

CLARKE, LUCY FRANKS.

INTERVIEW

10260

243

Field Worker, Anna R. Barry,
March 11, 1938.

Interview with Mrs. Lucy (Franks) Clarke,
El Reno, Oklahoma.

Mrs. Lucy (Franks) Clarke was born in Germany, April 28, 1874, a daughter of George and Karolene (Myer) Franks, who emigrated from the Fatherland to the United States in 1877 when Lucy was three years of age. They made this trip in a sail vessel called "Masel," taking fourteen days and nights to make the voyage. After living in Maryland for about a year, the Franks family moved to Kansas, locating on a farm about twelve miles southeast of Clay Center. The first school Lucy attended was in a little one-room sod schoolhouse, located about two miles from her home. This school was called Lycindie; later a small town was established here. The large old stone house which the Franks family built was of native rock, the walls of rock on the inside of the house were whitewashed. On cold mornings frost would appear on the stone walls and each morning while lying in bed the children would count the "diamonds" on the walls. The sun shining made this

-2-

frost sparkle and the children always counted these sparks of frost as their diamonds. Lucy (Franks) Clarke grew to womanhood in this neighborhood. In the early Spring of 1893, her father sold their farm in Kansas and began making preparation to move to Oklahoma in time for the Opening of the Cherokee Strip on September 16, 1893. Their two wagons were covered with white canvas and provisions were made several weeks before starting. It was decided that Lucy and a sister could go to St. Louis and stay with a married sister until their parents were permanently located. Lucy helped her father load their wagons before their departure; one wagon was loaded with a sod breaking-plow, shovels, tools, a barrel of sorghum, meal and flour to last the family at least six months. In one wagon they left room enough to put slats across the wagon, placed a pair of springs on the slats, then put the mattress on the springs and they had two good beds for the children to sleep as they traveled along. In the other wagon Mr. Franks set a cookstove in the center with

-3-

the pipe running through the top of the wagon. It was in this wagon that they placed the utensils for cooking as well as the flour, meat, coffee, beans, salt and other groceries which they would need along the way.

The parting day with their old home in Kansas was hard. Lucy and her sister came as far as Paola, Kansas, in the wagons with their parents, brothers, and sisters. Here at Paola they took the train to St. Louis. Her father made the run at the Opening of the Cherokee Strip on September 16, 1893, from Orlando in Logan County. He first started out in a covered wagon, but soon found this too slow a way to travel, especially in an exciting time like this. He unhitched his team, took the harness from one of the horses, placed it in the wagon, and tied the other horses to the wagon, jumped on his horse bare-backed and was soon in the race again. He was successful in the "Run," he first located on a claim about nine miles northeast of Orlando. He went back to get his horse and wagon and traveled about three miles farther to get his family whom he had left in a camp with a

-4-

number of women and children whose husbands also were making the run for claims. Mr. Franks was afraid some "Booner" might take his claim, so they hurried back to it that night but it was very late in the night when they arrived at their claim, due to the fact that Mr. Franks became lost several times on the way back.

Mrs. Clarke had often heard her father remark that the day of the "Run" was the hardest day he had ever experienced in his life. But to his surprise his troubles were not ended as next morning bright and early two fellows appeared on the scene who claimed they had staked the claim Mr. Franks was on. He was told by them to pack up and leave at once. Mr. Franks told these two men that he was here to stay. This was an especially good claim and both parties wanted it. After much arguing and talk, these two men pulled their guns, telling the Franks family that if they did not leave it would be the end of the whole family. Mrs. Franks and the children began begging Mr. Franks to pack up and leave and told him they no doubt could yet secure a claim, and Mr. Franks did so to save his family for he felt sure if he had stayed some of them would have

-5-

been killed. They traveled about three and one-half miles and found a place that had not been staked, but it was not near^{ly} so good a place as the one Mr. Franks had staked on at first.

Lucy Franks and her sister had been in Kansas all this time and first came to their folks' homestead in the Summer of 1894; Lucy was a young lady, twenty years of age, at this time. When she arrived at her parents' home, she found them living in a half-dugout, fourteen by sixteen feet, and when she got her first view of this dugout and saw her mother standing in front of it and realized that this hole in the ground was her mother's home, she burst into tears. The inside of the house was crude indeed. There was nothing graceful indoors or out, only the vast prairie with nothing but unending grass, green in the Spring, seared and brown in the early autumn, and burnt and black in winter. There were no trees, no rocks, only the shimmering waves of blistering heat rising from the prairie.

The first two or three weeks Lucy was here she thought she could never stay, it seemed so lonely and there was

-6-

nothing to do or see and nowhere to go. The conversation of the family each day was a repetition of that of the day before and was mostly concerning the terrible place where they had to live. Lucy begged her father to hitch up their two teams and head back to Kansas and told him that this country was not meant for human habitation. But after she became acquainted in the neighborhood, she felt considerably different about this country. If some misfortune happened to a family, perhaps the husband would be sick and behind with his work, usually the closest neighbor would go around and assemble the other neighbors to help this unfortunate man. Sometimes it was husking corn, sometimes plowing, hauling wood, or planting crops. No one thought of pay, and any suggestion of that would have been heartily resented. Usually the women and girls in the neighborhood took baskets of food for these men working. An occasional public project, such as building a schoolhouse, church or bridge also brought the neighborhood together.

If a new house went up that was a signal for a dance; this custom was known as "house warming," or if a new bridge

-7-

was built, or a couple were married, or any other occasion arose for which an excuse could be found, they would have dances. In their neighborhood the men outnumbered the women three to one; before a dance the young men traveled up or down the creeks for miles seeking partners for their dances. The advent of a new family into the community was always an important event and doubly so when an attractive young lady formed a part of it. The young bachelors soon wore a path to such a home. A girl of ten years and a grandmother of eighty were alike eligible to dance so as to equal the number of the opposite sex, and even then it was sometimes necessary for a number of men to take the part of ladies. In that case they wore handkerchiefs on one arm to indicate that they were "ladies." If possible these country dances were held in a cabin or house which had a board floor, but if not they proceeded just the same on a dirt floor. They, of course, had to stop often and sprinkle the dirt to keep down the dust.

In 1904 Lucy (Franks) married Ell Clarke, and soon after their marriage they moved to Oklahoma City where they resided a year. They then moved to Canadian County in

1905, locating in El Reno where Mr. Clarke worked at the
carpenters' trade. They are the parents of seven children.
Mrs. Clarke has a picture of her parents' dug-out home,
the home that made her cry when she first saw it.