

BIOGRAPHY FORM

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

8179

Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

GILSTRAP, MRS. HARRY B. INTERVIEW.

Field Worker's name Amelia F. Harris,

This report made on (date) August 12, 1937 1937

1. Name Mrs. Harry B. Gilstrap,

2. Post Office Address Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 2003 W. 20th

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month February Day 1 Year 1876

5. Place of birth Ottawa, Kansas

6. Name of Father: Samuel Lee Patrick Place of birth Berry, Massachusetts

Other information about father Dead

7. Name of Mother Mary Tarron Patrick Place of birth Illinois

Other information about mother Dead

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 _____

Journalist, Amelia F. Harris,
August 12, 1937.

Interview with Mrs. Harry B. Gilstrap,
Oklahoma City.

I rode horseback from the Creek County line, September 22, 1891, with thousands of other home-seekers. While this Opening did not have the publicity of the run of '89' and not nearly so many people took part, yet it forms a page in Oklahoma history, and I am proud to admit I was one of those homeseekers. I took up a claim of 160 acres about eight miles south of the Sac and Fox Agency. I was principal teacher at the Sac and Fox Agency Government schools south of Stroud. (Some of these buildings are still there, just going to ruin as nothing is being done to preserve them; they were nearly all built of logs). The Agency was moved to Shawnee under McKinley's Administration. I had a one-room, frame house, built with a nice front porch and I would ride horseback every Saturday and stay until Sunday evening, digging and planting a garden and flowers. I had a tenant who lived in a dugout and did some farming. Deer Creek ran through my claim and I had to put in flood gates.

-2-

I witched for water. This is done with a forked peach tree limb. I would hold one fork in each hand and walk slowly around until the stick would point straight down. Here, I had the well dug, struck water at thirty feet and had an abundance. I am not superstitious and it sounds uncanny, nevertheless it's true. Dr. Marshall of Stroud had me witch water for him. He had an immense wood pile, must have been ten or twelve cords--we didn't have gas then. I took the forked limb in both hands and walked around over his yard and when I came to the woodpile the limb turned straight down. I tried other parts of the yard but that was the only place the stick would turn down. Dr. Marshall had that wood moved, dug his well there and got a fine well of water, sufficient to run a windmill.

I tried to raise fine hogs on my farm but they took the cholera and died.

The next year I paid \$9.00 for seed potatoes and didn't realize more than one peck, but I kept teaching and improving the farm. I taught in Government schools for Shawnee Indians at Shawnee town; this school has been converted into an Indian Tubercular Hospital now. I was transferred in 1893 to Haskell Institute, Lawrence, Kansas, and taught here three

-3-

years. During this time I decided I wasn't a farmer and as it was a great deal of trouble to see after, I sold my farm to Attorney Lewis of Oklahoma City, who paid me \$3,000.00 for it. I felt repaid for my trouble. While teaching at Haskell Institute, I took twenty-three Sac and Fox, Cherokee and Creek Indians to school with me, the largest amount any one person ever brought to school. The Santa Fe officials turned over a coach to me and my group. I taught here until 1896 when I decided to return to the Sac and Fox schools. I had been with these Indians all my life and there was a bond of friendly feeling towards them that I couldn't overcome. I returned to Shawnee-town and taught until 1899; then I married.

These Indians were bright and easy to learn and easy to discipline. We had seamstresses who taught the girls to sew and embroidery and do all kinds of housework, and the boys were taught farming; in other words, they went to school a half day and had vocational training a half day, and I was so proud of my pupils as they made fine records. Jim Thorpe, the great athlete, was one of our pupils. His twin brother died at the school of pneumonia at the age of 16.

-4-

Often I meet some of my old pupils who have made a success in business and politically, too, and they pay me such nice compliments that I feel I am reaping the flowers of love sown in the hearts of these Indians, and it more than pays me for all my trouble, I was poorly paid by the Government.

I married Major Harry Gilstrap in 1899 and this ended a school-teaching career.