

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

Field Worker's name Elsie A. Norris

This report made on (date) October 8, 1937

1. Name William Fry

2. Post Office Address Lovell, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) R. F. D. #2

4. DATE OF BIRTH: December Day 9 Year 1851

5. Place of birth Cleveland, Ohio

6. Name of Father Andrew Fry Place of birth Cleveland

Ohio

Other information about father Veteran of Civil War.

7. Name of Mother Charlotte Fry Place of birth Cleveland

Ohio

Other information about mother Irish descent

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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Elsie A. Norris
Interviewer,
October 8, 1937.

Interview with William Fry
Lovell, Oklahoma
R. F. D. #2

Mr. and Mrs. Fry still live on the farm that Mr. Fry homesteaded in the run for claims in the opening of Oklahoma, on April 22, 1889. It is located three-quarters of a mile east and one-half mile south of where the town of Lovell is now located. They have lived here on their homestead for forty-eight and a half years. They have celebrated their fifty-eighth wedding anniversary. They have ten children living.

On April 8, 1889, Mr. Fry left Junction City, Geary County, Kansas, with a party of sixteen men. A part of this group were on a hunting trip; seven took homesteads in the Run, and two of this party are all who are alive now. They are Dan Dyché, the youngest, and William W. Fry, the oldest, who is eighty-six years old. These men all went down to Arkansas City and waited ten days until April 18, then they came down to the Oklahoma line. The Salt Fork River, where Ponca City is now located, was bank-full, and the soldiers flooded the railroad

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bridge between the rails, so that they could cross, as there wasn't any other way that they could cross. There were no wagon bridges and the river was up too high to ford.

They started at the line where Orlando is now located on April 22, 1889, at twelve o'clock noon. There were soldiers stationed all along the line and exactly at noon, they fired guns which were signals to start.

This party of men from Junction City were on horseback; they left their covered wagons where they had camped close to the line, but Mr. Fry says there were people on horses with blind bridles and an old quilt on the horse for a saddle; others in spring wagons. When a spring wagon would get into the first ditch it would take almost a week for the driver to get it out.

The group Mr. Fry was in all scattered when they started out, except Mr. Fry and Pat McGinty, a friend of Mr. Fry, from boyhood. They stayed together and about four o'clock on that same afternoon they reached the farms that were to be their homes. There is a creek running through the Fry farm known as Rock Creek. At the opening

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it had lots of clear water in it, and not any sand but there was not much timber. Now it is filled up with sand, and is dry about half of each year, but it has lots of timber on it now.

Mr. Fry and Mr. Pat McGinty each staked farms in the same section, both in the same section in which the town of Lovell is now located. Mr. Edd McGinty and Mr. George Languelin, brother-in-law of Mr. Fry stayed with the wagons at the camp on the Orlando line.

Next day after the run Mr. Fry started back on horseback after their wagons, Pat McGinty stayed here on their claims. There was not any road back but Mr. Fry started out over the prairie northeast until he came to the camp at Orlando; he killed two wild turkeys out of a flock he ran into. He got the wagon and the men all came back to their homesteads the next day. The road from where Marshall is now located was beaten into a good path the next day. They lost their drinking cup and all of them had to drink coffee out of the coffee-pot.

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The country had all been burned off early that Spring and the grass was good at the time of the Opening. It looked just like a cattle country, but nobody had any cattle.

There were no roads, just cow trails. Next day the men looked up lines and staked out claims. There were no fences anywhere and it was a dismal looking place, Pat kept saying, "Fry, are you going to stay?" Mr. Fry replied, "I've got to stay, I haven't any place else to go."

They dug a little place close to the creek for their drinking water and drank that until the middle of the Summer.

A few days after Mr. Fry and Pat McGinty settled here, a brother, Mr. Tom McGinty, came in from Texas with his family and staked his claim in the same section with the claims of Pat McGinty and William Fry.

At first Mr. Fry and Pat had to go horseback to Guthrie after their mail. Nobody got any papers, nothing came only letters. The first letter Mr. Fry got he paid

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fifty cents for it. The men were lined up fifty deep and each man could ask for mail for two so Mr. Fry got a man up in front to ask for his mail and paid him fifty cents to get him his letter. The day before it cost \$1.00 to have a man up in front ask for your mail.

Guthrie townsite was laid out before the country was opened. There were lots of grocery stores in tents with lumber frames.

The post office at Guthrie was established as soon as the country was opened. They left the block the post office is now on at Guthrie for a post office. It has always been there, first in the tent, then in a board building and now in a brick building.

The way they got the mail they would let four or five men into the building and a soldier would put a gun across the door in front; then after they had gotten their mail the men would go out the back, and there was a soldier there with a gun to see that no one got in the back door. Some men would buy all the postage stamps they had at the post office and peddle them on the street for 10 cents apiece. Mr. Fry had to

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pay 10 cents for the first two cent postage stamp he bought in Oklahoma.

They next got their mail at Alfred (now Mulhall) as well as their groceries. A man named James started up a grocery store and post office and called this post office Standard. It was about three miles east of Fry's. Later they moved this post office to Perth, one mile north of where Lovell is now located. After the railroad was built from Guthrie to Enid and the town of Lovell started the post office was moved to Lovell - where mail carriers delivered the mail on rural routes.

In May, the next month after the Opening, Mr. Fry went back to Kansas after his wife and six children who had stayed at the home of his wife's father in Junction City.

Three of these children were of school age and there was not a sign of a school or anything else much, just the prairie. The family came to Alfred on the train, as there was a railroad running through there when the country opened. They arrived in Alfred the next day after Decoration Day.

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Mr. George Languein met them in his covered wagon, and they camped on a little creek close to Mulhall for three or four days, waiting for their furniture to come; they had shipped their furniture before they left. All they had to sleep in was the covered wagon, some slept in it and some under it. Mulhall was just a tent town then with a railroad station.

After their furniture came, the Fry family started out for their homestead twelve miles west of Mulhall, Mrs. Fry and the children were very anxious to get to their new home.

There was not a sign of a road to follow over from Mulhall, but they had their axe and shovel in the wagon and they had to make their own road as they went along. They had a terrible time as there were so many little creeks to cross and no bridges so they just took their shovel and went up and down the banks of the creek until they found a suitable place to cross, and then dug down the banks of the creek and forded the streams. When they got to their homestead near Lovell, Mrs. Fry felt very down-hearted at the desolate looking place,

that they have called their home for the past forty-eight and a half years.

There wasn't anything but just a prairie with some trees and with a creek running through it. Just a tree and that old covered wagon for shelter. Their first night here Mrs. Tom McGinty and her children drove down in their covered wagon and spent the night with the Frys here in their yard. They had known each other in Kansas before they came here.

As every one here was in the same condition, whenever a family went to see another family they would take their covered wagon to sleep in if they stayed all night.

Soon after Mrs. Fry and the children came they dug a dugout and covered it and fixed a canvas tent and cooked in it and ate in it all summer and slept in the dugout and in the covered wagon. They had no milk, no butter or anything else much; they had to buy everything.

There was not a chicken, cow or anything on the farm except the three horses Mr. and Mrs. Fry had brought with them.

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They had to go to Mulhall or Guthrie to get their groceries. They either went horseback or in the wagon and it was an all day journey and as there was no road and no bridges they would cross the Cimarron River close to the railroad bridge and sometimes the water would come up into the box of the wagon.

Mrs. Fry would get up in the morning and listen to see if she could hear a rooster crow or a cow bawl, but she could never hear anything like that.

That Summer almost everyone left here and went to find work and Mrs. Fry did not know anyone around here for miles and wondered what they would do if any of them got sick as there was not a doctor around and no town any closer than Alfred (Mulhall) and that was nothing but a tent town.

The next year they all had malaria and chills and they would keep quinine on the table and would take it in large doses to break up the fever. They poured the doses of quinine out into the palms of their hands as they did not have capsules in those days.

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The second year they were here they all had the La Grippe or Flu and there was a doctor who gave medicine in a glass of water and stirred it up with his finger. He would walk through the country to doctor people. Finally they heard of a Doctor McPeck who lived between their homestead and Mulhall and they had him in all of the sickness the family had, as long as he lived and by that time there were other doctors coming here to these little towns that had begun to start up.

There were no telephones then and when anyone wanted a doctor, some one would get on a horse and go after him, then the doctor would get on a horse or else drive a buggy and it would be a long time before the doctor would come.

In July of the first year, Mr. Fry and Tom McGinty dug a well in front of the place where the Frys house now stands; they dug it with a spade and shovel and when they struck rock they used dynamite to blast and went through six feet of rock and struck good drinking water at thirty-two feet. This well is still standing in front of their house beside the road. They walled it up with

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rock and used a bucket and rope to draw water with.

That Fall they hauled lumber from Guthrie to build a kitchen. They would get^{up} and start to Guthrie at three A. M. and would not get home until twelve or one o'clock that night. It took several days to haul enough lumber with team and wagon from Guthrie to build one room.

In November of that year Mr. Fry went back to Kansas after his cattle; he had left thirty-one head in a pasture up there. He shipped them to Hennessey, as the railroad was built to Hennessey and as far as Kingfisher the summer after the country was opened. He drove those cattle afoot across the prairie and as there was not any road, he went by direction. It cost him half what the cattle were worth to ship them here.

They cut some posts in the timber south for four or five miles to thin the trees out and bought some posts at 2 cents apiece and made a small pasture and there was a school quarter, a half mile south, that they "day-herded" on, as there was no one living on it.

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Mr. Fry and Pat McGinty bought a plow together the first year. Mr. Fry planted some sod corn with an ax, it made a little. Mr. Fry bought a new mowing machine and rake and put up lots of prairie hay. There was grass that Fall as high as a horse's back everywhere. Mr. Fry put up fifty tons of grass for himself and cut twenty-five tons for Pat and Tom McGinty, and while they were in Kansas shucking corn, there was a prairie fire which burned all their hay.

One day while the grass was so high they scared up a deer and followed him through the grass for a couple of miles until finally Mr. Fry and Mr. Whitwon killed him and divided the deer meat among all their neighbors.

In the Fall of the first year they bought nine hens from a man that had brought them here from Kansas and could not buy feed for them and they got their start of chickens from these hens.

In those days Mrs. Fry baked all their bread and made all their clothing including men's shirts and overalls.

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The first four or five years were real pioneer days before the country was settled up. There were no social activities or any where to go. It was five years after the country was settled up before there were any activities in a social way and then they began having carpet tacking parties, when they tied rags to make rag carpets and had quilting parties among the neighbors, and there would be spelling schools.

People lived on as little as they could, mostly bread and molasses and two Christmases went by without a bit of sugar in the Fry house.

By the first year everyone had a dugout or a little shack of some kind to live in and they spent most of the second year breaking sod; Mr. Fry gave a man a cow to break sod for them with a team of oxen.

During the first ten years here Mr. and Mrs. Fry raised sorghum cane, had good crops of wheat and oats, lots of hay and a corn crop every year; they raised hogs enough for their own meat and had a few to sell. They always kept lots of cattle and had fat cattle to sell, also wheat and corn as they raised

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big corn crops. The corn sold at 40 cents a bushel at the crib.

Mr. Fry got money enough ahead to put up a little barn for the horses and cattle and he put up other improvements such as fences and corrals and they also built an addition to their house and some porches.

The first year the Fry family was here they were not assessed any taxes. They had no taxes and no schools.

The second year the settlers all agreed that each one should furnish a log to build a one room log school house. Each person furnished a log of a certain length brought from the timber and six men met and started to build the school house and the next day another bunch came and when they got the house up they borrowed \$4.00 to pay for having it covered and floored.

A sawmill had been started in the timber.

The Legislature had set aside an acre of ground in each district for school ground and Jim McKay owned the farm the school acre was on and he gave the acre to

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the school district and they afterward bought another acre from Mr. McArdle who had bought out Mr. McKay.

The second year they were assessed a little on personal belongings and they had a little tax, and they had a three months school.

Mr. Fry was Treasurer of the school for several years; he had a large family of children to send to school as seven more children were born to him and Mrs. Fry after they came to Oklahoma - and he was very interested in getting the schools started.

The first teacher was Cora McNally, Mrs. Hogland was her name after she married - she still lives at Covington.

At first they had a three months school and the teacher's salary was \$50.00 a month. The children went to school in this log school house for five years. It took all the personal tax money to pay the teacher. The personal property was all that was assessed. The land was not assessed until the homesteads were proved up and the owners got the deeds. It was five years before Mr. and Mrs. Fry got the deeds to their claims.

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Before the land was assessed the settlers took subscriptions to build a new one room frame building for a school house.

Every one in the district who was able gave \$5.00 and a good many gave a little. They had a hard time getting school started, as there were so many single men here and people who were waiting for the Strip to open. Some people had no children and were not interested in school and some were too poor to help any. They hauled the lumber for the school from Guthrie for nothing. A carpenter worked for a very small sum and some of the men in the district worked on the school for nothing.

They could not vote bonds as nobody would want them since the homesteads were still Government land. After they had taken up a subscription they still owed \$35.00 on the school house. They had neck tie parties and finally had a dance and a supper in the new school house. The people in the district cooked the food and Mr. Fry went around over the northern part of the district and gathered up the food and Jim Lovell went around over the southern part and gathered up the food.

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The women of the district fixed the supper and served it in the old log school house; the charge was \$1.00 a couple to dance and eat supper. After this they still owed \$7.00 so they sold the old log school house to Sam Taliaferro for \$15.00. That put them out of debt and left a little money for incidentals. It took all the tax money to buy seats. By this time the land was taxed and they had four or five months school a year.

Two or three years later this school house was struck by lightning; one Monday and the lightning ripped up the wall of the west end and the floor. Luckily, school had been "let out" on the Friday before. The teachers desk was split in pieces.

A few years later this school house burned, so they built a new one room frame building where they had school for eight months. After the country was settled up and improved they voted \$800.00 in bonds and later, after the town of Lovell was built, they needed more room and so they built two more rooms on the west end of the school house which they had, and employed three

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teachers for a nine months' school. They used these first school houses to have Sunday School and Church in as there was no church built then around any where.

About a year ago the people of the Lovell community voted bonds and built a \$10,000.00 two room brick school building with a basement, furnace and stage, to be taught by two teachers.

The roads were made slowly but gradually. The first settlers had a tug of war in this country. They hauled their grain to Mulhall with only one bridge between here and there. But after they got organized here after the first few years, they opened up section lines, graded the roads a little and each man was assessed a \$4.00 poll tax for work on the roads. When they got more tax money they gradually built bridges and worked roads.

The railroad was built in 1903 from Guthrie to Kiowa and the town of Lovell was started with elevators and a cotton gin so that they could market their grain and cotton without hauling it so far. Mr. James moved his store from Standard to Lovell and other stores were started.

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The first bridge was built across Rock Creek in 1903 in place of the ford in front of Mr. Fry's house. This bridge was washed away twice in a raise that brought the creek up level with the floor on Mr. Fry's porch, but was later rebuilt and anchored and is still standing.