

WALKER, STELLA

INTERVIEW

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Interviewer, Grace Kelley,  
July 21, 1937.

Interview with Stella Walker,  
Fifteenth and Corporation Sts.,  
Henryetta, Oklahoma.  
Born Wood County, Ohio.  
Parents Phineas Roberts, Ohio.  
Miss Spurbank, Ohio.

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In July, 1894, we left the Cherokee Strip for Texas. When we arrived at the South Canadian River we found it had been up on a big rise and we had to camp until it went down. Two young men were camped there. They had been shearing sheep on the north side of the river somewhere and had a lighter wagon, that is, their wagon wasn't loaded as much as ours. When the water was down so that we could cross, the crossing was washed out and everyone knows the South Canadian River is dangerous with quicksand. They made a crossing in this way. There were five men, these sheep shearers, my husband and his two brothers, and they knew quicksand and how to handle it. They looked the river over and decided upon the best place to cross, then they

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ran across the river and pushed stakes in the sand to make a path so they would come back over the exact way they went. By not stopping they were safe, but they would have been pulled under if they had stopped. The men ran back and forth until the sand was packed enough to get the horses and the lighter wagon on to it and it was safely crossed over and then they brought the team back. Then they hitched both teams to our wagon. Two men rode the lead team; <sup>rode</sup> one bareback, the other had a saddle.

One of the shearers rode in the wagon and drove and the other two were afoot. I was in the wagon with my baby girl.

The sand was so strong that it pulled the wagon and teams upstream and the men were pulling them downstream as hard as they could for they knew that if they got outside of the stakes they were lost. The horse that had the saddle on did get outside, it was a lead horse, and it was turned clear over, throwing the man between the horses. He had his feet in the stirrup and couldn't get them loose to jump. One of the men on foot grabbed him and jerked him out. He was sick for three weeks from his back being wrenched when he was pulled out. They got the horse out

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somehow and we got on across the river without further trouble. When we got to the other side the sheep shearer surely "bawled out" the one in the wagon for screaming. They said I screamed. I don't know what I did. I guess I did scream for I was so scared. The sheep shearer said he was not surprised when the young woman screamed (I was sixteen) but men were supposed to remain calm in order to better think what to do to get out of whatever trouble they were in.

Trip to Indian Territory.

We first came to the Indian Territory in 1891 from Arkansas. The last town we passed was Biloam Springs, Arkansas. There was no store nor river where we came into the territory but the trees were blazed to show where the line was. There were no towns nor stores where we could buy our stuff and so we had to take it with us from Arkansas. We made our second trip in 1893. We stopped on the North Fork of the Cimarron River in the Cherokee Strip

Senetville.

A Cherokee Indian, by the name of Senet, had a store and a post office in his home and they called it Senetville.

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The Arkansas River was between it and Tulsa. There was no grist mill nor anything there except the store. They freighted groceries and supplies from Tulsa which was sixty-five miles away. One time when they went for supplies the Arkansas River got up and they were waterbound and could not get back. We were out of flour for four days. Nobody around there had any flour. We bought flour in hundred pound barrels and any other time we could have borrowed some as we had neighbors who would always share their supplies with us.

Sweetgum Tree Boat.

This is a Cherokee boat that the men made to cross the river in each day to go to and from their work. They also used it for <sup>carrying</sup> provisions. They would cut a sweetgum tree and leave it as large as they could at one end. The other end was narrowed down until it was about a foot across. They took a foot adz to hollow it out, leaving a place on the big end for a seat and a board was put across the center for another seat. Two men crossed the river when it was bank full with a bale of hay, flour, groceries, syrup, while I stood on the bank watching and fearing that they

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would be drowned. They took the boat away upstream so it could drift with the current and kept fighting the current until they finally got to the landing.

They were clearing land for people who were able to pay and were also making posts and rails. One day my brother-in-law decided to see if this boat could be turned over but no matter how hard he tried it wouldn't turn over. He even stood on one side or edge and just made it dip a little water.

#### Pioneer House and Furniture.

Our house was of logs, ten by twelve feet, with a clapboard roof.

We had two beds in the corner. They put a pole for the outside foot post. Poles were fastened to the walls and to this post for the rails and another was fastened to the wall. Plats were made and laid close together, crossways. Another bed was made between that one and the roof. Steps were nailed on the post and called "Jacob's Ladder". We had two wagon-sheets and we folded one on each bed and put good featherbeds on that. The cross pieces were so close together that they kept the bed from sinking the cross pieces between/and

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being uncomfortable. My husband, little girl and I slept on the lower bed and my husband's two brothers slept in the upper one. A lot of people had that kind of bed.

My first bed springs were bought twenty years ago. I had one cane bottomed chair that someone had stuck on the wagon when we left Arkansas so I could hold the baby more comfortably when we were camped. Our other chairs were blocks for stools.

#### Malaria.

We were living on my brother-in-law's claim which had twelve or fifteen walnut trees on it. One tree was four feet broad. We could not stay here for we were all chilling.

My brother-in-law traded his claim for a horse and wagon and ten dollars to buy groceries to get out of the country. He had paid a dollar for a pre-emption. If in twelve months a person decided he didn't like the claim he had gotten he could let somebody else have it and get another, as he wouldn't lose his homestead rights. That was all changed later, though.

I never saw a doctor while there but there was one across the river. The Walker men worked for him. This

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Doctor left every little while and went back where he came from. When he came back to this country he would pay the men who had been working for him with meat, flour and meal that he had brought back with him. This doctor was later sent to the pen for stealing this stuff.

#### Opening of the Cherokee Strip.

Al Walker told me this story. Just before the opening, people were camped on the bed of the Cimarron River in the middle where the sand was dry. If a "rise" in the river suddenly had come, and it did often, it would have drowned these campers like rats for they had taken their horses out on the sand hills where there was grass for them to eat and it would have been impossible for them to get out without their horses.

A man dug a well and built a watering trough and charged five cents for washing a person's hands and face where eighteen or twenty horses were drinking. As the horses drank the water in which these people washed the man got paid for it two times. He sold water by the bucket and barrel. This water was used by the people for washing



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clothes and for watering their horses but I cannot remember the prices they paid for this water.

Tulsa, 1892.

On our first trip we located on some Creek Indian land eleven miles out from Tulsa. We didn't have to pay any tax but were told we could live there, build a log house and make any improvements we wanted to, stay as long as we wanted, but when we left the improvements belonged to the owners of the land. There was a railroad there in Tulsa, but it was a small town and did not have a cotton gin for there was not any cotton raised around there.

Mr. Walker was not farming but was working for other people.

I did not go into town very often and then just went to the stores so did not get acquainted with anyone. I do remember seeing the Chief but I don't know his name. He had white eyes and was black as a negro but anyone could tell by his features that he was an Indian.

Crane Ranch.

When we lived there on the Indian's land we had no fences. One of the sows belonging to this Indian had little pigs. The sow would bring them into our yard and lie in

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the shade and let these little pigs suck. She was so gentle that my little girl would play with the little pigs while they were eating.

We decided to go back to Arkansas but my husband's brother, Al, was going to stay until the opening of the Cherokee Strip.

When we left we passed the Crane Ranch to take Al Walker his clothes and suitcase. Mr. Walker saw this old sow and her pigs in their pen. The thieves had cut the ears off of the pigs. They did not cut the old sows ears off while Mr. Walker was there but it was our opinion that they did after he was gone, for, as the sow had the Indian's brand on her ears they would be afraid that Mr. Walker would tell on them. Their brand was to cut all of both ears off. That was a regular rogue's brand. By cutting both ears off they could steal any hog and destroy the ears and nobody could identify the hog. That brand was never used by respectable people. The Crane Ranch was the only one in there and it was a "side camp"; their other ranch was nine or ten miles from Tulsa. They had lots of

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cattle and hogs. Mr. Walker said if he ever saw one of the hogs belonging to Crane after that he would be tempted to kill it and eat it but we were going out and didn't come back to that part of the country. Crane just got rich by robbing the Indians.

Worked at Fort Supply in 1886.  
As told by his wife by James Walker,  
Stella Walker, Henryetta,

Fort Supply was a Government Post where James Walker worked when he was twenty-one years old. He rode a pasture line part of the time and carried a pack train. He had four horses which were loaded with groceries and another horse which he rode. He drove the others to the side camp where other men who were also working for the Government were cutting wood and making hay which was later freighted back to the post. His brother, Al, had a four mule train with which <sup>he</sup> hauled hay and feed as they had quite a bit of stock at the Fort. Everything was slower then because there were no good roads.

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TRAILS

I remember when we first went into Old Oklahoma. It had been opened longer than the rest of the country and the roads went straight north and south or else straight east and west. The turns were sharp corners. I had been used to going on roads that cut through the country the shortest way and yet would go around the high hills and find the easiest way to cross the streams. We never had gone on straight roads until then; they had been more winding.