

FREEMAN, BESSIE

INTERVIEW

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

Field Worker's name Ruth E. Moon

This report made on (date) September 25 1937

1. Name Mrs. Bessie Freeman

2. Post Office Address Guthrie

3. Residence address (or location) 3 miles north of town.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month February Day 18 Year 1890

5. Place of birth Kansas

6. Name of Father Joseph Roop Place of birth Illinois

Other information about father French and German parentage.

7. Name of Mother ---Miller Place of birth New Jersey

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 Five.

Interviewer, Ruth E. Moon,
September 25, 1937.

Interview with Mrs. Bessie Freeman,
Guthrie, Oklahoma.

I was only about two years old when my uncle, who had taken a homestead on Bear Creek in the opening of the Iowa lands, persuaded my father to leave our home in Kansas for the Land of Opportunity. Father bought a relinquishment on Bear Creek and began to build a house. The first thing I remember is lying in the sun, inside the walls of the unfinished house while my father worked on the roof. He had built the fireplace of native stone and just in front of it the warm sun shone down through the part of the roof that was not yet covered. This was the warmest spot my mother could find for me, and there I lay suffering from my first (but not last) attack of chills and fever. There was a lot of malaria along Bear Creek bottom.

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After a few years we traded farms with the Harris family, and so it was in this log cabin my father built that Jennie Harris (Oliver) began to write her stories of Bear Creek. The land along Bear Creek was heavily timbered. After the trees were cut and the stumps removed, there was still a lot of work to be done before the land could be farmed because the ground was a network of roots.

My father was a blacksmith and he made his own plow for cutting these roots. It was a huge thing of heavy construction. I think the beam must have been ten feet long. He also made the heavy yokes for the eight or ten yoke of oxen, and hitched them all to this plow. We children followed him, picking up the roots. After they were dried, we burned them for fuel.

Forest fires kept us worried. When the ground was covered with dry leaves, fires would break out and sweep through the timber. We could hear the roar for an hour before it reached the edge of our clearing. Father and the boys would hurry out and pitch any stray stalks of

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folded that the cattle had not cleaned up, away from the barn. I have seen every bit of such trash burned, but none of our buildings were ever damaged.

Shiloh was our post office. There was also a cotton gin and two stores there. It is one of the ghost towns now, nothing there but a house or two. When we had much trading to do, we went to Guthrie. That was a two-day trip.

There were lots of wild deer in the woods. We had a high fence but they could go over it easily and gracefully almost as if they had wings. I liked to watch them.

Six miles from our home, there was an Indian burial ground, abandoned long ago. I think it is straight north of Fallis. I watched the burial of a small child. Whenever there was a death, two pigs were killed. One was roasted and served to the mourners. The other was taken with the body to the grave so that evil spirits that might harm the soul of the departed would enter the body of the pig and be harmless. I don't know whether the pig

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was buried with the child or not, but I can still remember the swarm of flies that covered that pig as it was hauled to the grave in the same wagon with the body of the child. The corpse, wrapped in blankets, was placed in the grave and the top of the grave was then covered with a roof of logs. Then, earth was piled upon the logs. In time, the dirt fell through the cracks, partly filling the grave and leaving the roof of logs in sight. The mourners went through dances and chanted around the grave.

I first attended school at Shiloh. Jennie Harris was my teacher there for three years. After we moved closer to Guthrie, she taught two years at Pleasant Hill while I attended there. So five terms of my grade school life were spent in her classes.

There was a country doctor, Dr. Torrance, who lived somewhere out that way, but roads were too bad and money too scarce to call him very often and the only way to call him was to send someone after him, so most people just got along the best they could without a doctor. They used herbs and such simple home remedies, and they

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relied a lot on prayer. There wasn't anything else to rely on in those days. My mother used to have spells with her heart and all we children would gather about her chair (she could not lie down at such times) and kneel down and pray. Neighbors were always willing to help in case of sickness. Mother was called out many a night to help deliver a baby somewhere up or down Bear Creek. She, herself, had two children born while we lived out there.

My brother has just been here on a visit from California. We visited the old home place, and drove in a wagon over to the old burial ground. He took a mirror and was down on his knees peering into one of those old open graves, when a little rabbit jumped out almost into his face. I think he thought for a minute that one of the evil spirits had escaped from its pig. He searched the old barn to see if he could find one of the big yokes Father had made, but could not. He thought it would make a nice souvenir to take back to his Art Colony in California.