

TOMME, MATILDA

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TOMME, MATILDA (MRS.). Interview BIOGRAPHY FORM  
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION  
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name Amelia F. Harris

This report made on (date) July 19, 1937

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

1. Name Matilda Pomme - (Now Woody)

2. Post Office Address Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 417 West 10th St.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month March Day 19 Year 1870

5. Place of birth Trenton, Missouri

6. Name of Father J. G. Ranft Place of birth Germany

Other information about father \_\_\_\_\_

7. Name of Mother Louise Ranft Place of birth Germany

Other information about mother Came to United States in 1860 from

London, England.

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 \_\_\_\_\_

Finished Mrs. Matilda Pomme's Manuscript and interviewed George W. Mayes - return for another interview.....

An Interview with Mrs. Matilda Tomme, Oklahoma City, Okla.

By - Amelia F. Harris, Field Worker.

July 19, 1937.

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We took up a claim in Greer County. My husband, four little girls and myself came from Childress, Texas, to Russell. We had a small General Merchandise store in Childress and we shipped our goods by freight. We came through in a wagon. When we reached Russell an old friend of ours, G. McClung, who lived at Russell, invited us into his home until we got located and he assisted my husband in getting a free homestead and he took his plow and team over and assisted in digging a dugout for our first home. This dugout was about 14 X 14 with a dirt floor and a dirt top - but it was ours for which we were so thankful. My husband was a Baptist Itinerant preacher but he had contracted tuberculosis and his health would not permit him to travel any more so he became pastor at Russell.

Our farm was located one and one half miles southeast of Russell. My husband was too weak to break out any land and that duty fell upon me and a boy sixteen years old whom we hired. He knew very little, and I had to set all the plows, take them to town and have them sharpened, and I had to do all the planting.

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My two oldest girls, aged seven and nine, and I chopped out twenty acres of cotton. The first year we planted five acres in peanuts and we worked faithfully with them as everybody predicted they would bring a good price. When it came time to plow these peanuts up I did this and placed them in the sun to cure and then I cleared a corner of our dugout and took the peanuts down there where the children and I could pick the peanuts off of the vines. At night we sacked them and then stacked them in the corner all ready for the market.

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All other products we had sold in Russell, but we took the peanuts to Quanah, Texas, a distance of forty miles over rough roads in a wagon. This took two days and two nights. We sold these peanuts for sixty-five cents per bushel.

I was heart sick; it was Christmas week.

We thought we would get one dollar or more per bushel. We had to have coal, as we had been burning cow chips ever since coming to Oklahoma and they were getting scarce.

We bought a ton of coal, flour, coffee, sugar, and some toilet soap, and we then had sixty-five cents left to buy Christmas presents for our four little girls.

I bought four small china dolls for ten cents each, and six little caramel sugar mice for five cents, then I bought ten cents worth of candy and ten cents worth of nuts and that took all of the sixty-five cents.

We got home Christmas Eve and that night after the babies were asleep, I dressed the four china dolls. I then made and iced six cup cakes and put the sugar mice on them.

The members of the church paid my husband in different kinds of farm products so that Christmas they brought over a load of corn, a fat hog, a can of lard, two or three buckets of sorghum, a ham, a half venison and numerous other things that they had raised and our first Christmas in Oklahoma was a happy one, even though we were without money.

The children loved their china dolls and were contented. In the meantime, a Mr. Bragg, a merchant in

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Russell took over our small stock of merchandise on a commission basis.

There was a little money in the count when he was a year so I sold it all out for...

My husband's health was worse and he couldn't to preach although often he would be weak before he finished his sermon that he would have to climb to the pulpit for support.

The next year the farmers had made a little money off of their farms and had agreed to pay a little money on the salary so that he could buy medicine and pay the hired boy.

The next year we broke out more land and dug another cave beside the one we had. The new cave was 14 X 18 feet and we put a box floor in both. The new cave had a shingle roof and opened into the old one which we used for a dining room and kitchen. We built a 'chicken house on stilts to keep the chickens out of the reach of the "varmint".

One day that fall we had a big rain and that night there was a terrible blizzard. The roof of the

hen-house leaked and the rain froze and froze my chickens' feet to the poles.

We had dug our well in a "swag" about three hundred feet from the house and I drew several buckets full of water and poured on the feet of the chickens before I could get them free of the poles. Poor things! Some of them died, some of them lived with their toes frozen off.

That fall I sowed about twenty-five acres in wheat. I raised a good garden; had fine cabbages, so I, myself, dug a trench about two feet deep and twenty feet long and then I dug the cabbage up with the roots on the plants. I stood the cabbage plants up in the trench, poured water around them, then pulled dirt over them. I then cut mesquite brush for a cover and put hay and then dirt over that and in this way the cabbage kept all winter. I kept sweet potatoes in one corner of the kitchen cellar. One day a neighbor came over to visit us and saw that we didn't have a cow and he went home and drove three of his milch cows for us to milk. This milk was a god-send for my husband and four little girls, but milking three cows and caring

for the milk made more work for me but what it did for my undernourished children made the work a pleasure.

My husband built a milk trough and the children kept the cloths over the milk and over the trough wet - they watched the milk closely and in this manner we kept our milk and butter cold and sweet.

That summer I established a milk route, the first one in the town of Russell. I sold sweet milk for twenty cents a gallon, butter milk for ten cents a gallon. I sold butter for fifteen cents a pound and eggs at six cents a dozen. This money was a great help towards putting improvements on the farm.

Then in June of 1895 we harvested our fifteen acres of wheat. My two oldest girls and I followed the binder and shocked the wheat and when the threshing machine came in the neighborhood - the children and I loaded our wheat on a hay frame of a wagon and



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carried it over to Mr. McClung's where the threshing machine was. We made three hundred bushels of wheat which we sold for forty cents a bushel.

In the meantime, Mr. Bragg had sold our little stock of merchandise for three hundred dollars and we took this three hundred dollars and part of our wheat money and built a three room box house and a shed barn.

We hoped that by sleeping above ground where there was plenty of sunshine and fresh air that my husband would get better but it was too late.

He had quit preaching and was confined to his room and bed for one year.

This was the fifth year on our homestead.

My little girls were respectively six, nine, twelve, and fourteen and the three older ones would walk one and one half miles to Russell to school, when I could spare them out of the field.

My baby stayed at home to wait on her father.

I would start to cooking at night. I would cook beans, peas, whatever we were to have for dinner the next day and would finish cooking them during

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In this way we had more time to work in the fields.

When the leaves began to fall, my husband passed away. While he was never able to help much, he was always cheerful and gave us much good advice and encouragement.

The day he died I seemed so bewildered and lost, like a ship at sea without a rudder, and that fall I rented our farm and moved into Russell so the children could go to school every day.

The next year I sold the farm for thirty-two hundred dollars on time payments. I took the down payment of twelve hundred dollars and built a two story house in Russell which was unwise as my daughter wanted to finish school in Edmond - so after two years in Russell I rented our home for ten dollars a month and paid twenty dollars a month rent for a house in Edmond. I bought furniture on time and started a boarding house for the boys and girls who went to the Normal School in Edmond. I charged them three dollars per week for board and room. There were four in a room and then from June to September the girls and I worked in the fields. In

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this manner we managed to keep body and soul together until my girls graduated. They, in turn, taught school and living was easier for me. I then sold my home in Russell and with my farm payments bought a home at 519 West Eighth street in Oklahoma City.

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