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Biography Form
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name Grace Kelley

This report made on April 21, 1937

1. Name Bessie Hall

2. Post Office address Henryetta, Okla. Gen. Del.

3. Residence address Wright's Apartment House

4. Date of birth 1894

5. Place of birth Two and a half miles North of Henryetta.

6. Name of father Wadley Downing born in Ala.

7. Name of mother Tochee Yahola Don't know.

No. of sheets attached 1

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Father's Trip from Alabama
Interview of Bessie Hall
Henryetta, Okla.

My daddy was about fifteen when he came from Alabama. When I was a child, children weren't allowed to listen to older people talk, but were told to go and play, so I don't know as much as I should and wish I did know more but I'll tell what I can.

When they were coming here some of them walked, some ~~rode~~ rode horseback, and others rode in the wagons. Sometimes they would stop and there would be no wells, springs nor any place to get drinking water. They would find places where the hogs wallowed and strain that for drinking water.

Southern Civil War Veteran

He rode his horse day and night for many nights, finally they were running from the Northern soldiers, he and his horse was wet with sweat. He couldn't ~~stop~~ stop to take off his coat for they were so close behind him, so he had to take it off while they were running.

Relationship

I don't understand about my father's name and wish I did. Grandma Silla Perryman was a Burgess, her half brother was Fixico, Holocto Fixico, his son was Wadley Downing, my father. That is how I know it but I don't know how he got ~~the name of Downing.~~

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Civil War on Mother's Side

Tommy Yahola was my mother's father. When the Civil War came he took my mother, who was about six years old, and went North. He was a Northern soldier. Mother was uneducated.

Grandmother, Sowa, took Jennie Frank, mother's half sister, South to Waw-see-da. Aunt Jennie was quite a bit older than mother and a school teacher.

They didn't see each other till 1906. Jennie's girl, Mary, was on the train going to Sapulpa, my brother was on the same train and they got to talking. She told the story and how her mother had finally located her sister as living somewhere at Henryetta, but they didn't know exactly where. He told her that was his mother and where they lived. ¶ They both came to Henryetta the next day and went out to see mother, two miles North of Henryetta, She was so glad to see her and next day they all went to Sisocaway to see Aunt Jennie.

Judge Wadley Downing

Daddy was Judge in Okmulgee, in the Indian Court or Council. I can remember his being gone for two or three weeks at a time. He went horseback by the ferry that was where the bridge is now at the Okmulgee Water Works, out toward Nuyaka. He had black saddle-bags made of hair like sheepskin. We children were so tickled to see him and

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we would always run to these saddle bags for the candy he always brought to us.

One time I saw him cross on the ferry when the water was ~~way~~ flood high. They had to take broad axes and cut the limbs from the trees to let the boat pass. I don't see how they could take the boat across for there was no cable on that ferry.

Sometimes he couldn't come home from Council because of high water, and mother would have to go to the store for coffee and sugar. We had most of our groceries at home, but there were some things she had to buy.

Indian Ladies Shopping

Two or three old ladies would go horseback to the McDermott Store, which was about twenty miles from our house. It was straight west, pass through a long prairie, on the other side of Okemah. It would take them all day and they just cut across, if there was a trail I don't know about it.

They would get their things in a sack and put it across the horse and ride back home, getting there about dark.

Corn Dishes

There were about six different dishes that she could make out of corn.

Sofkey, a drink but not an intoxicant.

Blue Dumplings

Sour Bread

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Hominy

Cold Flour; a drink made from the flour, without the grits, first parch the corn, then beat it and fan the flour away from the grits. You can take the corn, after parching to the mill but it's hard to separate the flour and grits. Use sofkey corn. This drink is good to settle the stomach when a person has fever.

Dry corn; is just what it says, when it is cooked it tastes like ~~canned~~ corn.

Flour corn; I've known her to get up at five in the morning and go out to the corn crib and make flour for our breakfasts.

Cane or Flour Fan

Grandma Perryman has a flour fan. They are woven out of cane, and look like a big dish pan made of cane. They are about four inches deep. When you beat the corn good, you take this fan and fan it until you separate the flour from the coarse part, which we call grits.

Clay Jars.

When they needed some jars to use they didn't buy them,

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They would go where there was a thick clay, there is some of it on Mrs. Hardin's place on that old round hill. The kind of jars that they wanted were made out of it and then heated to make them hard.

Storm Killed Ox Team in 1889

Father drove oxen to haul logs, the wagon axle was bigger than a water bucket, the tires of the wheels were about eight inches wide. The yoke was of ~~steel~~ wood but it had a steel bolt holding it together, or that might have been to fasten them to the wagon, I really don't know which.

He was coming from work, hauling logs for a rail fence for himself. A bad looking cloud was coming fast and he ran into the house, not thinking to loosen the oxen. They went under a blackjack tree about a half mile from the house. When the storm was over and he went to see about the oxen they had been hit and killed by lightning.

The Reason Taylor Taylor Likes Me.

When father was Judge, Taylor Taylor was arrested for killing a man. He said then and says now that he didn't do it but was afraid he couldn't prove it, till he didn't know what to say or do. When father heard the evidence at the Council he decided that Taylor Taylor was innocent and turned

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him loose. Ever after that he has said that father saved his life, for if he had decided against him or found him guilty, the penalty would have been death.

Concharty Indian Town

Concharty is north of Okmulgee about twenty miles, right at Blueford Miller's ranch. He was one of the oldest settlers.

Little Cussehta

Little Cussehta is a Methodist church that used to be at Shulter but it has been moved east of Rock Hill, on the Burgess place. Yanah Harjo, the daughter of Cussehta Harjo, married a Burgess and made a home close to Rock Hill. She was the mother of Riley Burgess. She made, started, this church and named it Little Cussehta after the one her father had made.

Big Cussehta is the Methodist church South East of Okmulgee, at the old home of Cussehta Harjo, who started it.

New Town

New Town is a church right North of Okmulgee two miles.

High Spring

High Spring is a church right South of Okemah five miles on the right hand side of the highway.

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Nuyaka

Nuyaka was a settlement or town, so when they built the mission they named it Nuyaka just like they would name a town Arbeka if one was built at the Arbeka bridge, which is named after Abbeka Town.

Osoche Town

I belong to Osoche Town which is East of Dewar, but I couldn't give the exact location.

McDermott Store

McDermott was a rancher who had over a thousand acres of range. He had a store and I think a Post Office.

If I can study up any more we will get together again.