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

Field Worker's name Mrs. Nora Lorrin, El Reno, Oklahoma

This report made on (date) June 9 1937

1. Name Mrs. Belle Gunn

2. Post Office Address El Reno, Okla.

3. Residence address (or location) 202 South Barker

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month April Day 30 Year 1874

5. Place of birth Circleville, Kansas

6. Name of Father Mr. M. D. Godfrey Place of birth Roanoke, West Va.

Other information about father Died July 19, 1921

7. Name of Mother Mrs. Sarah Shaw, Godfrey Place of birth Coshocton, Ohio

Other information about mother Died November 20, 1922.

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 _____.

INTERVIEW WITH MRS. BELLE GUNN

By

Mrs. Nora Lorrin, Field Worker

Mrs. Belle Gunn, of 202 South Barker El Reno, Oklahoma, was born to Mr. and Mrs. M. D. Godfrey, on a farm a mile and a quarter from Circleville, Kansas, on April, 30, 1874.

There were three children, two girls and a boy, she being the youngest of the trio. Her father, Mr. M. D. Godfrey, who was known to all his friends for many years as "Uncle Mike", was born in Roanoke, West Virginia, on Feb. 28, 1835. Her mother, Mrs. Sarah Shaw Godfrey, was born in Coshocton, Ohio, on Sept. 7th, 1841.

They were married at Carthage Illinois, shortly after the Civil War. They came to Kansas in 1870, and left Kansas to come to Oklahoma in 1889. Mr. Godfrey came here in 1889 for the run, and was successful in getting a claim. His claim adjoined the old Thurston townsite, southeast of El Reno, about eighteen miles. He got sick and could not get his family here at that time, and so he sold his relinquishment. Later he bought a relinquishment for his oldest daughter, Ida Godfrey, (later Mrs. Robert Garrett) who was old enough to file on a claim.

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Her mother and father came to Oklahoma, with their possessions, on a stock car, her mother helping to care for the stock as people were allowed to do that in the early days. They had a team, an old horse twenty-seven years old that her father refused to part with, three cows, a couple of hogs, and a dog and cat. There were no cats in the neighborhood where they moved and when their cat had kittens, all the neighbors wanted them.

Because of the fact that her father was a Civil War veteran he got re-instated, and ran again; when the Cherokee strip^a opened. He was again successful but he sold the land or gave it away and never did collect for it. An old friend of his, with a big family needed it worse than he did, so he relinquished it to him. They then came to El Reno, in 1893, and bought a home at 503 South Foster. They lived there until he died, at the age of eighty-six, July 19, 1921. Her mother died November 20, 1922.

Mrs. Gunn said it was just a wide place in the road when she landed here on Oct, 5th, 1891, at twelve o'clock. She rode out to her sister's claim fifteen miles southeast of El Reno with the mail carrier in a cart. On her way she saw her first cotton patch, there

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were two acres of it , all very poor stuff. There had been a hail storm that spring, and it literally hailed everything in that neighborhood flat. The cotton was replanted late, and was about six inches high with more bolls than anything else. There was a one room sod house that was across the road from her sister's place with a family of seven living in it.

The first house that was built on her sister's place was a dug-out. It was a little different from most of the dug-outs, as it was dug into a bank, and had the usual dirt roof, but it had a board front. Soon afterward they built a house out of cottonwood lumber called native lumber, using what she called clap-boards placed up and down, and battened. She said it was so warped, you couldn't tell north from south, east or west. It was a story and a half house and it was considered a big house then. She attended Sunday school Oct. 10, 1891, in a sod house at West Point near her sister's place.

The next August she had typhoid fever, and for eighteen months, she did not take a step. This was after they had built the cottonwood house, and they used

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the dugout to keep their milk, butter and fruit cool. Before she got so she could walk again, she used a rocking chair, and scooted around with it as sort of a crutch. She took a notion one day to make a pie. They were all away somewhere, so she took that chair and walked, crawled and scooted, with the aid of the chair, out to the dug-out, to get the milk, and brought it back to the house. She had the pie nicely baked when her mother and folks got home. After her illness she learned to ride a bicycle, in order to limber up and she was also able to work at the Cook and Schrivvers general merchandise store in 1898. She clerked for them for two years.

A smallpox epidemic broke out in 1900, and Mr. Cook took it. They came and got him, and took him to the pest house. The pest house used to be where the poor farm is now, northeast of town, close to the river. After they took Mr. Cook away, a couple of squaws and a buck came into the store, and one of the squaws kept her back turned to Mrs. Gunn, who was behind the counter. She tried to find out what they wanted, but they would not do anything but grunt. Finally the squaw that had been keeping her back on view, turned around. She had the

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smallpox, her face was literally covered with sores. Mrs. Gunn said she didn't know what made them leave the store so hurriedly unless it was her horrified expression.

She says that the Indians were more peaceful than the white people were. The Indians came to town on pay day but for the most part stayed away at other times. They would spend all their money, that day, and sometimes they would bring the things they had bought on pay day and trade them for food before another pay day came. One Finger, Big Buffalo, Setting Sun, and Lone Wolf, were a few of the names of Indians that used to trade at Cook and Schrivers, and she has waited on them many times.

In 1902 there was a man lived there by the name of Jim Cole, who was a cab driver. To the townspeople he was Jim Cole, the honeymooners' cab driver. The train men all knew him, and would stop the train any place to help him rescue a honeymoon couple. When any couple decided to get married, and wanted to leave town without having a charivari, they would go to Jim Cole, and he would always get them away successfully. Often the

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train men would stop the train at the "Y" so he could put a honeymoon couple on the train, while a crowd of their friends would be waiting at the depot for them. She said that she would like to know just how many couples he had put on the train that way.

Mrs. Gunn clerked at Kelso's store in 1902 and was there until 1906, then she did sewing during 1907, and was clerking at Frybergers in 1908. She worked for Frybergers a number of years, and was unfortunate enough to fall down their elevator shaft and get badly injured. She was unable to do anything for quite awhile then instead of going back to work, she got married. She and Mr. Charles Gunn were married Oct. 6, 1913. They were married by the Minister of the First Christian Church, Rev. Lash, who had been in El Reno several months. Mr. and Mrs. Gunn were the first couple he had married, here in El Reno.

The oddest thing that she remembers in the opening of the Cheyenne and Arapaho country, was an ox and a horse hitched to a lumber wagon. The man driving the mismatched team, made the run from the depot, and was successful in getting a claim, without having to go many

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miles to get it. She said there were horses, buckskin ponies, Indian ponies, buggies, wagons, and anything that could be scraped up, or that anyone could ride on or in. They were strung and scattered up and down the line.

She said she got more of a thrill from the opening of the Kiowa and Commanche country in 1901. It took her an hour and a half one day to go a block from the store where she was clerking to the postoffice and back. There were so many people there that day that you went forward a foot and sometimes fell back two. She registered but did not get a claim. The next year she bought a relinquishment in the edge of Caddo. In speaking of the opening she said that every yard was full of somebody sleeping, and there were so many people that you couldn't see the streets. Everybody was good natured, and happy.

Her brother, Charles Godfrey, undertook to ford the South Canadian River at Caddo Jake's crossing in 1903 with his wagon and furniture. He was going to his claim, and at that time the natives, rode up and down on both sides of the river, sort of policing, or keeping watch. Her brother drove into the river, his small boy with him. The river was up and the quick sand bad, but the front wagon got across all right. Then the sand and water be-

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gan to whirl, and the second wagon was upset. The natives rushed in on their ponies, and rescued the team, boy and her brother Charles. Most of the furniture and other stuff, however, are still in the South Canadian quick sand.

MISCELLANEOUS

In speaking of Fort Reno, she states that at one time before the Fort was turned into a re-mount station, there were two companies of Negro Soldiers stationed out there.

The first automobile that was ever in El Reno, was brought here by a carnival. It was sort of a high truck like affair, that was filled with seats. You could ride in it around two squares for ten cents, but Mrs. Gunn's mother would not let her ride in it. A sweetheart of hers owned a horseless carriage, run by electricity. She said just a regular buggy but it felt so foolish sitting up there guiding that thing around. She was in El Reno when there were twenty-two saloons. However she says she prefers saloons to prohibition. She does not think there was as much drunkenness then as now.

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She has ridden down Hoff Street in a cab and had to put her feet up on the front seat, to keep them dry. The water was up in the cab, half way to the seat. That was before they had sewers and drainage. Mrs. Gunn states that she has never known of a cyclone in El Reno. They seem to strike all around, but never exactly at El Reno.

The ball games and all out door entertainment were held at the Fair Grounds, which was in the northwest part of town and to get there you had to "run the gauntlet" so to speak, of the "Red Light" district, and negro town.

The house she lives in now, a large two story structure, was a four room one-story building in the early day. She says that it looked as big as all out doors to us then when it belonged to Judge Waring.

She was in the last interurban car over the bridge at Oklahoma City, when it was washed out in June of 1923. A few hours later, she was on the Frisco passenger train, on the other side of Oklahoma City, and was in the last car to go over the Frisco bridge when it went out the same day. She remembers a Jack Smith that ran a ferry, near Oklahoma City. She is at the present time, and has been for years, El Reno's best known dressmaker.