

LORRIN, NORA L. (SMITH)

PIONEER EXPERIENCES.

10555

285

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

286

LORRIN, NORA L. SMITH PIONEER EXPERIENCES. 10555

Field Worker's name Mrs. Nora L. Lorrin

This report made on (date) April 28 1938

1. Name Mrs. Nora L. Smith Lorrin

2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 1006 East Watts

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month December Day 29 Year 1883

5. Place of birth Barnston, Nebraska

6. Name of Father Thomas W. Smith Place of birth Illinois

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Mary Jane Conley Smith Place of birth Indiana

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 _____

LORRIN, NORA L. SMITH. PIONEER EXPERIENCES. 10555

Nora Lorrin
Investigator
April 28, 1938

Experiences of Mrs. Nora L. Smith Lorrin,
1006 East Watts, El Reno, Oklahoma

I was born at Barnston, Gage County, Nebraska, December 29, 1883. My father, Thomas William Smith, was born in Illinois, January 29, 1842, and died March 17, 1925. My mother, Mary Jane Conly Smith, was born near Terre Haute, Indiana, December 29, 1846, and died December 3, 1902. I was one of ten children, two of whom had died before I was born. My parents were married in Iowa shortly after the Civil War ended. Father was a Civil War Veteran, having served in the Civil War for three years. He was a Corporal when he was discharged from the army.

My parents lived on a farm near Creston, Iowa, and around Mount Ayr. They moved to Nebraska about the year of 1882, going to Barnston, in Gage County, where I was born. This town was just in the making, being built on the site of an Indian village, and some of the wigwams were still standing when I was born. When I was six months old my parents moved to Custer County and my father took a claim next to the hills, north of the Middle Loup River

LORRIN, NORA L. SMITH. . PIONEER EXPERIENCES. 10555

2

about three miles. Our post office was Walworth and it was just a post office and nothing more. Later, there was a store there, but it never amounted to anything. Father had 160 acres of land and part of it was good rich land, but part of it was in the hills north and, of course, was good for nothing but grazing. I have helped my sister older than me to herd cattle in those hills many times, sometimes on horseback and sometimes on foot. We both got to be good riders. I can't remember when I couldn't ride, unless it was when I was crawling and couldn't walk. Father was allowed a tree claim of a few acres, and I remember that he planted cottonwood trees.

He disposed of his claim and we started south about 1890. He loaded up our household belongings and all of us children and started south. It was cold. Mother had cooked some meat; if I recall correctly it was a boiled ham. It froze so hard that when we went to eat it, we could scarcely gnaw it. There were five of us children with the wagons, the youngest about eighteen months old, and when we got to Grand Island, Father loaded us onto a train and he and our oldest brother stayed with the wagons. He

LORRIN, NORA L. SMITH.

PIONEER EXPERIENCES. 10555

3

shipped us to Topeka, Kansas, where his mother and two or three sisters were living. We stayed there, visiting our various relatives until Father and Brother Clint got there with the wagons. My father had a brother who ran a flour mill at Hallowell, Kansas, whose name was John R. Smith. He also owned a farm two miles southeast of Faulkner, Kansas, in Cherokee County. There is where we headed for and lived on Uncle John's farm for two years. This farm had a good orchard on it, lots of apples and a few peach trees. There was also a fish pond on the place that was just alive with fish. I spent two rather happy years while I lived on that farm. The folks let me do about as I pleased.

There was a creek about a half a mile south of the house, and I often took my dog, Fanny, a greyhound, and wandered along it alone. There were May apples on its banks, I did not really like them, but they looked so juicy, I kept sampling them in the hopes that I'd find one sometime that would taste as good as it looked. There was also a large wild cherry (black cherry) tree, in fact two or three of them, that had the most delicious cherries I ever tasted. I got to eat the only pawpaws that I ever saw while I was living there.

LORRIN, NORA L. SMITH . . . PIONEER EXPERIENCES. 10555

4

Father had a brother of the name of Daniel B. Smith who had gotten a claim nine miles southwest of McCloud in 1889, and he wanted us to come to Oklahoma, so one day we loaded up again in a couple of covered wagons and headed south. I remember that we drove miles and miles when there were no houses along the roadside. I don't remember seeing any Indians that were in a group at any time along the way. We'd see them riding across country, invariably bareback, and often clothed only in a shirt split up the sides and a rag tied around their heads with a feather in it. The main high light for me was that we came to a strip of timber in the Osage country that had been recently struck by a cyclone, and that was really a sight. It was about a quarter of a mile long and a little more than half that wide. The trees had been pulled out by the roots and slammed every which way. Some of them looked as though they had been picked up by a giant hand and wrung like a dish rag. That sight is one of the reasons I am afraid of storms. Some of those trees were two and three feet in diameter.

Along our route I saw the first log house that I had ever seen. It was empty, a one-room affair with a large

LORRIN, NORA L. SMITH.

PIONEER EXPERIENCES.

10555

5

fireplace. Near it was a cotton patch with the cotton just beginning to open up real good, so I saw my first log house and my first cotton at the same time. We stopped and examined the house and gathered a few handful of cotton. I found a large crockery marble on the hearth of the fireplace and still have it. I remember that we crossed a river on a ferry boat somewhere along the line. I presume it must have been the Arkansas River but could not remember it well enough to say for sure. I know that I didn't like it much. While passing through the Osage Country we camped one night near an Indian's dwelling. I went to the house and got acquainted with an Indian girl and took her back to camp with me. I made my first introduction when I introduced that Indian girl to my mother and older sister. They were astonished because they did not know that I knew how. This Indian girl was well educated, could talk good English and invited us all up to the house in the evening. We went and there was this girl, a boy and the father and mother. We sang songs and recited all the declamations we could remember, and they sang and danced for us; it was fun. We all recited

LORRIN, NORA L. SMITH.

PIONEER EXPERIENCES. 10555

6

and sang until about nine or ten o'clock, then we went back to camp. Those people, though full blood Indians, were as nice and polite as anyone I ever saw and their home, though simple as to furniture, was clean and neatly kept.

We landed at Uncle Dan's farm sometime in 1892 or '93 and set up our tent in his yard. He had a large family of children and a two-room box house, a cellar, a well and a box barn. He raised just oodles of the biggest water-melons that I ever saw, some of them weighing sixty or more pounds. He also raised cotton and corn. I do not remember just how long we stayed there, possibly six months, anyway it was through a summer and into the fall.

We were within about three and one half miles of a log school house that was to the southeast, and my sister, Effa, and I attended a term of school at that log house, going back and forth in a cart drawn by a balky sorrel pony. The "little devil" would take a notion to stop, and we'd just have to wait until the spirit moved her to go and when it did she'd start with a lunge. One evening after school was out, we started home and old Daisy balked

LORRIN, NORA L. SMITH.

PIONEER EXPERIENCES. 10555

7

when we came to a culvert. My sister was driving and I let my thoughts wander away as we were waiting on her to make up her mind to go. When she started, I was looking elsewhere, and I tumbled out of the cart backwards, head over heels. I struck the ground with my right arm out to catch myself and it bent right back between the wrist and elbow. I looked down saw what had happened and like a goose used my bent arm to get up with and I saw it bend some more. It was numb and did not hurt, but as I was just a kid and absolutely scared to death, I started screaming at the top of my voice. Effa was trying to hold the horse and she yelled at me to come to her. I ran to her and she looked at my arm which was grotesquely sticking out in the wrong direction. She quieted me and then took my arm and bent it straight across her knee. She worked with it until it was as straight as she could get it, and that was the only doctoring that arm of mine got except to have it wrapped with some brown paper that had vinegar put on it. I really don't know whether that did any good or not. It later swelled and turned black and blue and it really hurt. However, it got well,

LORRIN, NORA L. SMITH. PIONEER EXPERIENCES. 10555

8

but never has been so well that it isn't tender and a bit sore at times. I can't straighten my arm completely straight without it hurting my elbow.

While we were at this place the Baptist Church held a protracted meeting at the school house. My cousin, Viola Smith, and I went one Sunday. Several women who had religion had got after us to go to the mourners' bench and we went. Neither of us really knew what it was about. But after it was over and the preacher was about to close the meeting, he announced that we would be baptized as soon as it could be arranged. We were so young that he said that he would have to get our parents' consent, but he said he would attend to that. Neither of us had thought of baptism, and on the way home we both decided we did not want to be baptized. Anyway we went home and said nothing about it. That week we spent playing, making a graveyard by burying little dead chickens under the trees. We were attending the graves of "our dead" one day when we looked up and there the Baptist preacher was coming into the yard. I never left a place so fast in my life. I ran to ^{the} garden and crawled

LORRIN, NORA L. SMITH. PIONEER EXPERIENCES. 10555

9

under the tomato vines and stayed there until he was gone. I don't know where Viola went. I didn't stop to look. I need not have worried. Pa said that we were too young and didn't know what we were doing. Any way that was the last of the preacher.

We moved to ~~Shawnee~~ sometime in 1893, I believe. It was before there was anything there but one little main street, a few stores and a saloon or two. We built a house, one room above a basement dug out of a bank. It was located on the south end of Bell Street, There were two other houses between our house and the drop into the Canadian River bottom at the south end of Bell Street. They say that colored town is now where we lived then. I don't remember that there were any negroes in Shawnee when we went there, there were none in that part of town. My playmates and I used to go out west of town, into the Kickapoo country, and gather wild flowers. There was always an abundance of them in the spring time; cowslips, daisies, bluebells and dozens of other kinds. And we used to go swimming in the river southwest of town. One

LORRIN, NORA L. SMITH. PIONEER EXPERIENCES. 10555

10

of the things we used to see in the rivers that is a thing of the past now was immense quantities of mussel shells. We would often find great beds of them and I have gathered them by the water bucket full. One time a large pearl fell out of a big mussel into the water. We tried hard to find it, but it was swallowed up by the sand. It looked like a large drop of milk. I only got a glimpse of it, as it plumped into the water and was gone.

I was in Shawnee when they cut the big oak trees down, leaving large stumps two and three feet high sometimes. They laid off the streets and soon had the stumps out. We were living on South Belle Street, August 5, 1895, when my little sister, Gertrude, was killed by being shot with a .38 pistol by children playing with a gun. A cousin of mine who lived several blocks from our house had a penchant for hunting. He had several guns and his place was covered with horns. He let his children play with the pistol. One night a robbery occurred in town and he went home and loaded his gun and hung it on the wall and said nothing about it as he always had money

LORRIN, NORA L. SMITH. PIONEER EXPERIENCES. 10555

11

in the house. My older sister went over there to sew on our cousin's sewing machine and she took Gertie with her, and while she was busy sewing the kids got the gun and shot Gertrude. My sister who was so cool when she straightened my arm, lost her head when Gertie was shot and grabbed her up in her arms and ran all the way home with her, blood streaming all the way. We had two doctors with her, but it was useless. The bullet went through her little body, halfway through a wooden bed post, and missed her heart about an inch.

My brother, Clint, used to make quite a lot of money hunting quail . He would get \$2.50 a dozen for them and for a long time shipped them to Kansas City. But the law decided to make them stop shipping quail and he had to stop.

I saw the Kickapoo run and then we moved back to the neighborhood of McCloud, southwest of McCloud. We stayed two years on the old Younkman place that was located at the north crossroads where Newalla now stands. At that time we lived in a three room log house. Just across the road south lived a family of the name of

LORRIN, NORA L. SMITH

PIONEER EXPERIENCES. 10555

12

Newton and the Oakland Schoolhouse was almost in our door yard. Kate Bernard lived in a little shack on top of a hill on the south side of the road, about a mile east of us and she had an enormous Saint Bernard dog that went wherever she did and took very good care of her. My teacher at Oakland School for one term was the present county commissioner of Oklahoma City, Mr. J. V. Dobbs; I adored him. I was still a kid and I thought him about the finest specimen of manhood I ever saw. I believe he taught that school the Winter of 1898.

In 1901 I went out to Mountain View, Oklahoma, which at that time was a typical wild west cow town, to visit my sister who was married and running a millinery store at that place. Mountain View had one main street, about three blocks long, with typical old wooden buildings on either side. It had a bank, a confectionery or two, several saloons and several dry goods and hardware stores. While there I got to attend my first real Indian dance. It was out southeast in the Kiowa country about ten or twelve miles from Mountain View. There were many Indians there, probably more than a thousand.

LORRIN, NORA L. SMITH PIONEER EXPERIENCES 10555

13

It was a gorgeous crowd; those Indians were diked out in silks and satins of every color you could think of, there were also many buckskin dresses. Most all of the dresses were beaded, not only with beads but with small shells; some were decorated with a round nickel like disk about the size of a half dollar that were all over some of their dresses. The dance was held inside a large tent, and the Indians were not in a particularly good humor. It was a Ghost Dance and they did not want any paleface company. We did not get to see the actual dance as they would not allow a white person in that tent where they were dancing. The dancers would come out, however, and they were painted and befeathered to beat all, and many of them had horns arranged on their heads that were very grotesque. Some of the Indian children were as naked as the day they were born, and if I would let myself think about their weird singing, "Hi-ya-ni-ya, Hi-i-i-i ya-aaa"; it would haunt me. While there at the dance I saw two of the largest human beings I ever saw. They were hitching up their team to a spring wagon and when they were ready the man got into the seat and filled

LORRIN, NORA L. SMITH. PIONEER EXPERIENCES. 10555

14

it completely. The squaw got into the rear and sat flat in the bed of the wagon and I don't believe you could have put your hand between her and the sides of the wagon bed. They were not tall, about five feet I should judge.

We stayed there three or four hours and then went back to Mountain View. Later, for some reason, the men in Mountain View went away. It had been a scorching hot dry summer and those wooden shacks were like tinder. An habitual drunkard about town took a notion to go on an extra spree and he drank at the various saloons until his money was all gone and one of the saloon men kicked him ~~out of the saloon.~~ Anyway, that night, that man set fire to the saloon and that whole block, including the bank, a hardware store, and a lot of other establishments went up in smoke. Away in the night I woke up and a man was rushing madly up and down the street shouting "fire, fire" and shooting his gun at every step. The men, for the most part, were gone from town and the few who were left could do very little. Everybody came to watch, including all the riff-raff from the "Red Light District". They were drunk, cursing, and many of them about half dressed. All they could do was to keep the fire from getting across

LORRIN, NORA L. SMITH. PIONEER EXPERIENCES. 10555

15

the street. There wasn't much of a breeze but the flames shot into the air an incredible distance and made a rainbow over the town and many of the embers fell a mile or more north of town. If they could have found the culprit that set that fire he would have lost his life, I have no doubt, but he went away from there without hesitation.

I came home from Mountain View on the train. The Drawing here in El Reno was going on at the time and the train I was on had to stop about a half mile before we got to the depot, so that we could give the crowds of people a chance to get off the track; we just inched in to town. We passed a freight train somewhere along north of town that was so full of people you could hardly see the cars. The box cars were filled and the tops were covered. We had to lay over for three hours between trains. My brother and I were together; he was on his way home from Seattle, Washington, and had brought a bow and arrow that he had purchased from an Indian out there. He intended to bring it home to our brother, Fred, but he had fastened it to his grip and after we got to El Reno he did not want to

LORRIN, NORA L. SMITH.

PIONEER EXPERIENCES. 10555

16

carry his grip all over town. so he set it down in the depot and went out in the crowd. It was a sight. There were thousands of people and all were friendly. I don't think there were any strangers in town. I was stopped and asked a half dozen times before we got to the Merchant's Cafe if I had registered yet. I was big enough but not nearly old enough. We ate our dinner and I wanted a second glass of water and I had to pay five cents to get it. There were little stands everywhere and at the depot someone had a water bucket full of beer and a tin cup and was selling a tin cup full of beer for a nickel. Everyone, of course, drank out of the same tin cup. When we got back to the depot the bow and arrow were gone.

I went back to Nebraska in 1902, after my mother's death. I went to school, taught three terms, got married, had some babies and suffered through death and divorce. I was in the Black Hills of South Dakota and came south again in 1911; I worked four or five years in the Indian service at the Rainy Mountain Indian School south of

LORRIN, NORA L. SMITH PIONEER EXPERIENCES. 10555

17

Gotebo, then came to El Reno a little more than twenty
years ago. I worked about fifteen years in the Crystal
Laundry.



Photograph of Nora L. Smith Lorrin, El Reno, Oklahoma.