

MEDLIN, MATTIE KEMPER.

INTERVIEW

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Interviewer.
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Short Sketch of Living in a Dugout
In Indian Territory.

From a Personal Interview With Mrs.
Mattie Kemper Medlin, Hugo, Oklahoma

I was born Mattie Kemper, in 1897, in May, near Dallas, Texas. My father came over into the Indian Country to homestead a place, and did about the time I was born. Then in December, the whole family came over here in covered wagons. He had come ahead to prepare our house. He homesteaded in that tract of one hundred and sixty acres, seven miles from Granite and twenty miles from Mangum. Father's name was E. L. Kemper. Our house was a half dugout. One room, about 14 x 20 feet, dirt walls about five feet up then an extension wall above rough boxing plank, and half windows, made to slide, were all along both sides and ends, about four on each side and one in each end. The roof was of tar paper over boxing plank and dirt thrown over that. So you may know that it was very dry out there. I don't remember it ever raining while we lived out there. I remember it as being always windy, either hot or cold. Summers were very hot, and dry, and lots of grass burned. It was so dry that we gathered our corn and put it in pens and threw scrub oak

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brush over it. That was enough to protect it from all the moisture that fell out there.

I remember getting whippings for playing on that roof, sliding down it and getting the dirt off of it. The dirt kept the dugout below cooler, than just the tar paper and plank would have done.

We raised cotton and lots of cane and watermelons. The best and biggest watermelons I ever saw. We fed them to our hogs by the wagon loads. We would haul them out of the fields and pile them out behind the barn and the kids would burst one, eat the heart out and throw the balance to the hogs. The soil was white sand. The syrup from cane raised on that soil was delicious too. Different soils produce different flavors in melons or anything. Even vegetables taste differently raised on different soils.

In that dugout we always kept up four beds, sitting end to end and a trundle bed. All were home-made. There were nine of us children and always a hired hand and father and mother. My baby sister was born in that dugout. The nearest doctor was at Mangum, twenty miles away, so a neighbor woman officiated. In the back end of that dugout we cooked and ate. In winter we used only the cook stove

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for heat. It was sufficient, we were so crowded and we burned coal too. It was hauled from Mangum. Once in a great while a bunch of the men folks would get together and go to the river for driftwood. They had to steal it, because it was on Kiowa Indian Territory. It would always take them several days to make the trip, sometimes a week. The women folks would get mighty uneasy about them sometimes before they would return. The men would tell of how they would sometimes get a glimpse of an Indian or some Indians and how they would run and hide. And occasionally they returned without a load of wood. That would be when the Kiowas watched them too closely.

Now, there was a little old scrubby oak bush that grew out there, but never grew very high, but every bit of it was conserved for some use. We built shelters out of it for the stock, just to keep the sun off in summer and the north wind in winter. They would go to the river bottoms and get their poles, forked ones and more to lay across, then stretch barbed wire around it and interlace the bush all through the wire, and make a good shelter. They called them chinaberry bushes. The chinaberry bushes grew in great patches. They had to clear it off of their land, and

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of course used that for wood. Every bit of it. That was the kind of brush we put over our corn in the pens.

We had a deep bored well, and there was a little old creek between us and Granite that never went dry. Lots of the stock went to it for water. We had a pool in the pasture too, that sometimes had water in it. When it went dry we watered them out of the well.

There were lots of quail and prairie chickens, and lots of coyotes, no timber wolves, only down in the bottoms. The coyotes would steal chickens and turkeys if they dared, but they didn't dare come around our place much, because father kept a pack of greyhounds, and they really made these coyotes move when they got to chasing them. The timber wolves would kill hogs and calves, but coyotes did not bother animals unless they were very small.

One night the folks had not yet gone to bed. I awoke to find father with a 22 target across my face. I started to slap at it, when he told me to lie still. I did and he shot a snake that was crawling out of a hole in the dirt wall just above my face.

We all had small pox while we lived in that dugout. Father, mother, the hired hand and nine children. We lived

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in it seven years. Then father started to build a house on top of the ground when he sold out. We got a school house just about a mile away when I was six, so I went to school out there one year. Then he sold out and we returned to Texas, and lived till 1911, when we moved to Fort Towson.

On that return trip to Texas I had my first train ride, and had never seen a negro until I met that negro porter on the train, when I went to get a drink for the baby. I dropped my glass, broke it and fled screaming to mother.

Negroes were just not allowed out there when we lived out there. Once a negro porter got off at Shemrock. The cowboys spied him caught him with a lariat rope, dragged him through the streets, just barely permitting him to walk upright, returned him to the train with the warning never to set his foot in that town again, and he never even showed his face as he passed through there much less set his foot on the ground.

I never saw a Kiowa Indian as long as we lived out there. I never saw one of any kind until 1911, when we moved back here. You see, we just lived out there in the country and

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never went anywhere, and just didn't happen to see any when we did get to go back to Texas. I mean when we went to take the train to return. The Kiowas were all settled on lands of their own quite a distance from us.

Old man Bush, or Hous Tittle was sheriff of Greer County for thirty-five years I guess, until he just would not accept the office any more. He would never announce for office, and even tho' he would have opponents he was always elected. He lives at Langum now.