

KNIGHT, LAURA

INTERVIEW

12071

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FORM A-(S-149)

BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

Indian-Pioneer History Project of Oklahoma

Field Worker's Name Alene D. McDowell

This report made on (date) October 26, 1937

Name Mrs. Laura Knight

Post Office Address 539 Pearson, Pawhuska, Oklahoma

Residence Address (or location) 539 Pearson

DATE OF BIRTH: Month August Day 2 Year 1859

Place of Birth Humboldt, Kansas

Name of father James A. Coffey Place of Birth Illinois

Other information about father Laid out town site of Coffeyville, Kansas.

Name of mother Louisa Jarnahan-Coffey Place of Birth Texas

Other information about mother Buried in Colorado

Number of sheets attached 12

Alene D. McDowell,
Interviewer
Washington County.
Indian - Pioneer History, S-149.
October 26, 1937.

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Interview with
Mrs. Laura Knight
538 Pearson
Pawhuska, Oklahoma.

Mrs. Laura Knight was born August 2, 1859, at Humboldt, Kansas.

Father, Colonel James A. Coffey was born November 18, 1827, in Gallatin County, Illinois, died in 1879, a victim of typhoid - pneumonia, and is buried in Dodge City, Kansas.

Mother - Louisa Carnahan - Coffey was born December 11, 1833, at Austin, Texas, died September 18, 1913 at the age of seventy nine years. She is buried near Delta, Colorado.

I came with my parents from Humboldt to what is now Coffeyville, Kansas, in 1869, when I was ten years old.

My father, Colonel Coffey, bought the land where Coffeyville now stands, for \$50 in gold, and laid out the townsite of the present city of Coffeyville.

My father was a typical pioneer with an adventurous spirit, adapted to any and all conditions of life, energetic, thrifty, restless, nomadic, a born leader of men. He was imaginative

initiative, self-reliant and honest. He was fascinated by the glamour of a receding frontier, born in the quietude of an established order, but destined to die within the shadows of Boot Hill at a time when Dodge City was ruled by two-gun men as epitomized by Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity Jane.

My father died long before he had reached the so-called span of life, but he lived intensely and the ear marks of his sagacity and the foot prints of his restless feet still may be discerned after the lapsing of three score years of time. He lived in Kansas less than a quarter of a century, yet during that period he had been soldier, farmer, merchant, miller, stock trader, and postmaster. My parents reared a family of sturdy children, most of whom are still living, scattered over the western states.

At the time my father decided to establish a trading post at Coffeyville, he purchased a patent to a tract of land within what was termed "The Strip," a narrow strip of land lying between the South border

of Kansas-Nebraska Territory and the estimated Northern border of the Indian Territory.

It was several years before deed titles to any of this ~~strip~~ could be obtained. Old Parker lay wholly within the same strip. The North border of this strip coincided approximately with the present 12th street in Coffeyville. Deeds could be obtained to land lying to the North of this line, and therein lay the big secret of the rapid growth of New Coffeyville which sprang up a year later the site of the present location.

The Coffey trading post was located at the intersection of the present 15th street and Maple avenue. Our home was a long structure, later boxed, and was located just west of the present Missouri, Kansas and Texas railroad right-of-way on the south side of 15th street. So close was this pioneer residence to the right-of-way that when excavation for the tracks had been completed, only room for a narrow pathway was left on the east side of our house.

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To emphasize the narrowness of this pathway, I relate the following incident:

Clarence A. Lang, later Chief of Police, but then a carrier boy for "The Journal, rode a pony on his route. One evening after a heavy rain that made the path muddy and slippery, the pony slipped down this embankment, taking its rider with it. The embankment was all of 8 feet high.

Our house was razed a quarter of a century ago, but after this house was removed, other houses in the vicinity came to be pointed out as the former home of Colonel Coffey and some of their wood became sacred. Associated with my father in the incorporation of a "town company" were N.B. Blanton, Ed Pagan, John Clarkson and William Wilson.

Historians generally seem to assume that Parker was a thriving town at the time that Coffeyville got started. Parker Town Company was incorporated in September 1869, or a month after my father had organized his town company.

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Major H. W. Martin was president of the town of Parker and D. T. Parker, of the Southwest Stage Line Company, was secretary. The town's full name was Parkerbourg, meaning Parker Village.

My father was the third of a family of twelve children. He learned to write after he was married. My parents were married in 1848 in Illinois and in 1854 removed to Kansas and settled 4 miles south of Lawrence.

My father was opposed to the introduction of slavery in the Kansas Territory and was with James A. Lane and John Brown in the capture of Washington Creek Fort, and at the engagement of Lecompton, part of the time as Commissary. He was taken prisoner twice by pro-slavery parties.

In 1859 he became associated with in business with Oliver Marsh. Together they established trading posts on the Neosho, Verdigris and Arkansas Rivers, the latter post where Wichita, Kansas now stands. He acquired

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the knowledge of two Indian languages and spoke each fluently. In 1857 the firm laid out the town site of Humboldt, where I was born.

HAD A STORE AT CHETOPA

In 1866 Coffey and Marsh sold out their entire business and moved to Kansas City, Missouri, where they started a wholesale grocery business. My father took a large stock to the Dakota Territory and traded with the Sioux Indians for one year. ^{In 1868} He ~~then~~ dissolved partnership with Mr. Marsh and went to Westport Landing, where he again sold merchandise. In 1869 he went to Chetopa where he did merchandising for one year.

In 1870, he pre-empted land on the west side of the Verdigris River and almost opposite Parker. There he built a store and house and erected a saw mill and a grain mill. He also did some farming North of Coffeyville, but mostly his business was trading with the Osage Indians, a trade he maintained until 1875. He owned the farm, now known as the Montgomery farm, north of Coffeyville.

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A comment in a sketch of my father's life, probably written in about 1878 said, "Colonel Coffey was foremost in every enterprise for the promotion of public interest and on this account the town of Coffeyville was named in his honor. In the effort to build up and develop the town, he lavished his time and money and greatly aided in the construction of the L.E. & Gulf Railway."

November 18th is celebrated in Coffeyville as "Coffey Day," This is in honor of the birthday of James A. Coffey, the founder of the town, which was organized in August 1869, and from which eventually sprang the city of Coffeyville.

In the early 70's my father established trading posts at Pawhuska and Gray Horse. My brother, Eben, ran the store at Gray Horse.

In 1875 my oldest sister, Mrs. Mary McIntyre, taught the first school at Pawhuska. This school was located on the hill. I visited her while she was teaching and one of the Osage boys, Little Joe,

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wanted to trade 25 ponies for me. I immediately wanted to go home, but she convinced him I was not for sale.

In the spring of 1878 my parents removed to Dodge City where my father's death occurred one year later.

In 1877 I married John Soderstrom at Coffeyville, Kansas, and removed to Pawhuska, Indian Territory, in a covered wagon. My husband operated a flour mill for the government for four years.

We received our mail once a week by mail hack. Harry Broom (who now lives near Caney, Kansas) drove the mail hack. I made a trip to Coffeyville with him in the mail hack once, and I have never forgotten it. When we got to the Big Caney River, it was up, but we drove into it about middle way. The team was young and could not swim. The debris was coming down the river fast and furious and I thought the hack would turn over every minute. He jumped out of the hack, swam around and cut the horses loose, swam back to the hack and told me to climb up and sit on the back of the seat and hold

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the mail sack out of the water. He had also given me \$300 which I put in my pocket to keep dry. He then went for help to a farm house near by. Mr. Calahan, the farmer, came with him and brought a team which happened to be in the barn and harnessed. The hack had been washed down the river about a quarter of a mile in this time and it seemed like every minute it would go over. A tree hit it once and nearly knocked it over. I saved the mail and the \$300, but it was certainly a thrilling experience. Mr. Broom, the mail carrier visited me about ten years ago, the first time I had seen him for about 45 years but I knew him.

My son, Eben, was the first white baby born in Pawhuska. The Indians would come to our house and peep in the windows and when discovered they would ask to see the white baby.

After four years in the Indian Territory we returned to Kansas and settled on a farm 13 miles North of Coffeyville, where we lived for 15 years. My husband leased 100,000 acres in the Indian Territory, on Candy Creek where he fed 1,000 head of cattle. His

brand was an "Anchor". He shipped from Elgin, Kansas to Kansas City, Missouri.

In 1896 we returned to Pawhuska. We brought an old fashioned square piano and it took one wagon to haul it. My husband operated a cattle ranch east of Pawhuska and operated a flour mill in town.

When we first arrived here we boarded at the Debow Hotel, for six weeks. This hotel was a stone building located on West Main Street, between what is now, Mathews and Palmer Avenues. It was erected in 1894 and was at that time the best building in Pawhuska, with the exception of the government buildings. It still stands at the same location.

When we came here Mr. Gibson, father of Allie Gibson of 607 Grandview, Pawhuska, was building the government buildings.

Our principal food were dried beans, fruit, flour and pulverized pumpkin. Of course, our meat was wild game and beef.

In 1903, my husband was drowned in Bird Creek,

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just east of our home. He had several men working for him, putting up ice off the creek. He went down the ~~creek~~ where he located ice about 12 or 14 inches thick. The men heard his cries and went to his rescue but were too late.

I reared a family of six children and have gotten along very well. I have one son who ~~owns~~ and operates a large grocery store in Pawhuska and one son who is Vice President of the Bank of Commerce here.

My sisters and brothers are scattered and are all getting along in years. My sisters are: Mrs. Irene Moore of St. Joseph Avenue, Long Beach, California, Mrs. Amy Emerson and Mrs. T.C. Murdock, Loveta, Colorado. I have one brother, E.A. Coffey, who is now 86 years old, living at Austin, Colorado.

Seven years ago I married F.P. Knight of Pawhuska.

My grandfather was Achilles Coffey, born in Kentucky in 1804. He lived in Saline County, Illinois. My great grandfather was James A. Coffey, born in Virginia in 1773 and had lived in Tennessee, Kentucky

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and Illinois. My grandfather Achilles Coffey, was a Captain in the Black Hawk War and afterwards became a Baptist minister. He lived in Coffeyville for two or three years in the early 70's.

My grandmother was Jane Dean-Coffey. Her father was Rev. Jacob Dean, a resident of Hamilton County Illinois. He died in 1853.

Her mother's name was Lane.

I have a copy of the first weekly newspaper published in Pawhuska and also pictures of the early day osages.
