

CHESSHER, LOUISA R.

INTERVIEW.

9191

387.

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

388

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Field Worker's name Ida A. Merwin.

This report made on (date) November 11, 1937. 1937

1. Name Louisa R. Johnston Chessher.

2. Post Office Address Perry, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 128 Fir Street.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month January Day 24 Year 1860.

5. Place of birth California, Missouri.

6. Name of Father Henry Johnston. Place of birth Pennsylvania.

Other information about father Civil War veteran and Missouri Pioneer.

7. Name of Mother Louisa Slaughter Johnston. Place of birth Ohio.

Other information about mother Pioneer widow in Oklahoma.

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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Ida A. Merwin,
Investigator,
Nov. 11, 1937.

An Interview With Louisa Chessher,
Perry, Oklahoma.

I was born in California, Missouri, January 24, 1860, the daughter of Henry and Louisa Saughter Johnston. In December, 1891, I came from Clay Center, Kansas, to Guthrie, Oklahoma. My mother was a widow with six children and was anxious to secure a home in the new country. She had experienced the pioneer days of Missouri, and felt she could go through such an experience again to secure a home.

Our trip was made on the train, and we arrived in Guthrie on Christmas Day in 1891. We located there to await the opening of the Cherokee Strip.

I secured work any where I could and worked in some restaurants, hotels, laundries and at housework to help make our way.

In the fall of 1893, having secured a wagon and team we loaded our belongings and moved to Orlando. On September 16, 1893, I entered the race in the opening of the Cherokee

CHESSHER, LOUISA R.

INTERVIEW.

9191.

-2-

Strip, making the start from the south line near Orlando. I was on horseback and staked a claim southwest of Perry. This seemed to be quite an undertaking and the country looked so barren and wild that I decided I would prefer to teach school, so I did not file on the land, but I returned to Orlando where Mother and the family were waiting, and we loaded our belongings and started for the townsite of Perry.. This was then a tent town but we secured a lot on what was known as A. Street, and built a small shack and lived in it during the winter of 1893-94. I again secured work in restaurants, hotels and did laundry work to help make a living. During the winter Mother then bought rights on a piece of land west of the town and had a small house built on it, preparing to moving on it in the spring. A short time after the small house was built, some one stole it and moved it away. Then where we got ready to go out to the claim, we had to move the small house we were living in, in the town.

After we were located on the farm, we broke the sod land and planted our crop by hand. We raised kaffir corn and castor beans. I worked in the fields, doing any kind

CHESSHER, LOUISA R.

INTERVIEW.

9191.

-3-

of work that was necessary. In the fall I decided to teach school and secured a school south of Perry. This was taught in one room of Fred Mausart's home, which he had built on the land he had staked as a claim. I only taught four months that winter, and was paid twenty-five dollars a month, and this was paid in scrip or warrants, and in cashing them they had to be discounted.

Later I taught in District 35 west of Perry, also at the Whipple, Polo and North Valley Districts which are northwest of Perry.

Mr. Lippincott and Duke Mills were members of the first School Board when I taught in the room of a home.

I attended the first Teachers Institute that was held in Perry. Reverend Myers, a Presbyterian Preacher, was the conductor, and Professor R. R. Talley, who was the first County Superintendent, was an instructor. This was held in a building that had been built for school purposes and was located in South Perry, on the same location where the Blain School, the negro school, is now located.

Those early days were trying ones, I would work on the farm during the summer months and teach school in the

CHESSHER, LOUISA R.

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9191.

-4-

winter. I was married in December, 1902, and after finishing that term of school we located in Perry, where Mr. Chessher died in 1922 and where I still reside.