

## BIOGRAPHY FORM

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## WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name Anna R. BarryThis report made on (date) July 14 19371. Name Mrs Meta Earnest Williams2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma3. Residence address (or location) 710 South Macomb St.4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month September Day 29 Year 18685. Place of birth Cedar County, O.6. Name of Father Jeff Pyle Place of birth O.

Other information about father \_\_\_\_\_

7. Name of Mother Mary (Kelly) Pyle Place of birth LaFayette Co. Mo.

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 suggestions on subjects and questions. Continue on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 5 sheets.

Anna R. Barry  
Interviewer  
July 14, 1937

Interview with  
Mrs. Meta Earnest Williams  
710 South Macomb St.  
El Reno, Oklahoma.

I was born September 29, 1868, in Cedar county, Missouri. My early life was spent on my father's farm and in going to school in a little one room school house. In the latter part of 1888, and 1889, great news spread of the opening of Oklahoma for settlement. My father decided to sell his farm, <sup>and</sup> let mother and the smaller children go to her mother who lived on a small farm in Cedar County, Missouri, which was about fifteen miles from our home. Father said he would bring the three older children of the family. I was one of the older children, I came on the first trip. As we made ready for our journey to Oklahoma, we loaded our wagon with bedding, household goods, a few farm implements and how well I remember the old sod plow strapped on the back of the wagon under which there sat a coop of chickens.

After we had traveled several days and had passed

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Caldwell, Kansas, late one evening we were about ready to camp for the night when we came upon a couple of horses. We assumed that some one was making camp not far away as one of the horses was hobbled and they were both eating hungrily the grass that grew along the gulley sides. We knew a camp must be close. We could hear the driving of stakes as we drove up closer; we could see a man just driving the last tent pegs. He straightened up and stared at my father for a few seconds, "Howdy, howdy" he greeted him and went on with his work. "You lost?" "Yes I am and I aint" my father replied. The man then asked us to join their camp. We built an open fire, got out our blackened coffee pot and half filled it with water from a dented bucket, and balanced it on one side of the fire. The children, of both families, went to a brush patch and managed to clean several armful of dry wood, which my father broke up with the ax and got the fire to burning good; we peeled potatoes, cooked them in a skillet and mixed our bread which they baked in a Dutch oven. This looked something like a heavy cast skillet, which had a lid to fit it and coals of fire could be placed on this lid and our bread was baked

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or browned on top.

Travel in those days was very slow, and people did not seem to be in such a hurry as they are today. We landed at Fort Reno, sometime near April 16, 1889. Here we camped until the opening. This other family we traveled with came with us to Fort Reno, but we lost trace of them during the run. Weeks before the day of the opening the country was filled with settlers. The soldiers from Fort Reno patrolled the border lines, but in many cases were powerless to prevent people from entering beyond these lines. These were known as "Looners".

As we children were all too young to stake a claim, my father made the run on April 22, 1889 and staked a good claim six miles east of ElReno. Our first little home was a one room frame building fourteen by sixteen feet; the lumber to make this house was hauled from Oklahoma City. Here our family settled down to the life of the frontier. We faced many hardships, but we bore them cheerfully. The first summer here we all noticed the blistering heat, and the many snakes. People took great pride in their little homes, We just had two win-

dows, one in the north and one on the south side of the house. We made little white curtains of white flour sacks and hung them up to our windows; we made shelves for our dishes, and benches and boxes served as chairs. Our other furniture consisted of a small cook-stove, two bedsteads, and a home made table. I shall always remember how spotless my mother kept our house and floor; after the first year we always had a supply of home made soap. I can still remember, how each morning we girls would clean up our coal oil lamps, scrub the old cedar water bucket and dipper, and benches.

The first year, we arrived so late in the season that very little was raised. We broke out patches of sod, planted June corn, beans, black eyed peas, maize, watermelons and turnips. We raised quite a number of chickens, bought us a brood sow and two jersey cows.

In 1890 I went to Kansas City, Missouri, and took a course in dress making and in 1891 I returned to El Reno and continued to live with my parents.

On April 19, 1892, Cheyenne and Arapaho opening occurred. My sister and I were both old enough to file on a claim. We made the run in a spring wagon; our uncle drove the team. We both sat down flat on the floor of the spring wagon, while our uncle drove over rough prairie country at break neck

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speed; we each had our stake with a flag fastened on it.

We staked a claim six miles southwest of El Reno. My sister's claim joined mine but when the survey was made, a section line divided our places.

We then went to Oklahoma City and filed our papers for pre-emption, which cost us something like two hundred and fifty dollars for each one hundred and sixty acres. When we took out these pre-emption papers this eliminated having to live on our claims for a certain number of years.

My father financed my building, a nice five room house. We bought the lumber to build this house in El Reno. My parents moved to this place and lived with me. Here we started again to make a home, breaking sod, and we planted an orchard and fenced our fields and built a barn.

At this time almost every thing we needed could be purchased in El Reno. We could buy bacon for ten cents a pound, coffee for twelve cents per pound and flour for about seventy cents for a forty eight pound sack.

As I had taken a dress making course, and as I did quite a lot of sewing in the early days, I shall tell a little of the dress in the early days. Though the tailored costume appeared simple, it was very expensive

for every detail must be perfect. The popular shirt-waists were very simple in line, full in front with yoke backs and shirt sleeves. Sometimes a standing linen collar was worn with a bow tie. This fashion for odd waists led to a taste for colored waists of red, blue and green plaid or stripes with black, white or dark toned skirts. The wearing of skirts of one material and waists of another became quite the fashion, not only for everyday wear but for evening and receptions as well. Many of these fancy dress waists were of silk and grenadine and other transparent fabrics, and were usually trimmed with lace and ribbon and in many instances a skirt required from seven to nine yards of material. Circular skirts became a fashion about 1895 along with those cut gored, but whether circular or gored they must fall in a great flute like fold. The skirts were lined with a canvas or with a heavy material called fibre-chamois. The sleeves again kept pace with the skirts, sometimes as much as one and one-half to two yards in a sleeve; wide berthas were added at the neck-line and laces and ribbons were added to the shoulders. Somewhere near 1897, the sleeves of the dresses became close-fit -

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ting with a large puff or cap at the top, and ruffles of lace at the top, and ruffles of lace, ribbon and other material edged the yoke. All collars were worn high, closely fitting the throat.

The men at this time wore suits of dark colors with longer coats and high silk hats. The men's hair was cut rather long in the back, and it was very common to see a man wearing a beard or a mustache or both. The boys usually wore dress pants, of knee length until they were twenty years old. To add to the uncomfortable dress of the women, great quantities of false hair were piled high on the head, the hair was drawn up loosely over it and secured at the back with pins and combs. To give a light and waving appearance the hair was often curled with hot irons. On top of this mass of hair was balanced a hat, flat and very large, trimmed with a large plume or with long ribbon streamers down the back. It was covered with a veil which tied under the chin. Shoes were made of black kid, they were side buttoned, sometimes laced and usually had high heels.

During this period I have sewed by hand for weeks making a dress or garment. I did quite a lot of sewing



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for friends and neighbors, but we never thought of charging them for it. In looking back over the designs of costume for the last fifteen years, two things seem to stand out as having had a strong influence on modern dress, the motor car and the entrance of women into the business world.

In 1895, I married, sold my claim to my father and bought a nice little home. Here we have reared our two children and expect to spend our remaining days in El Reno.