

JOHNSON, T. L. (MRS.) INTERVIEW 9727

404

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

JOHNSON, T. L. (MRS.)

INTERVIEW.

9727

Field Worker's name Ethel Mae Yates

This report made on (date) January 21, 1938

1. Name Mrs. T. L. Johnson

2. Post Office Address Elk City

3. Residence address (or location) 503 West 5

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month April Day 4 Year 1886

5. Place of birth Tennessee

6. Name of Father M. M. Lester Place of birth North Carolina

Other information about father Civil War Veteran

7. Name of Mother Nancy Lester Place of birth Tennessee

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 \_\_\_\_\_.

JOHNSON, T. L. (MRS.)      INTERVIEW.      9727

Ethel Mae Yates  
Investigator  
January 21, 1938

Interview with Mrs. T. L. Johnson  
Elk City, Oklahoma

My father, Mr. M. M. Lester, came from Arkansas in 1889 to wait for the Run. But for some reason he did not make the Run but came back six months later and got a claim eighteen miles northwest of where Oklahoma City is now and eight miles from Yukon.

Father's post office was Miller; he built a two room house and went to farming. In 1893 my husband and I came; Father had some money when he came and didn't have to endure many hardships. It wasn't so with us. Father built us a little house in his yard and my husband worked for him one year; it was six miles to the Canadian River and we would hunt pecans and go swimming in the summer. We women wore Mother Hubbards and the men wore their waist pants when we went swimming.

Mr. Johnson almost got drowned one time. He and one of my brothers got to scuffling in the water and Mr. Johnson stepped off into a deep hole. My brother

JOHNSON, T. L. (MRS.)

INTERVIEW

9727

2

noticed him but was afraid that he would drown them both so he got a green limb and swam close enough for him to catch it and pull him out and saved him that way. We went from there to Norman and Mr. Johnson went to work for a man for whom my brother, Jim Lester, was working.

Over on the Nine Mile Flat was the richest land there was in the country, and there were two men there, one named Barker and the other Downing who were Sooners in there; and this man who we were working for knew it, and the Sooners were afraid that this man might tell so they came over and murdered him, and talked about killing my brother Jim to kill evidence, but for some reason they spared Jim.

We stayed there three years and then Father came down and wanted us to go and live on his place. He wanted to go to Missouri. This was the first year of the Spanish American War and Father stayed one year in Missouri and came back. We then went to Norman and from there to Oklahoma City, Father went to Norman and bought some property and lived there, and went from there to Muskogee.

JOHNSON, T. L. (MRS.)

INTERVIEW.

9727

3

In 1900 we came out here and filed on a claim six miles south of Cheyenne on Croton Creek. We filed on this claim "sight unseen", came in August and dug a dugout back in a bank and walled the front with rock, put a shingle roof on it and a plank floor. I had thirty yards of cheese cloth with me that I had bought and paid 3 cents a yard for and I lined my wall with that. I had brought a home made carpet with me and we put it over head for ceiling.

Our dugout was 12X14 feet and five of us lived in it and besides we kept lots of travelers. There were no schools nor churches or anything. We put in a sod crop and dug a well which was the only well between Sayre and Cheyenne.

Neighbors were few and far a part and one time it was three months that I didn't see a woman. The people got together and made a dugout school house and called it Needmore. ~~This dugout where they had school three months~~ out of the year was three miles from us. We stayed on our claim after that and would have preaching services around at the peoples houses and everybody in the country would come.

JOHNSON, T. L. (MRS.)

INTERVIEW.

9727

4

One rainy spell when the rain was pouring and the water was roaring down the hill, one morning, just after we had gotten up the rocks gave way and one whole side of our dugout caved in, throwing our beds full of rock and if we had been in bed they would have mashed us to death.

Another time Mrs. Muskfelt had been to Cheyenne and was caught in a storm and she stopped and stayed with us. The rats had undermined the walls of our dugout and the water broke through in a stream about as large as a stove pipe and before Mr. Johnson could get the hole stopped the water was six inches deep.

We went down on Croton Creek and gathered some currants and wild plums. And we used cherry grubs for fuel.

One Sunday during the following winter two men came to our house on foot. It was snowing and they had come from Sayre and said that it was not snowing when they left there and when they got to our ~~place~~ the snow was about fifteen inches deep. We were just at the last of our food and the men wanted Mr. Johnson to take them on horseback back to Sayre and wanted to know what he would charge and Mr. Johnson told them to give him what they thought the

JOHNSON, T. L. (MRS.)

INTERVIEW.

9727

5

trip was worth and they gave him \$2.50, and he took them and the snow became so thick that it was almost impossible for him to make his way.

There were no fences or anything for a guide and Mr. Johnson finally had to give his horse the reins and let it bring home, and the next day being Monday he took the money and went to Cheyenne and bought a sack of flour which you could buy at that time for \$1.00 and some other things that we needed so badly.

There was a Mrs. Huffman who lived two miles from us who hired Mr. Johnson and another man to break twenty acres of sod for her and gave them \$20.00 each. We then had \$5.00 a month until this money was gone. We never did have to eat water bread; Mrs. Huffman gave us buttermilk. She lived two miles away from us and the children went twice a week and got the buttermilk and Mrs. Huffman would put a hunk of butter in with the milk. Sometimes we would buy a pound of butter. We paid 10 cents a pound for it. After our \$20.00 was gone we went to Mr. Herring and asked for credit, he let us have a \$10.00 coupon book but he charged us 10 per cent interest for three months

JOHNSON, T. L. (MRS.)

INTERVIEW.

9727

6

time and then kept one of the dollar coupons besides. We then went to Mr. W. A. Beaty and got credit and were treated nice. I couldn't raise chickens for the fleas.

After we got started and the Herd Law came in and stopped the rangers cattle from eating up our crops, we got along pretty well. We were personally acquainted with "Herd Law Johnson", and think that he did a good deed.

We lived in the dugout two years, Mr. Johnson's father came from Tennessee and built a two room house and bought a cow for us.

When the snow was on the ground we would eat rabbits until I felt like I never wanted to see another rabbit. Every summer we would have singing school and everybody would go as they didn't have anything else to do.

My father's health gave way while he was living at Muskogee and he went back to Tennessee to a soldier's home but just lived three weeks after he got there. He passed away in 1908. Mother never got to come to the new country as she died in 1884. Mother's father was a first cousin to Davy Crockett.



JOHNSON, T. L. (MRS.)

INTERVIEW.

9727

7

We lived on our claim until 1910, then moved down to Blackwell and lived there for two years, then came back and rented a place near Berlin. We then lived in and around Berlin until 1918, when we moved to Elk City and have lived here ever since.