

UTO, MINNIE

INTERVIEW

#7519

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Nannie Lee Burns,
Interviewer,
September 15, 1937.

Interview with Mrs. Minnie Uto
Miami, Oklahoma.

My father was John Earto and my mother was Kate Earto, nee Campbell. Both were of French Canadian parentage and both were born in Canada. When I was fifteen years old, I married Pete Uto, a widower with five children, who then lived in Iowa. My husband, like my parents, was Canadian French and was born January 15, 1844.

We came direct to Riggs Station, Iowa, near Clinton where we lived five years and then we moved to Fort Defiance where we lived three years when we decided to come to the Indian Territory.

In company with two other families, we left Iowa traveling in wagons. We came in the month of September and I remember that many of the streams were dry and we saw little water but the roads were rough and very poor, in many places they were simply trails.

One of the families had a sick boy and when he would get real sick we would have to stop and camp till he was better, so it took us three weeks to make the trip. On arriving in the Territory we camped on the Cowskin Creek till my husband could look around and locate.

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He rented a place south of Vinita near Locust Hill.

Here we had only a one room box house. Here I made my first acquaintance with the Cherokees, Shawnees and the Delawares as my husband dealt in horses. We never had less than thirty horses and often we had many more. We had no fences in those days and the horses were allowed to graze on the range. We sometimes lost some horses that we never heard of but then they did not cost us much as we did not have to feed them. Wild game was plentiful here and my stepsons enjoyed hunting. One of the boys shot a big wild turkey during the first week we were here. Then, too, hunters would shoot the wild hogs. You had to hunt them at night, they were too shy to be found in the daytime.

I milked several cows and had some hogs. There were few settlers and you went on horseback even to your nearest neighbor. In some places the grass was higher than your head and because of the cattle, snakes and other animals on the range it was not safe to be caught afoot:

Neighbors

The Dalton boys' parents lived two or three miles from us and once when I was sick Mrs. Dalton came and looked after us and we became acquainted and she was a good

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neighbor. Her husband and Emmet Dalton had gone to California and had left the wife here with three daughters and five sons, Bob, Grant, Frank, Ben and the youngest son whose name I do not recall.

One day Mrs. Dalton sent her eight year old son to our house and asked me to go with the boy to another neighbor's house some distance away and get her some carpet rags. The boy as small as he was had a pistol and I was afraid of him but I went. Mrs. Dalton was always gathering carpet rags but I do not know what she did with them as I never saw any carpets on her floors. Ben was quite lazy. Frank supported the family as he was a United States Marshal. Bob was an excellent shot. One day I asked him to kill a chicken for me which he did with his pistol. Bob served on the posse under Frank.

Some people were living in a tent in that neighborhood and were stealing chickens. Frank was given a warrant for the man's arrest. Just at this time, another United States man came to the Dalton home and said that he had a warrant for this man on a serious charge. Frank said, "Let's go together, I will arrest him for chicken stealing and later you can have him." They went together and Frank entered the tent alone and told the man that he was wanted for stealing

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chickens; the man drew his gun and fired and Frank said, "For God's sake, don't shoot me for that." He fired several other shots and Frank died. The other man had failed to protect Frank.

After Frank's death, Emmett returned from California, and as the family were hard up at first he began stealing horses and peddling whiskey. Soon after the family moved to Coffeyville, Kansas.

During the five years that we lived in this section three of them were spent on Dr. Frazier's land and one on Markham's land. In those days we had no schools and as my step-children were growing up we would hire a lady to come and stay in the home and teach the children. We paid her three and four dollars a week.

The crops were poor here and my husband decided to move to the Osage Nation.

Life in the Osage Country

We located three miles west of Grayhorse. At Grayhorse, there were two licensed traders, one named John Flory and the other named Westmire. They sold groceries, drygoods, etc. At this time there were but two white families besides ourselves there, Johnny Gerard and Highbrow Smith, and their families. We moved on to land owned by a Mr. Sams. Here we

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had a three room frame house but no barns except sheds covered with hay. Our horses ran outside and wintered along the Arkansas River in the timber. Here my husband farmed some but gave most of his time to raising and selling horses and sometimes we would have seventy or more horses on the range besides the two stallions. In less than two weeks after we moved there, Mr. and Mrs. Sams both died, so we remained on this place for the five years that we lived in the Osage country.

I soon began sewing for the Osage Indians and I would receive twenty-five cents for each pair of leggings, and the same amount for each shirt or shroud that I made for them. Sometimes, if they did not have the money I would take material in place of money and when we moved to the Strip I had 700 yards of material which came in very handy during those first lean years there.

I usually went for the sewing and delivered it when finished, on horseback. The Indians would have the garments cut out for me. The squaws would sometimes come into my home but the men never did. I learned to speak their language but my husband did not so during those years, when an Indian would come to buy a horse or mule I would go with

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him on my horse to the range and sell the Indian the animal that he wanted. It was nothing unusual for me to leave the house in company with three or four Indian men and my dealings with them were always pleasant and satisfactory, and neither my husband nor I ever lost a penny in our dealings with the Osages and generally we had to sell on the installment plan, they would make a payment each three months when they received their money. All of them wore blankets and did not speak English.

Once with 200 pounds of finished sewing on my side saddle, I rode up to a camp to deliver some of it. Bill Hologany, who was an interpreter and also the guardian of the girl who owned the place where we lived, heard the horse's feet and came out and when he saw that it was I he said, "Mother, you get on horse and go home. There is not a squaw in the camp. They have whiskey."

It was quite common for an Indian to come to the house and say, "Sister, You sell me cow." I would go with him to the range, pick out the cow, agree on the price and after the sale I would wait to see him shoot the animal then and there and begin skinning it as I turned homeward.

The most serious trouble that I saw in the Osage Country there was when we had been there about six months

and it was the time that Bill Hologany told me to go home, explaining that Pal Harris, who hauled freight had killed an Indian. It happened this way. Pal Harris when he returned with a load of freight, displayed a pistol that he had purchased on the trip and said, "See what Pal has to protect himself with." He returned the gun to his pocket cocked, without noticing that it was cocked. Later, an Indian came in and wanted whiskey, knowing that they had brought whiskey with the freight. While talking to this Indian, Pal spoke of his gun and when he took it out of his pocket, it caught and he shot the Indian in the leg.

Indian Burial

When any one died, the Osages would select the highest hill and set the body of the dead person up against a tree and build with rocks a cover around and over him, leaving a small opening in the front through which to give him food for three days for his trip to the "Happy Hunting Ground." If the person happened to be the Chief or a Big Man, in addition to these things, his saddle, was also placed with him and the end of the halter placed in his hands and his Winchester was placed near. His favorite horse was brought near and killed and the carcass allowed

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to fall across the rocks. Persons were hired as mourners. The woman put dirt on their heads in token of mourning.. Cedar on coals of fire was carried through the house where the person had died. Some people were also hired to fast while others attended the dance and feast attired in only their breech clouts and with their bodies painted.

Before the dance was held the warriors would go among their friends asking for strands of their hair. The older warriors would take bows and attach to the string of the bow quantities of cotton and then offer to give you the bow. If you accepted the bow you were supposed to die within the year and to become the attendant of the deceased. The hair was placed on the ground and in the dance they would tread on it and this treading on it has the same significance. My husband used to take their bows and then toss them away but Bill Hologany would say to me, "Mother, I like you, don't you give them hair."

The clothes and the blankets of the deceased were also given away. His horses except the one killed would go to his sons. Formerly, a man would buy his wife by giving her father a certain number of ponies. Now a man has to give his wife's father money as well.

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Marriage.

The girl who is to be married is dressed and brought riding to the tent where the young man is and there she is dumped off. She enters the teepee and if she stays, she is to be his wife and then comes the wedding feast and dance usually lasting a day and night.

The Run

My husband decided to make the run for a claim on the opening of the Strip, so he and two of his sons registered at Arkansas City.

I intended to run at Newkirk for a town lot but one of my step-sons had just returned from California and had only a pony so I let him have my horse and I drove the "grub" wagon and followed the runners.

The night before the run we spent on the line. Every type of person and every sort of horse were to be seen there. It was arranged that I was to drive due south after the runners were off until I came to a spring and there I was to wait for my husband to return. Dirt was everywhere, you could not tell the color of some of the people's skin for it was September and they had had no rain for a long time and the buffalo grass was so dry that it would burn.

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Pete rode a trotting horse and secured a good location, three miles north and one mile west of Tonkawa. One of the boys by mistake staked on the edge of his father's claim.

As I followed, a half a mile from the line I passed a negro running afoot and holding up in his hand the stake that he was carrying and a little farther on I passed a horse down on the ground with his leg broken.

I prepared supper and waited at the spring till after dark. Growing tired, I went to bed and when the folks did come the supper was cold so I got up and fixed it over for them. We stayed there that night and the next morning stopped at a neighbor's camp and while we were there a man came into the camp and held up a hand on which one finger was missing and asked the lady if she would know him again if he should have to have some one to identify him. She replied, "If you wash off the dirt, I may not recognize you." That day the men went to Perry to file and I drove on home alone.

Knowing that we were soon going to leave the place where we were living, the oldest girl who had inherited the place and had married George Antwine, together with several

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others pitched their tents in our yard, intending to stay till after we left and look after the place. Sometimes an Osage would have several wives for when he married the oldest daughter, her sisters, as each one became old enough, also became his wife. So the last two weeks that I was there, my yard was full of red blankets. The skirts of the women were blue and their leggings were either red or blue.

Bill Hologany was among the number and when he knew that we were going he said, "Old man she good man, I want him to stay." My husband was in the Strip building a shanty for us. The Indians were friendly and we were not afraid of them, but one night they got some whiskey and so I said to my step-daughter, Annie, "I am going to milk early tonight." When I returned to the house, she had seven Winchester's lying across the bed. The Indians had brought them to her and asked her to keep them for them. They knew that they had the whiskey and were afraid they would hurt some one. Bill and his wife came in the house and said that they were going to stay with us. Late that night when they had grown quiet, he handed me his gun and said, "They are all gone now. I am going to set down and drink." We left him in front of the fire and went to bed.

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The night before we left, Annie looked out of the window and saw one of the tents on fire. It was put out and later the same night another tent got on fire and Bill said, "Let it burn." We moved to the Strip the spring after the run. We had more horses and mules than we had been able to sell that winter and more than we could keep there so after we had moved, I came back with Pete as far as Grayhorse. There he left me with his son, Jack, while he went on to Pawhuska for a couple of loads of corn.

Jack wanted to borrow my horse and go to see a friend and the next morning he did not return as early as I wanted to get to work so I sent word to one of the Indians that he would have to come and take me to the place where the horses were that we wanted to sell. They came and Bell Jackson went with me. I stood up before the crowd and auctioned off four teams that morning. I sold one pair for \$90.00, one for \$80.00, one for \$70.00 and the other for \$50.00 besides a horse for \$50.00. The Indians could only make a payment down so I made out notes and they all signed them the next day, agreeing to pay me the balance in installments three months apart. Every three months I went back to collect and I was paid by all of the Indians in full.

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The first trip back, I happened to be at ^{the} home of Alex Tallchief when they were eating dinner and he asked me to eat with him but I excused myself saying that I did not have the time that day as I must soon start right back. Never again did he ask me to eat with him and after that one day, I was there at mealtime and hungry but he did not ask me again. The Osages liked coon meat and I have seen them cooking coons in a kettle with the feet of several protruding above the water.

Life in the Strip

Those first years were hard. I worked in the field. I ploughed and harrowed, milked cows, made butter, raised chickens and turkeys. Annie and I each wanted a new hat, so we took some butter and eggs to Blackwell and there we received five cents per dozen for the eggs and five cents per pound for the butter. We bought our hats and paid fifty cents each for our hat frames, hers was white and mine was black and we purchased trimming for our hats and trimmed them ourselves.

Another time I purchased some part wool black goods at Ponca City for twenty-five cents a yard. We had no fruit and each fall I went to Arkansas City and canned fruit and made apple and peach butter which I put in large jars

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and about every two weeks, I would have to cook the peach butter over, till it grew very thick. The first three years were years of crop failures except for Kaffir corn which brought our stock through the winter. The fourth year we had a big wheat crop, forty to fifty bushels per acre for which we received a dollar a bushel. The first fall, I took the money that I had made in the Osage country, sewing, and bought the lumber and material for an eight room house and a barn. We had set out an orchard when we first went there but because of the dry weather, trees grew very slowly.

Here, March 1, 1895, our only living son Lee was born. Pete decided that he wanted to quit raising wheat and raise corn and hogs and stock so about 1905 we sold out there and came to this county bringing with us fourteen cows and thirty horses.

The Last Move.

We purchased 130 acres of land from Uncle George Big- ham. This land was four miles north and three miles west of Miami and here we lived till twenty-three years ago when failing health caused my husband to rent the farm and move to the present home in Miami.

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Pete passed on twenty years ago and I have continued to live at the same place except that I have spent this summer with my son, Lee, in Kansas.

Of all the years of my life I enjoyed most the time which I spent in the Osage Nation. The Osage Indians were honest and they were our friends.