

TRENT, SARAH B.

INTERVIEW

#8238

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BIOGRAPHIC NOTES
 WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
 Indian Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

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Field Worker's name Amelia F. Harris.This report made on (date) August 17, 1937.1. Name Miss Sarah B. Trent.2. Post office address Dallas, Texas.3. Residence address (or location) Rockaday School.4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month August Day 24 Year 1866.5. Place of birth Cincinnati, Arkansas.6. Name of Father Wesley Clark Trent Place of birth Forthampton.Other information about father Came to Indian Territory
1877.7. Name of Mother Masina T. Trent. Place of birth Arkansas.Other information about mother Came to Indian Territory in
1878.brought with her six children.

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 12.

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Amelia F. Harris,
Interviewer.
Aug. 17, 1937.

An Interview with Miss Sarah B. Trent,
Pioneer School Teacher, Okmulgee.

My father came from Kansas to Indian Territory in 1876 to manage a store for my uncle, Frederick B. Sayers. In 1877 mother and we children came to Okmulgee as father intended to make our future home in Indian Territory. My uncle Fred hired a governess for his children and I was permitted to stay at the ranch and attend school under this governess. The next year, however, I went back to Cincinnati, Ark., our old home. The next year I attended Harrell Institute; Reverend Theodore Brewer was Superintendent of this institute. H. B. Spaulding was a big contributor to Harrell and he was very proud of the school and wanted to see the institution grow and make good. I then finished my school work at Texas University at Austin, Texas, and returned to Okmulgee and got a position as teacher in the National Creek School held in this, the Creek capital. I taught here two years, and was elected to be principal teacher at the Creek orphanage in Okmulgee. This was a new school house just being completed and I was so elated because of the high position

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offered me, but no sooner was the new school house finished than it burned down. I then was solicited to teach a small subscription school at Eufaula until the orphan school was rebuilt. This new school was for Creek Indian children and it was finished by January 1, 1889, and I took the position as Principal. The Superintendent was Moty Tiger, Creek Indian, who took charge of the farm work and taught the boys how to farm, also taught them to do blacksmith and carpenter work.

Mrs. Tiger was equally as efficient in the home work. She taught those girls to cook and can and dry all kinds of vegetables and fruit; also to sew, make all of their clothes and embroider, too. She belonged to the old regime and didn't believe in idle hands. These children were bright as could be but were slow in learning to speak English. More often they would start speaking in English and finish in Creek language.

Our schools were built of hewn logs with a chimney. The Government furnished all of the wood, etc.

One snowy day in December we were without wood, and the trustees notified us we would have to close school for a few

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days until they could get wood to us, but the children protested saying, "No, no mahani " (no, no teacher) "big boys cut wood, little boys bring him in". I said, "all right", so the older boys cut wood sufficient to last until the trustees sent us some.

As time drew near for the closing of the school, I decided to try and have some kind of closing exercises. On rainy and bad days when they couldn't go out and play I would read some simple book, especially Mother Goose Rhymes with pictures. The pictures seemed to impress them more than anything else. They seemed to absorb every little character so I decided to have "Mother Goose" Rhymes in tableau. I kept the children in one afternoon and explained as best I could what I was going to do. I went over the pictures and picked out the characters for each one who was to be in the tableau, and I told them I was going to have them represent each little picture, with pretty lights all around them. They all seemed eager to try. I selected Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf, See-saw, Margery Daw, Little Jack Horner, Three Rigs, Little Miss Muffet, Simple Simon, in fact every character was represented. I impressed upon them they were to look just like

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the pictures and not talk. I would ask them, "does the picture talk?" They answered "No maha-ni" (no teacher), "Just look". "Well", I said, "pictures don't talk. You don't talk". Each day we practised in silence. One of the boys who wasn't in the tableau came to me and said, "We want speech to say". He was almost a full blood but spoke fairly good English. I said "Dilas, I'm afraid you can't say a speech", but he insisted until I gave him one to learn, which he did and each day I would stand in front of him and coach him. Then the children learned to sing simple little ballads; father was on the school board and he had a meeting of the board to assist me in getting the assembly room at the Creek capital. We got the room, had a stage built and sewed sheets together for a curtain. I ordered two colors in calcium lights ready for the tableau. Mother cautioned me about the lights that they might not be what I wanted, to try one out first. By that time we had the costumes all made ready for the final rehearsal. Each one put on their little costumes and went to their places and I said, "Now what do you do?" "no speak, mahani - look". Well, I coached two of the boys how and when to draw the curtains and how to set the calcium lights a fire; that night we tested one of the lights—the effect was beautiful and everything was

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perfect. When I first thought about the entertainment I told uncle Fred, who was very much enthused with the idea and he said he would have a fat beef and a hog barbecued and he would donate bread, pickles, sugar, coffee, potatoes and canned corn, and we would have a big supper on the lawn, then the entertainment that night. Well, the Indians came in from all over the country and they seemed more concerned about the entertainment, anxious to see it as very few of them ever saw any kind of entertainment.

Everything moved along fine; children all dressed in costume; the house was full; besides the Indians, there were about twenty cowboys from uncle's ranch there. I had asked Reverend Isaac Jones to open with a prayer. Then I explained each character and what they represented and about the light, and I had an interpreter to explain in Creek.

The first scene was Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf, Tom, Tom, the Pipers Son, Little Jack Horner, See-saw, Margery Daw, Little Miss Muffet and the Three Pigs. The curtains were drawn back and the boys lighted the calcium lights (they thought). The tragic part was; it was not calcium but some "fourth of July" gadget that boomed and shot sparks all

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over the stage and caught the curtains afire; some of the cowboys smothered out the fire. Margie Daw and companion ran off the stage but the rest of those dear little children stood as apathetic and erect as if they were carved of stone, with perfect faith in mahani. They never made a sound. They were drilled not to move until the curtains were pulled together. The devoted little things stood still. I ran back and saw that the next light was true. Then I came out in front and explained the druggist's mistake and Allan interpreted what I said in Creek.

The next light was a bright red, the tableau was beautiful, the cowboys cheered and clapped and the Indians said, "umph!"

The next was a song which pleased everybody, and the next was Silas' speech. I put him at the front of the stage, the boys drew the curtain. There stood Silas 'stage struck'. He had never appeared before a crowd before. I prompted him from back stage. A smile lit up his face, he heard Ma ha ni's voice and he knew all was well. He turned his back on the audience and began saying his speech to me. I saw that I would have to creep towards the front and yet be concealed by the

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curtains. That made him partially face the audience but he didn't make a mistake after he knew I was near. When he had finished he made a big bow and walked off as though nothing had happened. This tickled the cowboys and the Indians gave another big grunt of approval.

Then we had more songs and a speech by a little girl and the final act was another "Mother Goose" tableau, but this time it went off perfectly. The lighting effect was beautiful. After it was all over, the cowboys rushed up and thanked me for the "most brilliant entertainment" they had been to in years. The Indians grunted and looked so pleased, but I rushed back stage and put my arms around my little pupils and breathed a prayer of thankfulness that they were all unhurt. Their devotion and perfect faith in Mahani touched me more than I can express.

I taught in this school two years. I resigned and taught in the public school in Muskogee and I was elected Superintendent of the public school system there for eight years. I resigned and went to Fayetteville, Arkansas, university, as teacher of History for one year. Then Superintendent Cameron wrote me, offering a position as teacher of English at Durant Normal for

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two years. In 1910 I was transferred to the Chickasha Industrial School. That was before it was identified as a college.

As chairman of classification, I stayed one year, but my health was so bad that I went to south Texas to my farm with my friend Miss Hockaday and we spent eighteen months there. Then in 1913 we organized a girl's preparatory school in Dallas, called The Hockaday School for Girls. I am now dean of the Junior College.

I spent fifty years of service in the Indian schools of Indian Territory and public school of Oklahoma.

I will continue this manuscript with a short story of my uncle Frederick B. Severs.

FREDERICK B. SEVERS.
ADOPTED BY CREEK INDIANS.

I want to close my history as a teacher and give a bit of interesting history of my Uncle Fred, who came to Okmulgee, Indian Territory, in 1855 and established a general merchandise store. In this business he made the acquaintance of the Chiefs and leading Creek men and extended them many favors, which formed an everlasting friendship. In 1857 he was adopted by

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the Creek tribe - he was their beloved white brother. In 1860 he married Anna Anderson, a beautiful half blood Creek Indian, she was educated in Tallahassee, Mississippi.

Uncle Fred had taken up 500 acres of land after he was adopted into the tribe and in connection with his general merchandise store he went into the stock business, in a big way.

He had a beautiful Colonial home built on the ranch for his bride and they went out there to live.

He then fenced more land and went to raising fine blooded stock. He introduced the angus and short horn cattle and fine Duroc hogs into the Indian Territory. He built quarters for his cowhands. His herds of cattle were being increased monthly by young calves so that in 1875 his herd had increased to 10,000 head, besides his horses and hogs.

He was very liberal to charity. Whenever the Indians had any of their ceremonial dances or the payment, he donated several beeves and hogs for them to barbecue during their stay. He loved the Indians and was very generous towards them.

He had a foreman on the ranch, but his business grew so fast and the ranch demanded so much of his time, that he sent

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for father to come and take charge of the store. This is why we came to Indian Territory. Uncle had three girls and he employed a governess for them. I went my first year in the Territory to this governess for my schooling.

He was called the "cattle king" and he was one of the largest stockholders in the Severs Hotel in Muskogee (which was named for him).

He contributed to Marrell Institute and liberally to all of the churches and he always gave beaves and hogs to every public gathering.

When the Creek Indians were forced to leave Alabama, 90% of the tribesmen protested at this drastic change which the Government proposed, but the tribal leaders were finally persuaded that it was the best thing for their people that they sign the agreement whereby the Government would pay so much cash for their land and improvements and transportation to Indian Territory, McIntosh, a Creek Indian Chief, was one of the signers of this treaty. Later, he was put to death by his people for signing same. Uncle Fred was made Indian agent for this payment (for their lands). It was called the "Orphan Payment", I can't remember why so named unless it was

because so many of the children were made orphans by the death of their parents enroute to Indian Territory, as so many died of the cholera.

This payment was a tremendous event as there was wagon loads of gold and silver guarded by soldiers until the last dollar was paid. The Creek Indians, started to come to Okmulgee a month ahead of the payment. They would pitch their tents and there they camped until each one got his payment. This money was placed in one room of the capitol and the Indians would trek up to capitol with tow sacks, baskets, tubs and buckets. One old lady took a tin water bucket to get her money. The gold and silver was so heavy that it bursted the bottom out and her money scattered everywhere. The Indians all stopped and aided her in finding every dollar. In many cases the Indians became the prey of conniving white people.

I was well acquainted with Pleasant Porter, Chief of the Creek Nation, and I taught public school in Muskogee the same years Miss Alice Robertson taught. We were childhood friends and in 1920, when she ran for Congress she came to father, a

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hot headed democrat, for a letter of recommendation, and he wrote a good one. This was the first time Father ever split his ticket-he voted for Miss Alice for Congress.