

WHITE, W. N. (MRS.)

INTERVIEW

#4485

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

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Field Worker's name Virgil Coursey

This report made on (date) June 17, 1937 1937

1. Name Mrs. W. N. White

2. Post Office Address Altus, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 409 North Spurgeon

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month September Day 21 Year 1874

5. Place of birth Tarrant County, Texas

6. Name of Father J. T. Harmon Place of birth Alabama

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Martha Ann Walker Place of birth Arkansas

Other information about mother _____

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 _____

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Virgil Coursey,
Field Worker,
June 17, 1937.

An Interview with Mrs. W. N. White,
Altus, Oklahoma.

My father, J. T. Harmon, was born in Alabama; my mother, Martha Ann Walker Harmon, was born in Arkansas.

I was born September 21, 1874, in Tarrant County, Texas.

My father wanted to come to Oklahoma to get a home. In Texas he rented land, and we felt that we would never be able to own land of our own. I remember one day after we had been in Oklahoma for some time, it was necessary for me to assist my father in stretching some wire. He was building a fence. In some way one end of the wire broke and flew back hitting me across the back of my hand, and cutting it quite severely. I cried quite a bit over my hurt and remarked that I wished we were out of this old country, and back in Texas. My father gave me a sympathetic look and remarked that he knew we were confronted with hardships we had not known before but that perhaps some day after he was gone, I could have the farm and in some measure be recompensed. I have often thought of that incident.

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Perhaps that same thought and purpose pervaded the minds of many old pioneers.

It was in February, 1889, that my parents, my brother and myself reached Doans' Crossing. We had been on the way some fifteen or twenty days. We had not hurried. We usually did not travel any on Sundays, and Father sometimes picked up a day's work. I believe that day we left Doans' Crossing was the coldest day I have ever seen. I could not keep warm, so I got out of the wagon and walked all the way from Doans' Crossing to our claim which was located three miles north and five miles east of Altus.

One day my father called from our dugout door, "If you want to see some antelope, come look". My mother and I ran to the door, and just a few yards away were a number of antelope. The sage grass was so high that they had come up on our place before they realized it. Wolves very often came right up to the door, and we had quite a time raising chickens.

We brought an old wood cook stove with us from Texas

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and my father had to go to the Indian Territory for wood to cook with. Our cooking in those days did not differ very materially from cooking methods used to-day. We brought enough bacon, lard, dried fruits and vegetables to run us a year. After these were used we had much less to eat for a number of years. I remember that for long periods of time we would have nothing but milk, bread and butter to eat. However, we never had to eat maize bread as some people did. We always managed to have flour, though it was often of a very low grade.

-- At one time the Government sent in supplies of food for the settlers, but my father would never accept any. He was in the Civil War and knew what hardships were. He said that food might be scarce at times, but that he had never figured we would starve.

One disadvantage in those days was the difficulty of disposing of produce and commodities. We often carried eggs to Vernon, Texas, and sold them for 5 cents a dozen. At times they could not be sold at all, and it

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would be necessary to bring them back home.

We went five miles to church at Navajoe, school was also held in the church. Later a small school was built near us and called "White's School House", named after my father who contributed most of the work toward its construction. These schools are now consolidated with the Ozark school.

The pioneers got up supplies of wood in the summer time after they were through harvesting wheat. A number of men usually went together to get wood, so that they could double up teams in crossing the river.

I remember what many called the old Chisholm trail passed near our place. This old trail led out of Texas up into Kansas, and was used in transferring cattle from Texas to the northern markets. I have seen cattle passing along that trail from early morning until dark in a never ending stream. Cowmen have given us small calves that were too young to make the trip.

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The pioneer people had exceptionally good health as a rule. There were very few doctors in the country, and one would either die or get well before one could be secured. The doctors, of course, used horses, and had to travel miles to reach a patient. I remember there was a doctor named Reynolds at Navajoe.

I was married after I had lived here four years. I was nineteen. I thought it was awful to be married in a dugout, but my father insisted that I should be married at home, and reasoned that I should not be any more embarrassed by being married in a dugout than in having lived in one for four years. For one thing I was thankful- my husband had a two roomed box house.

Mr. White came to Oklahoma in 1887, two years before I did. I met him during the thrashing season. I was helping cook for the hands. He has thrashed all over this country. He bought his thrasher at Vernon and began moving this way, thrashing grain as he came to it.

I look back now and almost marvel at the way I stayed by myself during my early married life. In the

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thrashing season my husband often left home early Monday morning and did not return until Saturday night, and sometimes not then. It was really a treat to see some other woman, because sometimes I would not see one for months at a time.

There were a few Indian scares during the early days, but I never got unduly alarmed, though I did feel some apprehension. Several times most of the women went to Vernon or Quanah when there was danger of an Indian raid. During one such scare my mother was with me and I suggested that we go down in the field and sleep in a straw stack where the Indians would not be likely to find us. However, we remained at the house, and after we did go to sleep we slept soundly all night.

One of the biggest Indian scares was caused by a white man killing an Indian. It was thought that this Indian was stealing cattle. The white man accused the Indian, and the Indian drew a pistol. The white man killed the Indian.

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Soon there were forty or fifty Indians on the scene. They displayed their grief over a fallen Indian by making signs and uttering groans. It became evident that the Indians might attack so the white men, some fifty of them, fortified themselves in a dugout. There was one man among them who was accustomed to speaking with the Indians and had had quite some experience in dealing with them. His name was Ben Franklin. When the Indians drew near he made a friendly sign and went out to meet them. We were able to reason with them and explain the cause of their friend's death to their satisfaction, and they soon disbanded.

Late one day I was at home alone with my baby and a bad cloud came up. We had a storm cellar, but fleas were so bad in it that I didn't want to carry the baby there unless it was absolutely necessary. I laid the baby on the bed and sat down on a big rock which served as the door step, to watch the cloud. Being very tired after a hard day's work, I laid back on the rock to



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rest; when I awoke it was sunup, and I rushed frantically into the house to the baby. I found him sound asleep in practically the same place where I had left him.

I still own my part of the farm which my father promised me I could have.