

FITZGERALD, CORA INTERVIEW.

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INDEX CARDS:

Greer County
Living Conditions

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

#108

Field Worker's name Virgil CourseyThis report made on (date) May 18, 19371. Name Cora Fitzgerald2. Post Office Address Altus, Oklahoma.3. Residence address (or location) 418 East Liveoak

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month _____ Day _____ Year _____

5. Place of birth _____

6. Name of Father Philo H. Higgins Place of birth Georgia

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother _____ Place of birth Illinois

Other information about mother _____

Note 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 _____.

Virgil Coursey
Field Worker
May 18, 1937

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Interview with Cora Fitzgerald,
418 East Liveoak, Altus, Oklahoma.
Father-Philo H. Higgins.

The trip from Lampasas County, Texas, to Oklahoma consumed one full month. We had two covered wagons, one of which was drawn by a yoke of oxen, and one covered hack. And of course we brought all of our household furniture. The band consisted of my father, Philo H. Higgins, my mother, a brother, and four sisters. Also two boys, not related to us.

It was a long, slow trip of some three hundred miles, but we children enjoyed it immensely. I was about fifteen years of age, some of my sisters older, some younger, and my brother was just twenty one.

Along about Doans, Texas, the prairie-dog holes became very numerous. We had never seen Prairie dogs, and we thought these holes were post holes, but decided that post holes would surely be in straight lines, and not placed so promiscuously as these were.

My brother had an embarrassing experience when he was thrown from his horse. The horse stepped in a hole, and my brother lost his balance and fell, bruising his face quite a bit. You see, neither he nor the horse were used to Prairie dog holes. We stopped at Doans to have his wounds tended, and the doctor questioned him quite severely about the "fight" he

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had, and how the other fellow looked.

I suppose my father and mother have always known hardships. My mother came from Illinois, and my father from Georgia to Texas when he was twenty years of age. I remember they were continually harrassed by the Indians. My father had twelve days duty each month as scout to keep Indians out of the village. My mother often slept with an axe by her bed.

We reached Oklahoma by the old Chisholm trail, a wide trail sometimes a quarter of a mile wide, beaten out by the hoofs of thousands of cattle. We had to ford both the Pease and Red River. We came in at Doans crossing.

We settled eight miles south, two miles east of the present town of Altus. There was nothing but prairie and mesquite as far as eye could see. There were no roads nor trails to guide one. Lanterns hung on posts were sometimes used as guides at night. There were thousands of head of cattle here, as fat and pretty as you have ever seen.

There was a line camp at Hess spring, or Nine Mile springs, it was called. This meant it was nine miles from

Doans, Texas. One of the cowboy's name was Lorne Walcott.

My father filed claim on a quarter section of land, and bought another quarter. Land was very cheap. My brother, Philo H. Higgins, Jr., also filed on a quarter. We first built a dugout, in which we all lived. Later, my father hauled lumber from Vernon, Texas, and built a two room house. This was the first house built between Doans, Texas, and Old Frazier.

Our first year here was so encouraging that my father felt he had indeed found the land of promise. Virgin soil and good rainfall, both were conducive to a bountiful crop. We had adequate farming implements, and raised wheat and oats. We had an excellent garden. A man from ^Dover in Texas threshed our grain. We received very little money for wheat, and oats were cheap, and had to be hauled a great distance to market. The trip to Vernon to market usually took two days or more.

My sisters and I took wool sheared from the sheep, spun it and made rugs. We used indigo, aniline and walnut hulls for dye. Later when the county began to settle up we sold quite a number of these rugs.

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For quite a long time we hauled water from the Hess spring, but finally got a well dug at home. After this numerous campers stopped at this well. Practically every week several families used this as a watering place. Frequently there were Indians on trips to Quanah, Texas. I think they lived up near Cache.

Our sheep were gradually killed out by the wolves. Large snakes were also numerous. Occasionally while the sheep were being driven in you would see them part, some to the left, some to the right, and a huge snake (the large ones like you see in shows) would crawl through the opening, seemingly undisturbed. It seems miraculous that none of us were ever bitten.

My father frequently took his turning plow and ran a furrow around a new-comer's claim. This served as a sort of fence to determine his boundary.

On one occasion the men folks were assisting a new family to dig a well. The well was down some seven feet, over a man's head, and these men were in the well. Some one on the ground remarked that Indians were coming. The men in the well became

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very excited and had quite a scramble getting out on ground. They had barely managed to get out when the Indians arrived. It really was enough to frighten anyone. There must have been some three hundred of them. They came in hacks, others on horseback with bedding and provisions strapped across the horse and tent poles dragging on either side. They were led by old Quannah Parker and his son. Quannah made quite a striking appearance in his regalia. He was astride a beautiful spotted horse. The Indians were enroute to Quannah or Vernon to some sort of celebration. It is said that Quannah Parker's mother was a white woman, stolen from people in Texas. The Indians wanted food, but my father finally convinced them that there were far too many to be fed by his limited rations, and they turned their horses toward their destination and took leave.

Well, to get back to the new-comers: they decided they did not like this country. They pulled up and left, and we never heard of them again.

As I have stated, my brother was twenty one years of age. He filed on a quarter section and bought a quarter. The girls married and all of them lived near us for sometime.

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Several of them are now in California. My brother is now deceased. I married Alva Fitzgerald in 1898 and we moved on a place three miles east of my father's place. Mr. Fitzgerald gave a horse and saddle for one quarter section of this land. Mr. Fitzgerald died in 1922.

We had plenty of vegetables and meat to eat, but knew nothing of canning vegetables. We did put up wild plums in barrels, and preserved them with salicylic acid. We dried beans, and dried okra on strings.

We sometimes burned mesquite roots for fuel. They made a fire similar to coal. Most of the time, however, we procured wood from the Indians across the river to the east. This entailed quite some risk, both from wardens on the Indians' territory, as well as danger of high waters. I remember one time quite a number of men were on the territory side when the river rose. They stayed almost a week and some of them finally came across on an improvised raft tied to their horses' tails. My husband was one of the men.

We made as high as three thousand bushels of oats some years, but had to haul them ^{to} Vernon, Texas, and

often received only fifteen cents a bushel for them.

Wheat usually sold for about twenty five cents.

We raised some cotton. We picked the seed out and spun thread on an old spinning wheel. Each of us girls knitted a counterpane. I still have mine. It took first prize at a recent exhibit.

Interviewer's note--

We saw the counterpane mentioned by Mrs. Fitzgerald. It is indeed a beautiful thing, similar to spreads now being crocheted.

She has the spinning wheel that saw service in 1863.

Also a dish over one hundred years old.