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Hazel B. Greene,
Journalist,
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An Interview with Mrs. Effie Jo Cunningham
Cook, 508 North Broadway, Hugo, Oklahoma.

I was born in 1889, four miles north of Ladonia, Texas. My father, John Cunningham, was also born in Texas, as was my mother, Mollie Cunningham, who was born at Pecan Gap, Texas. Both of my parents are buried in Texas.

My father died and left my mother with a bunch of little children to care for. She remained on her farm north of Ladonia for awhile, then someone told her of the new town of Hugo, Indian Territory, and she decided that she could do better to rent out the farm and go to the new town of Hugo and make a living by keeping boarders. She laid her plans before Dr. Parsons of Ladonia, Texas, who had faith in her business ability, so he built for her the two-story house that is standing today; it is number 412 North Broadway, Hugo.

Mother loaded her little brood up in a covered wagon and came on over to Hugo and took charge of the new boarding house and she had it full from the beginning- merchants, professional men and railroad men.

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Hugo was made up of the flimsy plank buildings usually seen in a boom town, as it was, because of the new railroad that had just been built through here. Sometimes fire would break out and burn a whole block of the houses before the "bucket brigade" could get it under control. When the cry of "Fire" was sounded, everybody ran to help fight it, and everybody did their bit. If one's home was burned there were always kind hearted neighbors there offering shelter to them, and the same kind hearted neighbor helped them to get into their new homes, too, when they would get them built, whether the new home was a tent, another "shack" or a good house; they always helped each other. There was no fire department here for years after I came here.

The city's water supply was hauled in barrels from a big spring just west of the Spring Chapel Cemetery and church, on the Isham Williams Place. We paid all the way from 10¢ to 25¢ per barrel for water; the price depended upon how rushed the water hauler was to fill calls, or how low the spring got. That spring today is all filled in and is just a bog now.

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Some deep wells were sunk southeast of the city to supply water to the town, before the waterworks were put in. I know our boarders bathed at the barber shops when they didn't dip hot water from the big old reservoir of the cook stove, and take it upstairs and take a bath in one of our wash tubs. What sort of bathing facilities the barber shops had there, I do not know.

Hugo was the usual new town with its muddy streets and plank sidewalks to keep us up out of the mud; and the usual put-up-quick houses. The house we lived in was built rather high off the ground and, as there was no stock law, hogs just ran loose on the streets and slept under the houses. They would wake us up nights, rubbing against the under-pinning and grunting and squealing and fighting.

The houses, rugs, and bedding swarmed with fleas. We used all sorts of flea-powders to exterminate them but fleas would hop on our bare feet as we would get into bed.

I was here when a building was erected in one night to establish a claim to a lot.

I was here when an old frame hotel burned and cremated some little children.

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I was here when Dr. Love shot and killed Dr. Rucker in Dr. Rucker's own drug store and when another prominent doctor, Dr. Morris and the City Marshal, Tom Ingraham, shot each other to death on the streets of Hugo. It was a mystery to all of Hugo as to WHY they did it. Outlawry was pretty rife here in those days and killings on the street were common.

Mother moved to Durant first, from our farm home, and stayed there about a year, but we children got sick and she decided to take us back home. I remember, we were going in a wagon, and got down in the river bottom somewhere south of Bennington, and got lost. She was just driving around and around hunting for that road when, by the moonlight gleaming on the water, she found she was right on the edge of a bluff at the river. She assured us frightened kids that the mules would not have walked off into it anyway, but I don't know. Well, she heard some dogs barking and went to a house and they cared for us a day or two, then we went on to our home in Texas.

I remember that when we moved from our home in Texas,

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Mother stored a lot of things upstairs and the people we rented to were supposed to take care of them; but we were away so long that a succession of renters did not take care of them. Among them were family records and old classics that I would prize now if I could only get them. Also among them were scraps of family history that would be worth something to the family as records. I know that General Sam Houston was a first cousin of my paternal grandfather, whose name was Matthew Cunningham and he was a Tennessean.

Oh I must not forget to tell of the main Sunday diversion in Hugo, in the early days here. Youths would take their girls to Roebuck Lake in buggies which were usually hired from the livery stable. This livery stable did a lively thriving business; sometimes one would have to speak for a buggy and team as much as a week ahead. Everybody who could get rig would drive to Roebuck Lake on Sunday afternoons. It would take all the afternoon to go there and back, but they would. There was no special attraction there, just the lake. All who could not go

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"buggy-riding" would go down to the railroad station to see the trains come in and see who came in.

Occasionally a stock company or medicine show would come to town, and they usually showed in tents; everybody went to those shows. They nearly always put up a prize for the most popular girl in town, to be voted upon by the people. Once I got a ring in such a contest, and had stage fright too bad to do more than say, "Thanks." When they put me up to make a speech of appreciation to my friends.

I don't remember any schools here for a year or so. Then there was a private school taught by the lady who afterward became Mrs. A. A. McDonald. Later, there was a public school taught by a Miss Damon, who married the publisher of the newspaper, W. J. Baldwin. I guess he published the first newspaper in Hugo.

We had church, though, from the first. We met for a long time in an old hall, but we had services regularly. Then in a few years Hugo began building some of the most beautiful churches in the state.