

MILLER, MARY ALICE. INTERVIEW #8870

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

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MILLER, MARY ALICE.

INTERVIEW.

8870.

Field Worker's name Anna R. Barry.

This report made on (date) October 12, 1937. 1937

1. Name Mrs. Mary Alice Miller.

2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 111 South Macomb Street.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month August Day 15 Year 1866.

5. Place of birth Lincoln County, Missouri.

6. Name of Father Jarrett Sitton Place of birth Lincoln County, Missouri.

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Susana Mitchell Sitton. Place of birth Warren County Missouri.

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 7.

Anna R. Barry,
Interviewer.
10-12-37.

An Interview With Mary Alice Miller,
111 South Macomb Street, El Reno.

Mrs. Mary Alice Miller, 111 South Macomb Street, El Reno, who about a year ago was among twelve state residents added to the Oklahoma Memorial Association's Hall of Fame, long has been active in public service.

Mary Alice Sitton was born in Lincoln County, Missouri, on August 15, 1866, and when two years of age moved with her parents to Vernon County, Missouri, near the little town of Virgil City. The Sitton family consisted of five children, three girls and two boys. Mary Alice received her first schooling at a little rural school, located one and one-fourth mile from her home.

She came to El Reno in May, 1893, her parents having located in Canadian County in January, 1893, but in the fall of 1893 she accepted the position as principal of the Preparatory Department in Afton, Iowa, Normal and Business College for one year.

She returned to El Reno in the Spring of 1894 to accept a position in the El Reno Public School System where she served as eighth grade instructor for four years, or until 1898.

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The Burnett Brothers Construction firm completed the buildings at a total cost of twenty-seven hundred dollars. These buildings were located on the present site of the Central School and consisted of three wooden frame buildings. They were used to accommodate both grammar and high school pupils.

S. N. Hopkins, superintendent of the new public school system, was assisted by Misses Etta Dale, Alma Russel, Iona De Baun and Margaret Cramer. There was little sign of the comfortable schools of today about the pioneer buildings. Each building contained two rooms and the Superintendent had little privacy since he also used his classroom for an office. Superintendent Hopkins drew a salary of sixty dollars each month. The first high school was established here in the winter of 1893 and 1894 at 700 South Rock Island Street with Mr. S.N. Hopkins as the first Superintendent and Miss Duna Cobb his assistant. There were no graduates until 1896 when Nellie Jensen, sister of Thomas Jensen, was accorded the honor of receiving the first diploma from El Reno High School. Four diplomas were issued the next year by the board; this graduating class consisted of Anna Hughes, Setta Dixon, Ina Gainer and Mabel Jensen

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The town grew and in 1895 it was found necessary to again enlarge the school plant. Bonds were voted and the first brick structure in the form of the Old Irving School, at Lincoln and Webster Streets, was finished in 1909 and the original high school in 1912. The high school remained at the new Central building until 1912.

There have been nine Superintendents here since the public schools were opened, S. N. Hopkins, F. N. Howell, C. M. Leib, Charles E. Grady, J. T. Butcher, Leon J. Deming, H. F. Allen, H. E. Wrinkle and the present Superintendent, Paul Taylor.

One of the pioneer teachers, Miss Etta Dale, principal of Central School, has been engaged in instructing the youth of this city since November 30, 1892. Miss Dale holds the honor of being the "Dean" of state teachers.

When Mrs. Miller first came to Oklahoma the wind and dust blew almost constantly and her pupils would have to wipe the dust from their books about every five minutes. The schools at this time did not have the playground equipment that they have today. The girls usually wore skirts and shirt waists and the boys knee length trousers. In the eighth grade the ages of Mrs. Miller's pupils ranged from fourteen to twenty years.

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When Mrs. Miller first came to El Reno, the town had only three trees; one was located in the 700 block on South Rock Island Street near the school where she taught. It was one of her hardest problems to keep the children away from this little twig of a tree. She often explained to the children that this little twig would grow and some day be a beautiful tree of which they would feel proud. This tree is still standing. If one glances over El Reno today and looks at all the beautiful shade trees it would be hard to believe that in 1894 El Reno just had three trees.

Mrs. Miller's enrollment in the eighth grade usually stood at forty pupils. Just as soon as a student in those days finished the eighth grade he or she was permitted to go before the County Board and take an examination which entitled this person to teach school and a number of good teachers in Canadian County began teaching with only an eighth grade education.

Two of the youngest pupils to complete the eighth grade during these early years were Frank Burford Jr., only son of Judge Ben H. Heggler, who passed into high school at the age of eleven years.

In 1898, Mary Alice was married to C. R. Miller, who was born April 18, 1859, in Genoa, Iowa. Mr. Miller came to

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Oklahoma from Caldwell, Kansas, with the late T. C. Dowell in May, 1889. He first located at Kingfisher but in June of that year accepted a position as clerk in a drug store operated by John Dobson at Reno City. They moved to El Reno when this city was founded, and in 1895 Mr. Miller purchased his own drug business. The Miller Drug Store was first established in the one hundred block on South Bickford Street. Since 1900 the Miller Drug Store has operated at 112 South Rock Island Street. On April 21, 1937, Mr. Miller passed away and is buried in the El Reno Cemetery. Since this time Mrs. Miller has managed the Miller Drug Store.

Mrs. Miller has been a member of the Methodist choir for forty-two years, and a teacher in Sunday School for the same length of time. She organized a young man's Sunday School class which was the first in the Indian and Oklahoma Territories. Mrs. Miller was president of the Ladies Aid Society for five years; member of the official Board of the Women's Missionary Society and at present is writing the history of the First Methodist Church at El Reno.

She is president of the local W. C. T. U; was three years Vice President of the state W. C. T. U and State Director of parliamentary usage for thirty years.

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Mrs. Miller served as worthy matron of the Order of the Eastern Star from 1897 to 1898, with her husband as worthy patron, for El Reno Chapter No. 27, which then was Mistletoe Lodge No 3. She was Worthy Grand Matron of the Indian Territory and Oklahoma Grand Chapter from 1899 to 1901, the only living Past Grand Matron to have served two years.

From 1910 to 1913 she was Most Worthy Grand Matron of the General Grand Chapter of Eastern Star, the highest governing body of the order with jurisdiction over the United States, Canada, Alaska the Hawaiian Islands, Porto Rico, Cuba and the Philippines.

Mrs. Miller assisted in organizing the El Reno assembly Order of Rainbow for Girls in 1922 and was first Mother Advisor. The local assembly later was named for her. She now is Supreme Charity of the Supreme Assembly of the order of which all officers are selected for life.

She is also serving as representative of the grand chapter of the G. E. S. on the Masonic Charity Foundation in Oklahoma.

She is past Most Excellent Chief of Pythian Sisters and is Parliamentarian for the El Reno Parent Teacher Association's Council.

Mr. and Mrs. Miller put thirty-five boys and girls through school at either Normal or Business training .

Today Mrs. Miller says she is proud of El Reno, and Canadian County, and is proud to say that she has been a pioneer school teacher.

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