

CLARK, RUTH

INTERVIEW

8331

192

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

CLARK, RUTH.

INTERVIEW.

#8331.

Field Worker's name Zaidee B. Blend

This report made on (date) August 24, 1937.

1. Name Mrs. Ruth Clark.

2. Post Office Address Altus, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) Corner of Elm & Julian St.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month November Day _____ Year 1873

5. Place of birth Michigan

6. Name of Father David Spencer Place of birth Ohio.

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Martha Cunningham Place of birth Indiana

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 Nine.

CLARK, RUTH.

INTERVIEW.

#8331.

Zaidee B. Bland,
Interviewer.
August 24, 1937.

Interview with Mrs. Ruth Clark,
Altus, Oklahoma.

I was born in Michigan and we often laughed at Father and said he was part gypsy for he was always on the go. We literally lived in a caravan consisting of two prairie schooners with two horses hitched to each wagon. We had six trips to Texas from Michigan before I was grown. We would stop and make a crop or establish a trade with the Indians some times staying a whole year in one camp but hardly ever more than a few months. The most of our camps were in Indian Territory along running streams. There were a lot of things that the Indians wanted Papa to teach them. He always had good seed. He would stop and help build a log house, plant an orchard, clear a piece of ground, have a class of Indians in English. He was always trading some way and we always had plenty. We always lived in camp and were never afraid of anything.

Father was a Union soldier and could turn his hand to many things to make a living for his family. We never wanted for anything we needed.

CLARK, RUTH.

INTERVIEW.

#8331.

2

I guess Mother liked to live that way, too, for she seemed always happy.

I was six years old before I ever heard a sermon. There was an old time camp meeting going on in Indian Territory and we drove up and set camp. When the people began to shout and dance I was so frightened that I screamed and almost went into hysterics until someone took me away. Father and Mother both got saved during this meeting and never again did we travel on Sunday; we always stopped every time we passed where a meeting was being held to attend.

Father took a good many squatter's claims; he would build a hut, plant an orchard, gather around him cows, horses, chickens and pigs, but after a year or two he would sell out and move on. East of here we accumulated so many cattle that we could not sell them all so we came back to a place fourteen miles north of where Altus is now and bought out a proved claim and here we are.

Mother and Father taught us a lot and then during school time Father tried always to camp near a school

CLARK, RUTH.

INTERVIEW.

#8331.

3

which we always attended. We always fit in well for we had been in so many states we could tell the other children many things first hand so we were always welcome and enjoyed our school life.

During our wandering we ate many squirrels and wild birds which were plentiful. Father cured deer meat by digging a pit, burning green wood, placing the meat on limbs above the smoke. We always had dried venison. The outside would become so hard that we would have to boil it a long time before it was tender but we put turnips, potatoes and onions (most anything) with it for a stew and ^{it} made a savory stew we all liked. The inside of the dried venison was rich and soft and could be fried. We always had plenty of hog meat and lard for the woods were always full of hogs and we always managed to be where potatoes and such things were gathered at harvest time. Father and we children would gather crops of such things for a share and then on our way to trade for other things that we happened to need. We always had an abundance of Indian blankets and moccasins.

CLARK, RUTH.

INTERVIEW.

#8331.

4

Clothes.

Mother knitted all our stockings and hoods.

In the summer we had sunbonnets and the rest of our clothes were usually swapped for or we would trade work for clothes we might need in a village we might be camping near.

As we children got larger we could bargain for some dress that suited our fancy as well as Mother and often brought home some rare dress for our wardrobe.

Storms.

We were in many storms and crossed rivers where the water came into the wagon or if we were on horseback the ponies would have to swim. Since we never had a real home our stock had to be herded continually and we all took turns about so the girls of our family learned to ride and rope as well as the boys.

Once I remember we were going to improve a squatter's claim and had the wagon beds set off on boxes while we were using the wheels of the wagon for hauling. A blowing rain storm came up. The dugout was already dug and

CLARK, RUTH.

INTERVIEW.

#8331.

5

had about half of the top on it. Father and Mother were in that part that had a cover on it; I was in one of the wagons where the meat box was; Brother was in the other wagon. The wind tumbled my wagon bed right off in a little creek of water and as I scrambled out and made a run to where Mother was, brother's bows caved in and he and the wagon sheet went tumbling across my path. I helped him get untangled from the sheet and we made it to the dugout only to find it half full of water; all the other children and everything else were piled on the bed under the roofed part of the dugout. Mother and Father spent all night bailing out water to keep us all from drowning. In the morning the sun came out and you could not see a cloud anywhere but we were the muddiest, dirtiest bunch you ever saw. Everything we had in the world was wet and muddy. We had to haul water three miles to wash the quilts and clothing in. After that experience if a cloud appeared Father always tied everything down to the ground tight and fast.

Mother always dried pumpkins in rings and had great sacks of dried pumpkin that was almost as good to buy what

CLARK, RUTH.

INTERVIEW.

#8331.

6

we wanted with as money.

She would peel a pumpkin and cut in rings and place on a pole to dry. As they dried on one side we would pass along and turn them so they would dry evenly. This was stewed and then fried. It made a healthful as well as tasty dish.

As I grew older Mother became more particular how I dressed and rode. I had to have a long tweed riding skirt and use a side saddle.

When we settled for good near Warren we attended church every Sunday and met all the young folks.

I rode to the post office every other day to get the mail at Martha. Martha had one store and a post office.

Some way we had never seen any cotton growing and knew nothing about it until we settled here. We had eighty-seven head of cattle besides our horses, sheep, goats and hogs. There was one thing Papa would not do, he would never brand either his horses or cows for he thought it cruel. He would split their ears but put

CLARK, RUTH.

INTERVIEW.

#8331.

?

no other mark on them.

Once when my girl chum and I had rounded up some cattle to water at a well Mr. Clark came over and asked us for some water. We could tell he was an educated man but thought he talked funny; he talked with such a brogue we could hardly understand him. There was a big camp meeting going on not far away and imagine our surprise when we went to preaching that night to find the stranger at the well was one of the preachers helping with the services.

I wanted to meet him at once more for curiosity than anything else. We could not help but laugh at his talk. But he could pray, the nicest prayer and we did not notice the broken language so much. Of course, I was flattered when he would single me out to talk to, and it was a rather brief courtship for he had already filed on his land and wanted to establish a home so he could go forth and preach yet have someone at home.

CLARK, RUTH.

INTERVIEW.

#8331.

8

Mr. Clark built a one room house before we married. At first I did not like the staying at home while he went to preach the Gospel for I had always been used to going but as our family came on I loved my home.

We set up family prayer three times a day, a custom which we observe to this day.

Preachers were paid in those days only by free will offering and sometimes we got very little and I would feel like maybe Mr. Clark had better stay home and help more with the crop. But when we needed money he was so good to go out to work dig wells, build houses, get posts for extra money that I was soon more reconciled.

Mr. Clark has married hundreds of couples and many times they paid nothing, some would pay \$1.50 and some would pay more. The couple would usually ride up in a buggy or on horseback, present their license, sometimes they would come in but always I had to be a witness. Many a time we were called out of bed at midnight for Mr. Clark to marry a runaway couple.

CLARK, RUTH.

INTERVIEW.

#8331

9

Our moneyed crop, besides a yearling to sell now and then, was cane seed. Mr. Clark always flailed his own seed and flailed for a neighbor for toll so when he started to Vernon for supplies he usually took cane seed to sell.

We raised all our family on this half section of land and only traded it away a few years ago.