

VERMILLION, JOHN (Mrs.) INTERVIEW

#1327

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

Field Worker's name Amelia Harris

This report made on (date) April 27 1937

1. Name Mrs. John Vermillion

2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 1517 East Park

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month _____ Day _____ Year 1876

5. Place of birth Kentucky

6. Name of Father John C. Cook Place of birth Kentucky

Other information about father Physician

7. Name of Mother Clara Meyers Place of birth Indiana

Other information about mother Dead

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

Interview with Mrs. John Vermillion
El Reno, Oklahoma
1517 E. Park

My husband came from Kansas City, Kansas, to Oklahoma in 1903, to make the Cherokee Strip Opening Run. He was just twenty-one years old, and had nothing but a little bay pony and about twenty dollars in cash. He was anxious for a home, so he tied his stakes and a blanket onto the back of his saddle and started out. He reached the border and stood with a mob representing almost every state in the Union. They formed a line on the border, laughing, and jostling one another, but each anxious to hear the firing of the guns which would give them permission to start on a wild run. His pony became so frightened at the yelling, screaming, and running, that my husband guided him to where the crowd was the thinnest. Here he spied a location that no one was on so he jumped down and quickly drove his stakes up on what looked to be a fine one hundred sixty acres of land. He was so proud and happy that he took the saddle off his pony and staked him out, stretched his blanket out on the grass, and with his head pillowed on his

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saddle, he prepared to rest both himself and his horse, before returning to Guthrie to file his claim. He hadn't been there thirty minutes before four big burly men rode up with guns in their hands and ordered him to move on. He told them he was there first and that he was the rightful owner. They replied, "No, you're not. This here claim is ours. You move soon and be quick about it." Of course the only sensible thing for him to do was to move so he came home, undaunted however.

When the drawing at El Reno took place for the Kiowa, Comanche and Caddo Reservation was opened in 1901, my husband went back to Oklahoma to try his luck again. This time he registered on a slip of paper and dropped it into a barrel with thousands of other names. The commissioners at this office had a big map with the location of one hundred-sixty acres of land to be filed on and each one hundred and sixty acres was numbered. They had

a boy to shake this barrel of names up and down, then put his hand in and bring out a handful. They then read the names, and they would look on the map and get a number, put it on this slip and register it on the books. They repeated this performance every day until all of the land was filed. There were thousands registered who did not get a thing but my husband was among the fortunate ones who drew a claim. It was located twenty-five miles southwest of El Reno and nine miles west of Minco, which was in Caddo County. My husband was a carpenter by trade and had saved up a little money. He immediately bought enough lumber to build a one-room box house. Near a creek, running through the farm, he dug a well. He only had to go twenty feet for an abundance of water which supplied water for all the neighbors. It never went dry. Then he returned to Kansas for us. We packed our few possessions into a covered wagon and started for Oklahoma. My husband, two children, and myself were ten days

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or more on the road. My babies' little bodies were sore from the bumping of the wagon over rough roads, and they were fretful, and sick. Every day I would wish we had never started as I was tired and worn out, too. This didn't discourage my husband as every day brought him nearer to his home. He was happy when we did get there. We had seventy dollars, cash, to feed us, and the team, three ducks, six hens, and all our earthly possessions. We never owned a cow and we always bought our milk, but out here we couldn't buy it. My husband got a chance to buy a cow by breaking out twenty acres of sod, which he did. That solved a big problem for us, and soon he got all the carpenter work he could do building houses for the neighbors. Some paid cash, some paid in work, improving our farm. He received twenty-five cents per hour for his work so we got along fine after the first year.

We were so lonesome, as all of the neighbors

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worked so hard they never had time to visit unless somebody was sick. Then the good neighbors took their turn in sitting up, cooking, washing, ironing, or taking care of their children. Everybody seemed to think it was his duty to look after his neighbor when there was sickness.

During our first year my husband worked our one team so hard that the collar rubbed sores on the neck of one of the horses. He had an old vest he thought he would never use again so he padded this horse collar with the vest to hold it off the sore. This old vest stayed on there until it wore out. One day he thought he would take it off of the collar and burn it up, so he ripped it loose and unconsciously ran his hand in the pocket. He pulled out a twenty dollar bill. He couldn't remember putting it there or any thing about it, but it was indeed a God send.

The first year we farmed we had fifteen acres

in corn, twenty acres in cotton, and some feed stuff. We had a good second bottom farm about a mile from the Canadian River. We raised a bale of cotton to an acre of ground and sold the cotton for two-cents per pound. We raised the finest corn I ever saw and that we sold for ten-cents per bushel, and we were glad to get it, as we had raised so much (We often had a bushel basket full back of the stove, and would burn it for fuel). We had plenty of wood, too. We had no market for it, but had more than we could use.

We had very few amusements. Those we did have were Sunday School, preaching, singing, or box suppers. These were always held in our school house which was built of boxing, and located about three miles from our farm.

The Indians were mostly Arapahoes. Many were mixed blood as the cattlemen had married these Indians. They would raise large families, and they were good

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citizens, and good neighbors. Most of our neighbors were Germans.

Each year we put improvements on our farm and we broke out one hundred-twenty acres, and had a fine orchard. We had a big blackberry patch, a grape arbor, good cave, and a three-room house.

There was plenty of game, especially quail and prairie chickens-and plenty of snakes, too. One day I went down in the cave, or cellar for some fruit. I heard something rattling above me but was afraid to look up. When my husband came to dinner I told him about the noise in the cellar, and he took his twenty-two rifle and went down there. Very soon afterwards I heard the gun and in a few minutes he came out dragging a chicken snake which was about seven feet long, and the biggest around I ever saw.

We lived on the farm seven years, then rented our farm and moved to El Reno to send the children to school. We had lived there three years when my

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husband got the opportunity to be carpenter for the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad Company. We traded our farm for a six-room house on East Eleventh Street, and a pair of lots, all clear of any indebtedness. Our farm had a thousand dollar loan, and this house rented for seventy-five dollars per month during the World War and until 1921. Then it decreased in rent, but never rented lower than twenty-five dollars per month. All told we have realized ten thousand dollars off of this house alone. It is in the oil district now and we expect to sell for a good price. We have always considered our venture into Oklahoma worth the hardships we have endured.