

DILLINGHAM, ALONZO V.

INTERVIEW

9599

**374**

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

Field Worker's name Anna R. Barry

This report made on (date) December 20, 1937

1. Name Alonzo V. Dillingham

2. Post Office Address El Reno

3. Residence address (or location) 1003 West Wade Street

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month January Day 21 : Year 1868

5. Place of birth Warren County, Kentucky

6. Name of Father John W. Dillingham Place of birth Warren County, Kentucky,

Other information about father \_\_\_\_\_

7. Name of Mother Emila (Pedigo) Dillingham Place of birth: Kentucky

Other information about mother \_\_\_\_\_

Note 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 7

Anna R. Barry  
Field Worker  
December 20, 1937

Interview with Alonzo V. Dillingham,  
1003 West Wade Street, El Reno, Oklahoma.

Alonzo V. Dillingham was born in Warren County, Kentucky, on January 21, 1868, the son of John Dillingham and Emila (Pedigo) Dillingham. His parents lived six miles southwest of Smith's Grove, Kentucky, on a farm. He first attended a rural school not far from his home and in 1879 when he was eleven years of age, his parents moved to Harvey County, Kansas, near the town of Burrton. While yet quite young Mr. Dillingham started out into the world to make his own livelihood, he usually worked around for people, most of the time working at farm work and he made two trips back to his old home in Kentucky.

In the middle of March, 1892, his folks decided they would leave the state of Kansas and seek a home in the Indian Territory that they had heard so much about and in a few days he, his father, mother and three brothers started in a covered wagon, bound for the Promised Land to stake a claim in the Cheyenne and Arapaho Opening. They traveled pretty rapidly as they made this trip to El Reno in six days, over the old Chisholm Trail. Mr. Dillingham is firm in his belief that the Opening of the Cheyenne and Arapaho

Country was held on April 22, 1892, instead of April 19. He made the run on the line eight miles north of El Reno. The soldiers from Fort Reno were stationed just in front of <sup>the line of</sup> homeseekers and a noisy line of people they were. When they announced ten minutes of twelve o'clock noon, all made ready. It was a wild howling crowd, all trying to get a little closer to the line, some were in wagons, others in buggies and two wheeled carts; while many tried their luck by riding horseback. The ten minutes were up and the cannon roared at Fort Reno, the soldiers on the line fired their guns and shouted "Go". And the race was on. Mr. Dillingham made the run on horseback, he ran just one-half mile north of the line, jumped from his horse, placed a flag in the ground to let the rest know that he had made settlement on this claim. This claim was located eight and one-half miles north of El Reno.

After he had staked his claim his first thought was to build a house and as his dollars were few, like many others at this time, he decided the cheapest and quickest home to construct would be a dugout, so the next day he had a room dug in the side of a hill, a few posts were used to make a door frame, the front wall was made of logs, a roof sloping back onto the hill was made of poles covered over with brush, a layer of prairie grass thick

enough to hold dirt was placed over this and finally a layer of dirt over the grass. It was necessary to dig a trench from the house to the drainage level to carry water off the floor. Then too, a frog pond for a front yard meant mosquitoes which in summer would make it a very unhealthful place to live.

The first spring Mr. Dillingham planted a few acres of sod to corn and Kaffir corn, melons and pumpkins and the next Fall he planted something like twenty acres to wheat; by this time the wheat harvesters or threshing machines had made their appearance in the country. Harvest usually started while the wheat was about half ripe because in most communities many acres were cut by a single machine. The crew, therefore, worked at breakneck speed to get the grain harvested before it became too dry and brittle to bind well. The threshing machine was operated from daylight until far into the night; many times if it happened to be moonlight these men worked far into the night. Corn cultivators were at first one or two shovel walking plows pulled by one horse. It was necessary to make a "round" in order to cultivate one row. A little later a two horse cultivator with wheels came into use. It straddled the row and cultivated a whole row at a "through" or two at a "round". Many of the old farmers, reared in toil and educated in the school

of hard knocks, laughed at the riding machine, said the old walking implements did the work just as well. It was thought by many of these old timers an evidence of slovenliness or laziness to sit down and work at the same time. Labor-saving devices for women were introduced slowly. There was a tendency for the homesteader to buy new machinery to till his fields and build new barns to house more stock and grain, while his wife went about the drudgery of household life in the old way. One of the early improvements for women were the crude washing machines and wringers; this washing machine was some improvement over washing on the board, but these did not prove satisfactory in many cases. The wringer was no doubt more successful and efficient than the machine. Some of the outstanding makes of the sewing machine were the "New Home", the "White" and the "Singer". The invention of pumps was a great help to the farm women. They usually carried water from a barrel, later when a well was dug a pulley with its rope and bucket helped matters some, if a homesteader was lucky enough to get good water on his claim. The first pumps were made of wood, but a little later the iron pumps were displayed. The windmill with its free lift of water made life more comfortable for these women. But the machine age then did not greatly help the women. They continued to operate the churns, carry water, turn the

washing machines by hand, if fortunate enough to have them, and do other work without the aid of horse power which their more fortunate husbands began to apply in harvesting, threshing and planting.

Shortly after settlement had passed its early stages of hardship and little luxuries began to creep in, a livery stable was erected and most young men who did not own buggies would hire them to take their ladies riding over the prairies. These prairies with their level plains and gentle slopes appeared as smooth as a floor, but they were hard to ride over in a vehicle. In certain parts of the country the dirt was swept away from the roots of the trees leaving the grass standing in bunches and making a rough surface. Nevertheless the family who could afford a buggy took rides and usually in the cool of the evening went to a neighbor's to spend a couple of hours. Before long it became customary for every young man to procure a buggy when he reached the courting age. When he secured a new buggy it was regarded as a sign that he was interested in some member of the fairer sex. It was more or less a rule that a young couple interested in each other must go somewhere together. The little houses did not invite visiting in the presence of younger children and the young

lady's parents. The young couple chose a church and went on Sunday nights whether either one was interested in the particular denomination or not.

Love-making on the frontier was rapid work. Marriageable girls were soon sought out and rushed to the altar. Apparently most of the weddings were civil marriages performed by the Justice of the Peace or by the County Judge. After the ceremony was performed the couple usually went to the home of the bride for the wedding feast. Sometimes this was given in a hotel and ended with a dance. A wedding was accompanied by fun-making and amusement on the part of well-wishers in the neighborhood. Sometimes a wedding was kept a secret, but usually the news leaked out and soon the street surrounding the house where the bride and groom were staying was filled with a crowd of serenaders. Soon could be heard the sound of tin pans, horns and every other noise maker that could be found, this continued until the bridegroom came out and offered to treat the bunch. The next day following the wedding, a visit was made by the bride and groom, the bride's folks and perhaps others of the wedding party, to the home of the parents of the bridegroom. An extended honeymoon was out of the question but sometimes the happy couple hitched up the team and drove gaily across the prairie to the county seat or



closest town to buy a few articles for their meager housekeeping equipment.

The old Anstine Hotel was about the first permanent hotel in El Reno. Today it is still in operation and still known as the Anstine Hotel. It is a three story building of frame construction located on the corner of Woodson and Barker Streets. Rates in early days ran from \$3.00 to \$5.00 a week for board and room, during the land rush rates were the highest. The land rush occurred at the opening of the Kiowa and Comanche Country held in El Reno, 1901. After supper there came the dip into the bowl of wooden toothpicks and the selection of cigars. Usually in most hotels there was a bar at one end of the dining room where the guests took a drink and lighting their cigars, gathered around the stove for the evenings discussion. The dining room was the bar room, the smoking room, whittling room, standing room, coughing room, spitting room, reading room and writing room.

It was in 1894 that Mr. Dillingham married Viola May Basinger. They reared their family of four children on their homestead. In 1907 they moved to El Reno.