

FRES, DEXTER N.

INTERVIEW

#8399

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

Field Worker's name Nora Lorrin, El Reno, Oklahoma

This report made on (date) August 23, 1937

1. Name Dexter N. Fees

2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 814 West Wade St.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month April Day 29 Year 1864

5. Place of birth Iowa.

6. Name of Father Isaiah Fees Place of birth Pennsylvania  
Dec. 17, 1833.

Other information about father Died April 21, 1915.

7. Name of Mother Mary Morton Fees Place of birth Pennsylvania  
April 22, 1840.

Other information about mother Died Dec. 22, 1922

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 \_\_\_\_\_.

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FIELD WORKER NORA LORRIN  
Indian-Pioneer History S-149.  
August 23, 1937.

INTERVIEW WITH DEXTER N. FEES  
814 West Wade Street  
El Reno, Oklahoma

Dexter N. fees was twenty five years of age when he came to Oklahoma from Mount Etna, Iowa. A cousin, Irwell fees, came to Iowa and decided to join Dexter in a trip to Oklahoma, and a neighbor, George Abbey, decided to come too, so the three men came together. They came by the way of Caldwell, Kansas, and picked up another cousin, Ira fees, at Caldwell, making four in the party.

When they left Iowa they got what they thought was a correct map of Oklahoma; that took in a strip west from the 98th meridian, up the Cimarron, between the Cimarron and the Canadian Rivers, taking in what is now Beaver County. When they got to Caldwell, Irwell fees got another map giving the 98th meridian straight through the territory.

While coming through the Cherokee Strip they stopped at "Skeleton ranch" to get water and found a

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man who was freighting lumber from Pond-Creek. He had broken his leg and had been trying all morning to get someone to change loads with him so he could get to Kingfisher, forty miles away to a doctor.

The fees party was in a spring wagon, and they exchanged teams and the injured man went on with the spring wagon to Kingfisher and a doctor. Mr. fees drove the load of lumber forty miles in less than a day and a half. He made no charges but the man insisted that he take \$5.00 which he did. The morning after they landed in Kingfisher they went up Kingfisher Creek looking for land. About ten o'clock, by comparing maps, they found they were in the Cheyenne and Arapaho reservation. They came back to Kingfisher and went up Uncle John's Creek south from Kingfisher about fourteen miles. They came onto a bunch of men building a log house. These men said that all the bottom land was taken; but that there was a fine body of upland

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only a mile west. Thirteen of these men had clubbed together and had hired a surveyor to survey their claims. After surveying one claim they paid the surveyor off, knowing they could get the rest of their claims from that number, but he was too smart for them. When the surveyor saw that he had been tricked he gave them the wrong number on the quarter he had surveyed and they not knowing, at that time that they had been tricked, gave Mr. Fees and his companions the numbers for their claims from the numbers which the surveyor had given them. This other party came to Oklahoma on the 22nd of April and were two weeks ahead of the Fees party which did not come to Oklahoma until May 6th.

Mr. fees did not make the run, he came in later; there was lots of land that had not been filed on. He found about two hundred or more men ahead of him lined up waiting to register, but at that time there was a storm brewing. A very black cloud was coming up in the west and when the storm broke there

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was a heavy downpour of rain and all but ten of the men ran for shelter. Mr. fees ran to the land office when they left. The ten that stayed backed up against the building, getting as much shelter as they could from the wall. The registering officer, when he got through with the bunch who were in the office, filing, opened the door and told them to get out and asked how many men were waiting outside to file. One man answered, "Eleven".

The officer answered, "We are only filing eight men at a time, but owing to the storm you can all come in." In that way, Dexter N. Fees filed for his land without registering beforehand.

He filed on the number taken from the survey mentioned above, got back to camp that evening happy as a lark thinking he would be on his road home at daylight, but while he was gone one of the men had found a township cornerstone with illegible markings and Mr. Fees found that he had filed on a claim a mile north of the claim which he had settled

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on as his choice. So he went back to Kingfisher the next morning, Ira Fees with him as he was going back to Kansas. Dexter Fees saw a lawyer who said that he would take the case and put in an amended filing with promise of pay when he came back to the claim in October. This lawyer could get in at the back door of the land office to transact that business, without interfering in any way with others rights, so Dexter Fees and the lawyer both got to file on their claims at that time.

When Dexter Fees left Iowa he had just \$35.00 and that together with the \$5.00 he got from the man whose lumber he hauled in the Cherokee Strip, was all the money he had on this trip and he loaned his cousin money for his filing fee out of that.

Mr. Fees and his cousin went on to Caldwell, Kansas, and Mr. Fees spent his last cent at Pond Creek, on their way back, for a loaf of bread and some apples which cost twenty cents. When he got to Caldwell his cousin paid back the money he had borrowed for his filing fee, and that money took Mr. Fees the rest of the way back to his home in Iowa.

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Mr. and Mrs. Fees settled on their claim in October 1889, coming down on the Santa Fe Railroad to Oklahoma City. They had been expecting Mr. Fees sister to meet them but their letters to her had gone astray and she was not there. There was a place in Oklahoma City with a hotel sign put up and they thought it was a regular hotel. It was the only hotel sign they saw. They engaged a room for the night, went to bed and slept peacefully. The next morning they found that they had spent the night in a dance hall and that it had been dedicated while they slept the night before. They had not awakened and knew nothing about it and just across the street there had been a shooting scrape.

Their room was nice and clean and they had enjoyed a good night's rest. Mr. Fees went out and rustled up a spring wagon and a man to take them and their luggage out to their stopping place and they left Oklahoma City at 1:30 P.M. and got to their destination just at sundown. It was thirty miles from Oklahoma City and the man charged them just \$3.00 for the trip. They built a box house, 14' by 16' out of rough lumber.

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It took three weeks to dig a well and they carried water from a seep or spring until they got the house up and the well dug. Mr. Fees broke thirty five acres in the spring of 1890, with three ponies. He would plow awhile and then plant awhile. He put in cotton, corn, Kaffir corn and five acres of castor beans. There was a good market for the latter and lots of castor beans were marketed. The claim they had chosen was nine miles north and two miles east of El Reno. Their well was the only well that was in sight of the road between Kingfisher and Silver City. It was drawn dry many times and they'd have to wait for it to fill up. People would stop for water day or night. Their claim was close enough to Caddo Springs that they could hear the Indians beating their tom-toms night after night.

Mr. Fees had an uncle named Dan Harader who used to live about three miles east of Hennessey; he was a Dunkard preacher and lived and preached around in that country for years. His uncle knew about the Patrick Hennessey killing and Mr. Fees has heard him

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tell about it many times. The Indians got the blame for that tragedy, but from Mr. Harader's tale it was white men and not Indians who committed that atrocity.

Patrick Hennessey was waylaid by renegade white men who murdered and robbed him. Patrick Hennessey had borrowed his whole freight outfit, wagons, mules and all from an officer friend of his who was stationed at Fort Sill. This officer and another officer were planning to go to Kansas and Pat Hennessey was going to Caldwell, Kansas, after a load of sacked oats. Pat was going ahead of the officers and was planning on meeting them on his return, at what is now Dover's Springs, and when the officers got to Dover's Springs Pat was not there; they waited awhile for him and he did not come and so they decided that they would ride on and meet him farther along the trail. They came to a slight rise near what is now the town of Hennessey and they saw smoke; they hurried and came in a short time, in sight of the wagons. They found Pat Hennessey

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propped against a wagon wheel with sacked oats piled over and around both him and the wagon. The robbers had set fire to the oats and they were burning briskly, but the officers got there in time to save the body from the fire. Patrick Hennessey had been murdered, robbed and his harness and mules taken.

These officers took the trail and followed it through the Cherokee Strip, picking up cowboys on the way. They overtook the murderers just south of Caldwell, Kansas, and found them to be white men, and they promptly strung them to a cotton-wood limb.

There used to be a pretty good reward for the recovery of stolen horses and mules. Renegade white men would steal horses and mules and hide them out in the "Gip Hills" and then after a time, when they felt safe, they would get some Indian to bring these horses in, collect the reward, and the Indians would get the blame for stealing. There were some bad Indians but the Indians as a class were blamed for lots of things that they did not do.

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Al Lee, a man who was killed here, shipped in horses and mules by the car load and sold them to white men and Indians; lots of times on credit. He said, "No Indian ever failed to meet his note, but I cannot say the same for white men."

Mr. Fees' house was on the main trail, and they never locked their house when they went away. They would often be gone for weeks at a time and never lost anything. There were times when there were ten to fifteen Indians camped in our yard when Mrs. Fees was alone but they never molested her and she was not afraid.

One time Mr. and Mrs. Fees and a neighbor, a Mr. Barret, his wife and family, got into a lumber wagon and started to Fort Reno. They came to <sup>a</sup> hill just east of Fort Reno, looked ahead and saw an Indian walking. He had dropped a strip of beaver fur and it was lying stretched out on the ground behind him. Mr. Barrett wanted Mr. Fees to get it and hide it in the wagon. They both got out and walked on ahead of the wagon and picked the beaver fur up.

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They met the Indian who had discovered his loss and was coming back after it. Mr. Fees gave it back to him and the Indian thanked him and shook hands. Mr. Fees offered to buy the fur as he wanted it to send to his wife's folks back east but the Indian indicated that the fur had been given to him and he did not want to part with it. The other man, Mr. Barrett, was smart alecky and he grabbed hold of the piece of beaver fur and insisted on the Indian's giving it to him and was unkind about it. The Indian was furious. Mr. Fees said that he never saw anyone get mad so quickly. He threatened to turn Mr. Barrett over to the Indian Police. Finally the Indian turned and gave the strip of fur to Mr. Fees, saying, "You take Him," indicating Mr. Barrett no good." Mr. Fees did not take the fur. Mr. Fees states that if ever he had a chance to go to one of those land openings again he would go as far as he could to get there. "It was the most exciting thing I ever saw." The oddest part about it, was the even way men were distributed over

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the designated country. One man was stationed at every quarter section. These men did not know the country and did not know where the corner stones were located. It was very seldom that men were found bunched on one claim.

Mr. Fees and his wife ran both when the second Cheyenne and Arapaho lands were opened and when the Cherokee Strip was opened. They did it just for the excitement and fun there was in these runs.

When the second opening of Cheyenne and Arapaho land occurred, a negro and his wife had a big mule team and a heavily loaded wagon. He unhitched the tugs, so they could not run off with the wagon, and tied the lines to the dash board. He did not get to his team in time to hitch the tugs when the gun was fired. The mules broke loose from the wagon and started running. The negro woman was very fat. She grabbed a hoe out of the wagon and started on a dog trot after the mules. She was following them as far as they could see. The mules ran three miles and a fellow that was located on

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a claim caught them as they came by. The negro woman got the mules, took them back, hitched them to the wagon, drove about twelve miles and got a claim after all her trouble.

The horses and mules were just as excited as the people were.

Old work teams got up extra steam for the occasion. Many persons who were so poor when they came into the country that they had to come on foot, became wealthy.

Out where the Dillingham Killing Station is now, nine miles north of El Reno, a half dozen men wanted the same place and three filed a contest against it. The man who got it hitched his horse to a sulky plow, and of course when his horse started and he let his plow down into the ground, he was improving it. There was a furrow plowed straight down the east side of the land to be taken for a starting point and as the claim in question was just on the west side of this furrow, the man did not do any running. This also happened in the 1892 run.

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When the Cherokee Strip opened Mr. Fees and an uncle went with their wagons to haul supplies. There was a crowd of them planning to stay more or less together. Mrs. Fees was with them. Mr. Fees' father and sister were together and she got a claim. They all started from six miles east of Hennessey on the south line of the strip. Mr. and Mrs. Fees were running this time just for the fun of it. They had intended to run twenty miles to "Bear Creek." The soldiers were stationed all around and someone fired a gun ten minutes ahead of time and the whole United States Army could not have held the crowd back. The reason their crowd had intended to run as far as "Bear Creek," was that they thought all the fast horses would take all the good land closer. When the fast horses ran their distance they lagged and any sort of a pony or mule, especially if hitched to a rig, would go right on past them. The crowd in which the Fees were, ran thirteen miles and a half in forty-five minutes. The party had everything arranged and each

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person had a flag and plans were made in case they should be separated, lost or slowed down. They also had a light signal (red lantern) for night and also gun-signals. They drove clear on to "Bear Creek" and missed their crowd. Came back to their camping ground and missed them again. The fees did not see any of their crowd for ten days and it was three years before they saw the claims which other members of the party had taken.

There was an old man they called "Old Man Cosby" who was sixty-five years old and he rode a horse in the race, bareback. Mr. Cosby rode clear to "Bear Creek" and came back to the place where the others had staked their claims and got a claim.

Mr. fees said "We picked up one woman who was lost and crying and we hauled her five miles and found some of her friends." There were Sooners on "Bear Creek": they had dug wells, built some bridges, lived in tents and camped in wagons and kept their horses out of sight in the draws."

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There surely was a hubbub the night before the opening all along the line. One man started in the race riding a mule and after running five or six miles an antelope crossed his path and the mule promptly took after the antelope and could not be controlled until he had caught it and stomped it to death. Mr. Fees said, "We had antelope for supper and then the man went on and got his claim."

Mr. Fees married Mary Hale at her father's home near Mt. Etna Iowa on the 2nd of January 1839. They have had twelve children only two of whom are dead.