late allotted land, as the name Too-late is applied to those Indian citizens born too late to get on the roll and receive allotment. -Ed.