

JOHNSTON, JENNIE.

INTERVIEW

9869

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

474

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INTERVIEW

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Field Worker's name Ophelia D. Vestal

This report made on (date) February 1 1938

1. Name Mrs. Jennie Johnston

2. Post Office Address Lawton, Okla.

3. Residence address (or location) 704 E. Ave.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month November Day 18 Year 1853-84 yrs.

5. Place of birth Kentucky

6. Name of Father _____ Place of birth _____

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother _____ Place of birth _____

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 _____.

Ophelia D. Vestal
Investigator
February 1, 1938

Interview with
Mrs. Jennie Johnston
Lawton, Okla.

My birth state is Kentucky. I was born November 18, 1853. I was nine years old when the Civil War started. My father served in the Civil War. Once he came home on a furlough. At that time there were soldiers whose only duty was to see that the men went to war. My father heard these soldiers were in our neighborhood and he hid in the timber and heavy bushes so he could stay as long as his furlough stated.

We owned our own home and had two pretty white horses. We had a good spring on our little farm, over which my father built a little house so the water would be protected from the hot sun during the summer months. This we called the spring house.

During the time my father was home on the furlough my sister about five years old and I went to the spring house to get our parents fresh cool water. It was a muddy time and the soldiers had just passed hunting the men; my sister was so frightened she ran and hid in under

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a big tobacco stalk until they had passed. I didn't want to see them but I couldn't leave my sister. After they passed, we went on to the spring and started back walking up a little hill which was very muddy. I saw a piece of paper sticking up in a track. I picked it up and discovered it was a ten dollar bill. I took it quickly to my mother saying to her, if those men came back we wouldn't give them the money. Mother replied, "Oh yes we will give it to them if they come back and ask for it." But they never came back.

We had a colored woman and man working for us. They lived at the back of our house in a small house. It was in the loft of the house where Nancy stored her share of the tobacco. The soldiers came to Nancy's house and started to look in her loft for hidden men; she told them there wasn't anyone up there and she hoped they'd fall and break their necks. They must have believed her for they never looked anymore.

We were so proud of our big fat white horses and were uneasy, afraid someone would come and get them, maybe at night. This did happen. The negro man was in the barn

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shucking corn. He tried to shield our horses when the men came to take them to war, but all he could do was let them take one of them. Then he had to take the corn to the mill on horseback.

Colored people are very superstitious. Sometimes we heard peculiar noises and once some girls were spending the night with me, Nancy called it the "rapping spirit," this noise that we heard. Some of the girls said, "Why, Nancy, didn't you know that Jennie was a person that could tell you your past and future, also had influence over things as to cause peculiar sounds?" Nancy said, "Nah, you not talking of our Miss Jennie, if so," as she put a bucket on the bed, slowly saying, "now rap if that's the truth." For some reason or other the bed must have been touched unnoticed and the bucket rolled across the bed, rattling over some buttons that were lying on it. Then she believed I could do as the girls told her.

Nancy was a good cook. She used to make a kind of vegetable soup that tasted so good, using corn meal. During the War our food supply was limited.

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We were sure we would never see our pretty white horse that was taken away to war. Sure enough we never did, but in a few months the Government sent us a check which we used to a good advantage, for things were certainly torn up after the War.

My husband came to the opening of the Cherokee Strip, buying and selling land, following booming places. His health became very bad, so we moved to Iola, Kansas.

When we heard of the Opening here, our boys came on down, buying some horses and locating tents for the rest of us to live in until the Opening date.

We drew the lot on which my home is now, a 50 X 150 foot lot. My husband hired the lumber hauled from Duncan and built a barn, putting a floor in it of tongue and groove lumber. For a few years this served as our house. It was the first building ever put up in this town. We had a small building for a barn that we kept our horses in.

One day one of my sons went down to Faxon to look over the place he drew near there. He always kept a nice saddle pony. While there he started to call back home over the phone and just as he started to listen, he heard someone

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say, "Johnston's little barn is on fire." He ran for his horse, riding as fast as he could for home. When he arrived they were taking the horses to the veterinarian. They were cared for and one brought home, keeping the other one there for treatment as they thought it was nearly blind. I asked to go see it and went with my son.. The horse saw me as I came in the door and neigh-ed, so it was not blind and soon recovered.

When we got off the train on our way down here Richard Spur was as far as the train came. We were so afraid of the Indians we hired the sheriff to come with us to protect us.

We had nothing but our few clothes and I shall always remember the first meal we ate here, we used a bale of hay for a table..

These really were trying times, but happy days.