

MILLER, ELLEN HOWARD

INTERVIEW

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Form A - (S-149)

BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
INDIAN PIONEER HISTORY PROJECT FOR OKLAHOMA

Field worker's name Alene M. Mcowell

This report was made on (date) February 14, 1938

- 1. Name Mrs. Ellen Howard Miller
- 2. Post Office Address 1801 Peeler, Bartlesville, Oklahoma
- 3. Residence address (or location) 1801 Peeler, Bartlesville, Oklahoma
~~refused to give her name.~~
- 4. Date of birth: Month May Year 1888
- 5. Place of birth Enterprise, McDonald County, Missouri.

- 6. Name of father James J. Blythe Place of birth Tenn.
Other information about father Shaver, buried at Bartlesville, Okla.
- 7. Name of mother Sarah J. Logans-Blythe Place of birth Ga.
Other information about mother Shaver, extraction. buried at Bartlesville.

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~~ blank sheets if necessary in attach firmly to this form.
Number of sheets attached 17

Aleus D. McDowell
Research Field Worker
Indian-Pioneer History, S-149
February 24, 1938

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Interview with
Mrs. Ellen Howard Miller
1201 Keeler avenue
Bartlesville, Oklahoma
one-sixteenth Cherokee

Mrs. Ellen Howard Miller was born in Enterprise, McDonald County, Missouri.

Father - James C. Blythe was born in 1824 in Tennessee, died December 24, 1906 and is buried in the White Rose Cemetery at Bartlesville.

Mother - Sarah Jemima Rogers-Blythe was born in 1833 and is a native of Georgia. She died at the age of 77 years, ~~January 2, 1910~~ 1910.

I am the great-granddaughter of John Rogers, who was born in Bullock County, Georgia. He was a private in the War of 1812. His father was a native of England and served as a colonel in the Revolutionary War.

My maternal grandfather, Joseph Rogers, improved a fine farm east of Baxter Springs, Kansas, now known as Lowell, where Shoal Creek empties into Spring River, and built the first house and

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had the first library in the state of Kansas. He was a personal friend of General Stand Watie. I own the solid ^{walnut} book case which belonged to him. My grandparents moved west in a wagon in 1837, when my mother was 4 years old.

My parents were wealthy people and owned a large farm and many slaves before the Civil War. We lived near Neosho, McDonald County, Missouri. At the outbreak of the war my father enlisted with the Southern Army.

Our home was made very convenient for those days. There was a large hill back of the house. The water was piped from a spring on the hillside to our house. These pipes were small logs which had been split, hollowed out then put together to serve as pipes. Water was piped into a stone trough in the barn yard. Our house was a two story frame building with a front porch extending the full length of the house. There was a hall through the center of the house and each room had a large brick fireplace.

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The cabins for the slaves were built around a large space in the shape of a horse shoe facing the circular space. The pick-aninnies played within the horse shoe. A store and mill was situated on the left of the cabins.

Our home was in the path of the army and it was unsafe for us to live there. My mother's cousin, John Rogers, was a Captain, and later a Major, of the Northern forces and through his influence my mother and we children were moved to the Northern fort at Neosho by the government wagons where we stayed until the close of the War.

At the close of the War my father returned to find that he had lost everything. He accepted a position as manager of the lead smelters on Hickory Creek, between Neosho and Grandby, Missouri. We lived there for several years.

I was too young to attend school but often visited with my sister when my legs were too short to reach the floor, when I sat on the benches.

The windows of this school house had oiled paper stretched across the opening for light. They had no desks but there was a shelf under the window sill where the older pupils could stand to write.

When I was five years old my parents removed to the Indian Territory and settled at Tahlequah. We made the trip in three covered wagons in mid winter. It took us two days to make the journey and we camped at night. The men of our party burned the brush around our camp and stretched the tents over the warm earth before we left the wagons. It was very warm and cozy inside the tents.

My father was a trader and bought and sold cattle. He rented a two story southern style house from Johnson Foreman. It had seven rooms with a stairway up to the gallery and faced the east. There was an ell on one side.

The printing office, where the Cherokee Advocate was published was located across the street from our home. This office building had been built by the Mormons who hoped to establish

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a mission at Tahlequah, but their plans did not materialized.

The old whipping post was across the square. This post was about 8 or 9 feet high and the prisoners' arms were tied around the post, their shirts stripped from their back and they were lashed by the Sheriff on the bare back with a blacksnake whip. So many lashes were given for the first, second and third offense. If the violator gave more trouble he was shot.

The log council house was located in the square. All Cherokee affairs was translated there.

The old Masonic Hall was used for school and Sunday school. This building still stands in the same location. I attended school in the old hall and we sat on long benches and had no desks. Mrs. Jane Stapler was Superintendent of the Sunday school first in the hall. She held this office for 29 years.

The Presbyterians established a mission at Ark Hill. Rev. Steven Foreman who migrated

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with the Cherokees from Tennessee financed the erection of the buildings. Rev. Foreman was a graduate of Princeton and helped Dr. Worcester with the translation of the Bible into the Cherokee language. Rev. Foreman's oldest son, John A. Foreman, married my sister. After her death he re-married and his sister-in-law of this last marriage has the diary of his life but will not part with it.

John A. Foreman held every office in the Cherokee Council with the exception of Chief. He has one child, Mintie Foreman, who was later manager of an Indian school in Southern Oklahoma. She is now living in Roswell, New Mexico.

VINITA.

The first location of Vinita was south of the present site, across Cabin Creek, and was known as Downingville. When the Santa Fe railroad was built into the Cherokee Nation from the east and the MK & T from the north, they crossed at the present site of Vinita and the town moved to the railroad

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junction. The name of Vinita was given the new town by E.C. Boudinot, brother of Stand Watie, the great southern general during the Civil War. Col. E.C. Boudinot could not stay in the Cherokee Nation because he was in favor of sectionizing the Cherokee country and the Indians thought he was a traitor. His home was in Washington. He wore long hair and walked with a slight limp.

Col. E.C. Boudinot, Sr., lived at Fort Smith, Arkansas, and was editor of the Cherokee Advocate at Tahlequah. He visited our home many times and one thing I remember about him, he never tied his shoes. He also wore long hair and was a wonderful musician.

My sister, Mrs. Goodykuntz, lived at Vinita and I spent much of my time in her home when I was a child. On one occasion, my sister, Jessie Blythe, a miss in her early teens, and I were introduced to President Grant, his wife, daughter and son, when they were touring the West. When their train stopped at Vinita there was a crowd at the station to meet them. Col. Boudinot introduced my sister and me to them.

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When I was 17 years/^{old} I secured a non-citizen school which I taught for two years. When I was 19, I married William Wallace Miller, July 21, 1880, at Vinita. My husband was proprietor of a hardware store and carried furniture, wagons, buggies, farm implements and undertaking supplies. He later sold his interests at Vinita and removed to what is now Washington County and purchased a ranch on Caney River. We resided there for sometime then removed to Battlesville but he continued to operate the ranch. My allotment is located east of Ramona and I now have 280 acres in my own rights.

The trading post and postoffice known as Sequoyah was located on my farm. This little trading post consisted of a store where the mail was also handled, the residence of the storekeeper, John Carter and a blacksmith shop situated in the pasture. Buck Wallace was the clerk in the store. John Carter married a sister of the last Cherokee Chief, W. C. Rogers.

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HISTORY OF VICTORY ROW.

The American Legion Auxiliary, composed of the mothers, wives, sisters and daughters of the men who gave their all that we might have liberty; who worked for the boys during the war and are still working for them; decided at the meeting of the James A. Teel Unit of Bartlesville, August 1920, to take up the plan of tree planting for Washington County. First, to those who made the supreme sacrifice; next to those who went across; and then to those who were in the service, but could not go across.

We wanted to do this just right, so we went to our county commissioners and received their full sanction and they were good enough to send the county engineer to see that the stakes were in the right places for each tree.

Much Hard Work.

It took some time and a good deal of hard work to get the money, but in the fall of 1920 we planted forty-four splendid trees, the James A. Teel tree being first in the row as he was the first

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to fall in action, our first gold star. This tree was placed by the mother and father at their request. The last loving service for their boy.

"We were just congratulating our selves on good work well done when we were notified that "the trees must be moved, as they might inconvenience the workmen."

What to do next we did not know. The County did not want them, and we had no land. Then Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Drum, true Americans, in the goodness of their hearts, came forward and told us to use what we needed of their land that lay for some distance on each side of the road. But to use this ground, the trees had to be moved from the pavement 26½ feet, because of the deep ditch on each side, necessitating a sign to show they were memorials and not private property.

The offer was gladly accepted. The trees were moved, costing almost as much as when first planted, and on December 19, 1920, they were dedicated to our war heroes.

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In the fall of 1921, forty more trees were planted, using all available space on the Drum farm.

Later our county farm agent, Mr. Porter, brought a representative from A and M college, Mr. Christian Jensen, who has charge of this department in college and is secretary of Oklahoma Forestry Association and an authority on this work, to see us in regard to the trees. He told of how the eastern states were planting ~~mem~~ memorial trees and that it was desired that the same plans be used in all states and that later laws would be made to that effect. So the trees should always belong to the county and not to individuals in the years to come.

Owners Refuse Land.

We had our first trees on private property and wanted them uniform so we tried in every way to get the land adjoining the road where the last trees are, driving here and there, personally interviewing the property owners, but they positively refused to have trees planted on their property.

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So we took the plans sent us from A and M and went to our county commissioners again. They went over them carefully and decided it was the logical thing to do. One of the commissioners, who is a good practical business man, said he felt the trees would be a benefit to the roads, helping to hold the embankment.

The stakes were put out as on plat, three feet from the pavement, but the trees were placed four feet from the pavement and Saturday, February 10, the last 52 trees were planted and paid for, and on Monday, February 12, we received a communication from Fred G. Simmons, state engineer, saying he had heard of our tree planting, but asked that we take the matter up with him.

A letter was sent to him at once, going into the most minute detail in regard to work done.

Paul Nesbitt, commissioner of highways and also president of Oklahoma Forestry Association, wrote in reply, congratulating the women "who had given their efforts towards beautifying the highways of your county," closing with these words; "We have

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no laws regarding this matter, but I understand the Legislature is proposing to provide some legislation that will govern the beautifying of the highways. However, I think whatever you have done should not be molested and I want to again assure you of my sympathy and co-operation in your work."

I am glad, as a member of the Forestry Association, that I had been privileged to vote for such a broadminded man, one who does not think just for today, but for the future.

Helpful at Night

Of course, it is understood by one who reasons that when an embankment is thrown up there is no danger of cracking the pavement as the roots go to firm ground and moisture, and there is water in these ditches a good part of the time. And when the shoulders of the road are made wider, or the surface is flat, the trees can be placed farther from the pavement.

One of our leading men who spent his allotted time in France, said they were a wonderful protection to life at night planted this way.

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He said the trucks and motorcycles had to travel so much at night during the war and with no lights, and the men continually thanked the wonderful forethought of the French for planting in this way, for those living sentinels on each side kept them safely on the road. It will have the same bearing with the bright lights from cars. You can see the trees when you cannot see the road, and you know they are between you and those dark shadows that may just be a shadow or may be a deep ditch that too many have already found.

Then G. S. Reed, the good road expert from Los Angeles, was here, he remarked about these last trees and said he was glad to see them, as the beauty of the road and the safety of travel more than compensated for the break in the pavement which could be repaired should a break occur which he very much doubted.

This plan has gone over Oklahoma and we have received letters asking for information, so Washington county's plan has been used over the state. One from Mr. E. B. Guthrey, state president of Capitol Route Highway

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Association, asks for information in these words:
"am impressed with the idea that the plan you have initiated should be extended over the entire route. Won't you please write me advising me in some detail just what your future plans are with reference to work along this line in order that I may take it up with our board of directors with a view of making a route project of it."

COMMENTS

When Mrs. Miller's son attended the Oklahoma University at Norman she also attended and took a course in ornithology.

For seven years Mrs. Miller was state chairman of nature work for the state Federation of Women's Clubs, and State Parliamentarian for two years. She was first president of the State Pioneer Club and is an honorary member of the Tuesday Club and Garden Club of Bartlesville and a life member of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Mrs. Miller is known in club circles throughout the state and nation, and is listed in Who's Who among the club women. She is a member of the

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National League of American Pen Women, was nationally commended for her work as chairman of War Saving Service and placed as life member of the Advisory board of the Boy Scouts of America.

She conceived a plan and compiled a list of the names of all ex-service men in Washington County for a Memorial Bridge across Caney River in Bartlesville. This list was engraved on bronze tablets and placed in pylons on this bridge, it being the only Memorial Bridge in the world at this time. She is a member of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the D. A. R.

Mrs. Miller is instrumental in starting bird work in the schools in Oklahoma, serving for four years as chairman for the General Federation of Women's Clubs on nature study, birds, flowers and wild life. An outstanding achievement to her credit is a sanctuary, built under her direction, at Chateau de Saint-Hilaire, a lovely estate two hours drive from Paris, France. Mrs. Miller's literature and her work for protection of song birds have brought her signal recognition in the United States and foreign countries.