

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

KARNES, MARY H.

INTERVIEW.

9387.

Field Worker's name Ethel Mae Yates.

This report made on (date) December 18, 1937.

1. Name Mary H. Karnes.

2. Post Office Address Elk City, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 1121 West 2nd Street.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month July Day 17 Year 1891.

5. Place of birth Cedar County, Missouri.

6. Name of Father G. M. Stalnaker. Place of birth Virginia.

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Eveline Stalnaker. Place of birth Virginia.

Other information about mother _____

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 8.

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Ethel Mae Yates,
Investigator,
Dec. 13, 1937.

An Interview With Mary H. Karnes.
1121 West 2nd Street, Elk City, Okla.

I was born in Cedar County, Missouri, in 1871 and came to Kansas with my mother and father in 1884. We came in covered wagons and brought some chickens and a few head of stock and led a milch cow behind the wagon all the way. We lived there one year then moved to Liberal, Kansas. Came by train to Decatur County and then came in covered wagons to the place of Liberal. This place was almost owned by the cattlemen.

While we were in Liberal, there was a big Indian scare and many people left. We learned later that it was the cattlemen who put on the Indian scare to get the people to leave, so they could have the grass for their stock.

In 1886 we moved over into the Territory and came to what was known as "No Man's Land" and settled on a claim and dug a dugout back in a bank and covered it with sticks and dirt.

We settled on Beaver Creek and used water out of the creek until we could get us a well dug. The sand was so

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"quicky" that we took boxes that we brought our things in and broke them up to get the lumber to stand on to keep from going down in the quicksand while we dipped our water, and we used cow chips for fuel.

There was a little post office nearby named Blue Grass, but we had to go to Liberal, Kansas, for our supplies which was about fifty miles and it would take several days to make the trip. A little later we built a sod house and had to haul the lumber that we used in it from Liberal.

My father did not file but was what was known as a "squatter"; he farmed and raised stock.

In 1891 I was married to Mr. W. S. Scranton. He was a ranchman and owned lots of stock. He filed on a claim, and when we were married I moved into what was called a "doby" house. It was one large square box room with one door and two windows in it. I still lived on Beaver Creek and our post office was near Optima; it was on one side of Beaver Creek and we lived on the other. Beaver Creek got some big rises up. One time I noticed that it was rising. I was home alone and I went to the barn to get my little chickens

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and before I could get back to the house I had to wade in water two feet deep.

In 1893 I was sick in bed and a rise came down. My husband put my bed up on the table and nailed up the door, to keep out as much water as possible. He then stood and dipped water with a bucket and threw it out the window just as fast as he could.

In 1894 there came one of the worst blizzards that was ever known. It was on May 21, and I was alone. I spent night after night alone. My husband had bought another room and moved it and set it about three feet from the other room with the doors facing. That night a big snow fell and the next morning the snow had drifted in between the rooms and I was snow bound and nothing to dig out with but a little stove shovel. When I began to get the snow dug away I found our dog buried in the drift, but he was still alive and came wiggling out. Grass was green and we had quit feeding our cattle. We lost twenty-five head and our nearest neighbor lost fifty. Not far from there they said that a person could walk for miles on the carcasses of dead cattle. I guess the

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cattlemen suffered the worst losses that they had ever known.

We laid in one thousand pounds of flour a year extra to feed the roomers and comers and goers. Our door latch was always on the outside and when a cowboy came around he knew he was at home. Sometimes there would be as many as thirty-five men for me to cook a meal for and maybe I would know only an hour before that they were coming and I had to cook with cow chips as there was no wood. Our food consisted mostly of beef, bread, and coffee and sometimes gravy.

Every fall the men would have a big round-up and would round-up all of the stray cattle and throw them in a pasture near us and our house was headquarters. When the men got through rounding up, each one would pick out his own brand and go home. The cattlemen would round up their cattle and put them in a pasture by us until they got ready to ship, then they would drive to Dodge City, Kansas, and ship them from there to Kansas City, Kansas. After the cattle were taken away and the cow chips were dry we would take the wagon and gather the cow chips into the barn and this was our winter fuel.

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I got one real scare the first year that I was married. I went down to the creek to get some water and ran right up onto a wild cat lying on the bank. My husband took his gun and went down and killed it. When we first came to the Territory our fruit consisted of little wild Chickasaw plums.

We lived here five years and in 1896 we moved down near Hartshorne in what is now Pittsburg County. My husband was still in the cattle business and went "broke". He then went to work in the mines and was killed in the mine explosion in 1900.

In 1901 I was married to Mr. W. A. Karnes. Mr. Karnes had come to the Territory in a much earlier day than I. He came from Dodge City, Kansas, to Fort Sill in 1873. They were hauling supplies to the fort. They brought one hundred wagons and four mules to the wagon and one hundred extra mules and twenty-five extra men. There were no roads and they just had to blaze their way across the country. When they got to the Canadian River it was frozen over; they put the mules across first then put the wagons across.

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Mr. Karnes' wagon was lost. It was loaded with shelled corn and when he went on the ice it broke through. His boss caught him with his lariat rope and rescued him but his wagon and teams went down in the quicksand and were never rescued. He was frozen stiff but they worked with him and got him warmed up. When they got to the fort they never had an extra mule or an extra man as they had frozen to death on the way. He was gone six months on this trip that his folks didn't hear from him as there was no way to send mail. They thought that he was dead, that he had frozen or the Indians had killed him.

He fought the Indians in 1876. He and another man were scouting around and in some bushes they found two girls. The Indians had made a raid on them and had burned their parents. One of the girls was about sixteen and the other was smaller. The older had been so scared that she had lost her mind. Neither of the girls had a stitch of clothes on.

Mr. Karnes was a great hunter and with several other men had been over on the plains hunting. One night some of their horses strayed away and he went out to hunt for them. He became so cold that he sat down two miles

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from a fire and imagined that he was by the fire. The men were hunting for him with spy glasses the next morning and saw him where he was sitting and came and got him and thawed him out. He said it was not the freezing that hurt but the thawing out.

Then in 1913 we moved to what was then South McAlester and ran a hotel for two years. Mr. J. J. McAlester ate with us. He was the man who founded the town. That was just about the time the Indians registered and we have had as many as one hundred and fifty Indians in the hotel at one time. We stayed there two years and went back to Hartshorne and carried the mail to Mc Alester in a surrey and also carried passengers. We did not stay there long until we moved to Crowder; the post office was Juinate but all are as one now. This town was also named after the man who founded it and he was an Indian. We lived here four years and ran a hotel. We then moved to Missouri in 1908 and in 1914 we moved back and settled at Carpenter. We made all of these moves in covered wagons and cooked on campfires. All slept in the wagons that could and what

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could not sleep in the wagons slept under the wagons.

We came from Carpenter to Elk City in 1920 and in 1924 my husband died here in this house that we live in now. We took him back to Hartsborne for burial. He fought in the Civil War for both the South and the North. He was caught in Texas when the war broke out and was taken in the war. He went home on account of sickness and was caught and taken to war again. He and Abraham Lincoln were great friends; played together when they grew to manhood. He drove the hearse that took Abraham Lincoln to the cemetery.