

KRENER, C. E.

INTERVIEW

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Field Worker: Virgil Coursey  
 May 26, 1937.

Interview with C. E. Keener  
 710 North Jackson  
 Altus, Okla.

Born May 29, 1882  
 Texas.

Parents D. H. Chism, father,  
 Mollie Turner, mother.

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Three other families came with us to Oklahoma in 1888— The Mullins, the Cleavelands, and a Mrs. Henderson, a widow. We chartered a car to Vernon for our furniture, and we came through in covered wagons. We came from Limestone County, Texas. I was six years old at the time, and was the third oldest of three boys and three girls. My father was D. H. Chism, and mother's maiden name was Mollie Turner.

We settled six miles east and a mile and one-half south of Altus, near my grandfather, E. T. Turner, who had been here some time.

Things were discouraging from the very start. We found the well where we were to get water full of rats. It had to be cleaned out of course, and my father

needed to get back to Vernon to get our furniture. We got some water from another well and found it very hard. We had always been used to soft water and the more soap one used the thicker and stickier the water seemed. My mother washed dishes and cried, saying she wished we were back in Texas.

We didn't remain long at this place however, and moved six miles south of Duke. By going farther west my father was able to file on a half section of land rather than a quarter. In a way, I was rather glad because we were further away from the Indians. I had heard tales of the terrible things the Indians used to do, and I really believed that at any time we might be scalped by the Indians. My mother, knowing my fear of the Indians, took advantage of the fact and scared me into wearing my bonnet when I was out in the sun. She said the Indians were more likely to scalp me if they saw my head uncovered.

Duke was a very small place, consisting of one store, a blacksmith shop, and a few other little buildings. It was a very wild and desolate place. It was several miles to our closest neighbor. We had a dugout and a one-room shack.

We used oxen for farming for a number of years. Food sometimes got scarce, but as a rule we had plenty of a few simple foods. There were a few antelope in the country, quite a few prairie chickens, and plenty of rabbits. They were good rabbits too, sweet and delicious. I have helped twist many a rabbit out of a hole. I remember where we kept our wires used for twisting the rabbits out of the holes. We kept them hanging up at a certain place, and they were pretty and bright from constant use.

We walked four miles to school and back, which was held in a private home. Afterwards a school was built nearer us, but we had to pay to attend.

One day one of my brothers and my father were coming in from the field. A cloud had come up, and my father told the boy to hurry to the house with the oxen before it began to rain. He was coming on behind with a hoe across his shoulder. My father was struck by lightning and was killed instantly. Heavy rains followed, and the weather was so severe that only some three or four men attended my father's burial. He was buried in the Aaron cemetery.

One of the boys got a job over at Vernon, Texas, with a merchant, where he worked for some time. We remained on the farm for a number of years.

We had very little sickness in our family. I remember that the croup was the most serious illness during our childhood. We had no medicines other than coal oil for cuts. One night my sister had the croup and it looked as if she would choke to death. My mother sent one of the children out after some binder oil. She had my sister drink some of this oil. It made my sister awfully sick and she vomited and got over her choking spell.

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I think one of the worst hardships we had during pioneer days was the suspense and worry of waiting for the return of some member of the family who was away from home. We used to worry when the men were over in the Indian Territory for wood, for one never knew when they would be caught by the marshals and carried to El Reno or some place to stand trial.

I remember that at one time we were completely out of food, and it became necessary for my mother to

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go to Vernon after supplies. She told us younger children that it would be better for us to stay at home, and she took the older ones and struck out in the wagon for Vernon. As I have already said, I had a brother working in Vernon. He later told me that when mother arrived at Vernon she looked him up, and told him she was out of food and had made the trip to secure some. My brother was almost panic stricken, for he didn't have a cent and he knew mother had no money. However, he went to his employer and borrowed ten dollars and gave it to her. Now, ten dollars in those days would buy a lot of groceries; that is, staple groceries such as flour, sugar and coffee. But mother used all the money for groceries. She had a whole load of them. My brother said she looked relieved when her purchases were made and the groceries piled in the wagon. She climbed in the spring-seat and made her departure. She was humming a little tune. She was happy, she had groceries, food for her family.

Back home, we children were having quite a lonesome time. Mother was gone three days and two nights. When

dark came on we scuttled down into the dugout and bolted the door and the sliding windows. And we wouldn't <sup>have</sup> opened the doors under any circumstances. We had a big dog and he sat on the dugout and howled, and his howls mingled with the howls of the wolves, the cry of the owls and the moaning of the wind. Thus, we spent the long nights.

On the afternoon of the third day we climbed the highest hill and watched and listened for the return. Night came on, and we were afraid to stay longer so we hurried to the dugout and fastened ourselves in. Along about ten o'clock we heard the rattle of a wagon and the steady plodding of oxen feet, but we remained inside. There might be some mistake. It might not be mother. But the sound drew nearer and nearer until finally the wagon drew up almost to the dugout door, and we heard mother's voice. The tension lifted. We unfastened the door and rushed out, happy and relieved.

We had very few clothes, mostly cheap calico. I don't remember that there were any styles. They were just dresses, and we were glad to get them. One Christmas

we received some gifts. They were called "fascinators."  
 They were three cornered, covered with brilliant beads,  
 tied  
 and/under the chin. Need I say we were fascinated  
 with our fascinators?

I have in my possession a bread tray used by my  
 mother. It is worn so thin in the bottom that it is  
 cracked.

I feel that we should not complain today about  
 the hardships we have, for they are nothing in comparison  
 with those of pioneer days.

Note--Mrs. Keener married C. E. Keener in 1909.

He died in 1933.