

COKER, H. J. (Mrs.)

INTERVIEW

4596

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COKER, MRS. N. J. INTERVIEW. Form A-(S-149)
BIOGRAPHY FORM 4596.
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

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Field Worker's name Virgil Coursey.

This report made on (date) June 22, 1937. 1937

1. Name Mrs. N. J. Coker.

2. Post Office Address 1211 North Hudson.

3. Residence address (or location) Altus, Oklahoma.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month August Day 31 Year 1861.

5. Place of birth Tennessee.

6. Name of Father Eli Turner Sutherland. Place of birth Tennessee.

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Martha Stewart. Place of birth #.

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 4.

COKER, MRS. N. J.

INTERVIEW.

4598.

Virgil Coursey,
Interviewer.

An Interview With Mrs. N. J. Coker,
1211 North Hudson,
Altus, Oklahoma.

My grandfather Sutherland was born in North Carolina, married there and went to Tennessee where he was a Methodist preacher for a number of years.

My father, J. T. Sutherland and my mother, Martha Stewart, were both born and reared in Tennessee.

I married J. D. Dobbs in 1881. In a few years we moved to Texas, and thence to Oklahoma in 1890. We settled near Humphreys. My husband died that same year after an illness of eighty-one days. I was left with four children—two boys and two girls.

My brother-in-law, who lived in Tennessee, and who was a doctor, came to be with my husband during his long illness. He liked being here and decided to try his hand at farming, though he had never had any experience. It was about a year before he could arrange to leave his practice in Tennessee and come back to Humphreys.

In the meantime, I tried my best to make a living, but three years' crop failure reduced me to extreme poverty. The children were too small to work, and I was unable to

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make a go of it by myself. I had good neighbors who did everything in their power to assist me, coming miles to see after me. My brother-in-law also let me have some money which I repaid after the children got older.

Those were years of hardships, when it seemed impossible to go much further. One year I made one half gallon of oil last through the entire year. I soaked coals in the oil and these were used to start fires.

My brother-in-law secured a farm adjoining me but his inexperience in farm management made it necessary for him to return to his profession as a doctor.

My brother-in-law went over into the Indian Territory to get me some wood. He was arrested by the United States Marshal and put in jail. We were very much worried about him before he was able to send word to us telling us where he was. The officers searched him and found a pocket book containing sixty dollars. They told him they would keep it for him. In a few days someone was in need of a wagon and team to move something. The officers told my brother-in-law they would allow him to take his team and do this

work provided he would promise to return to jail when the work was completed. This he did. He made several dollars on this job and was soon released from jail returning home with more money than he had when he left.

I was determined that he should not make any more such sacrifices for me and thereafter I went after my own wood. My small son accompanied me and we camped long enough to cut a load of wood. We had one balky horse that insisted on balking just before we got to the river. He always balked at just the same place. Finally I conceived the idea of blindfolding him by tying a dress or something over his head. This worked fine, and he never balked again.

In 1891, my brother-in-law paid us a visit. When his train arrived at Vernon he found one of our neighbors there and arranged to ride out with him. The neighbor told him that he was welcome to ride, but that they must hurry. There had been an Indian uprising near Navajo and the neighbor had heard of it after his arrival in Vernon where he had gone to secure supplies. He urged haste, reasoning that in all probability their families

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would be found slain by the Indians. My brother-in-law hastened into a store and bought a large supply of ammunition. My husband had been a sheriff in Texas and he knew the kind of guns we had. So he bought generously for every gun on the place. They arrived home late that afternoon. We saw them coming, lashing the team every step of the way. I noticed the neighbor seemed anxious to get home and stopped only long enough for my brother-in-law to get out of the wagon. I questioned my brother-in-law concerning the large amount of ammunition, and he replied that he intended doing some hunting. I did not know for several weeks that there had been any trouble with the Indians.

My mother and brother were killed in the tornado at Snyder in 1905.

In 1901 I married Mr. Coker. He was a local preacher and preached in practically every school house in the entire country. We have been living in Altus for the past twelve years.