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

Field Worker's name Elizabeth L. Duncan

This report made on (date) June 15 1937

1. Name Mrs. Dena Payne Hammond
2. Post Office Address Medford, Oklahoma
3. Residence address (or location) ½ mile west from pavement on Cherokee Ave.
4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month June Day 8 Year 1874
5. Place of birth Ravenwood, West Virginia, Jackson County

6. Name of Father Reuben Stanberry Payne Place of birth Wheeling, W. Virginia

Other information about father Lumberman and Methodist Minister

7. Name of Mother Lucetta Rouline Place of birth Frozen Camp, West Virginia

Other information about mother She was brought upon a plantation in Virginia. Mrs. Hammond can tell a very interesting facts about her.

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 23.

Elizabeth L. Duncan
Field Worker
June 15, 1937

Interview with Mrs. Dena Payne Hammond.
Cherokee Avenue, Medford, Okla.
Father-Reuben Stanberry Payne
Mother-Lucetta Rouline

No, fortunately or unfortunately as the case may be, I was not born in the Indian Territory. That interesting event was staged in the little town of Ravenswood, West Virginia, on the banks of the muddy Ohio River. The daughter of Reuben and Lucetta Payne was not consulted as to her choice of the place of her nativity. If she had been, I am sure that, in her usual self-sure way, she would have said, "Let me be a daughter of the West". However, I managed to exist quite happily through my first nine years among those green clad hills, and felt quite sure that my heart was irreparably broken when my family, having heard of the wonderful wealth of the cattle country in southern Kansas and the free range in the Indian Territory just to the south of it, decided to come west. And come west, we did, with little more of my own volition than I had known in the choice of my first home. We came first by steamboat, and then by train to southern Kansas.

My father found but little of the fabulous wealth of which he had dreamed in the rich cattle land, which had been recently devastated by the grasshopper and chinch bug, and the terrific prairie fires of the early eighties. Instead, we found a people trying hard to recover from the climatic disasters just as the farming people are doing to-day, only they are trying to do it without the help of an alphabet re-enforced by the Government. They were going about it on the "help one another" plan. That is where so many noble characters like David Payne, William Mathewson, John Brownback, and many others of their type made themselves useful.

Now there was David Payne. As a child I knew him well but not as historians picture him. I have searched in vain in the printed pages about David Payne for the Boomer as I knew him, but I cannot find him there. I can only see him as he visited in my father's home, a kindly, homely man

who had a vision of an Utopia in this land-a land of ideal homes where every man was your friend, where white would live in neighborly friendship with the red man and work together for their common good.

While as a child I could not agree with him in feeling that the noble red man was my brother-I would not even think he was a distant cousin of mine-and that even spoiled my relationship with Mr. Payne, himself. While he and my father were very sure we were distantly related, his fraternizing with Mr. Indian spoiled him as a relative of mine, and we know the historians would have us believe that he was an aggressive, bold, pushing sort of a man. I can only see him as a mild mannered, kindly Christian gentleman, in rough garb, and with toil-worn hands. I wish some of the histories had told about his hands. They were more expressive than his face, much of which was covered with the then fashionable hirsute growth and only his eyes and their radiating lines told us

of what was going on behind them, but his hands, as he talked, moved about or opened and closed in the most fascinating manner I ever saw. I do wish I could just make others see them, especially when he said grace before the meal. I am sure that God saw and understood them as they were clasped above the table and aided him in soliciting God's blessing on our household.

He frequently visited in our home and often my father, who was what was then commonly known as a local preacher(though why any more local preacher than local butcher, or baker, or candle-stick maker, is more than I can explain) was often invited to come down to the Boomer Camp, near what was called Rock Falls on the Chicaskia River, south of Honeywell, to hold Sunday services. These invitations were frequently accepted and, sometimes when the weather was fine, the family all got in the old-fashioned surrey, which was a sort of two seated carriage, and spent what would now be termed a week-end at the Boomer Camp in the

service of the Master, and who shall say that these services were not just as inspirational as any religious worship of today. In fact, on a Sunday, just before the Soldiers came to take Mr. Payne away, we were there and my recollection is that there were at that time about thirty-five men, about twenty of whom were accompanied by their wives, in the camp. To me they seemed a hardy people, most of them somewhat silent and taciturn, but seeming to have in mind a home of law-abiding and God-fearing people.

Then soon we heard that the soldiers had come and taken them all away and we saw them no more. Then some time in the late eighties, we learned that Mr. Payne had passed on without seeing his ambition of the white settler living side by side with his Indian neighbor, each learning and accepting the best in his brother's practices, fulfilled nor have we seen it yet today.

To my childish mind, Mr. Payne was not a boomer. He was a dreamer who could make the simple minded see

his dreams and live them. He talked of settling this country with such earnest eagerness that he seemed almost inspired.

Then, too, in those days of hardship and pioneering, there was one, William Mathewson, who erected a post on the bank of the Chicaskia River, several miles northeast of Caldwell; and when we came to Kansas, he was supplying the drouth and grasshopper stricken settlers with food hunted down in the Indian Territory.

Now, my inquiring mind never was satisfied about the name of that post. It looked more like a lot of posts stood on end and rather close together, bound together in some manner(their architecture was of no school that would be recognized in modern art) and they were roofed over with leafy boughs. Inside hung the carcasses of buffalo, elk, wild turkey, and often prairie chicken. And the settlers, if they had money or if they had corn or

wheat or other food stuff, could barter for meat; and again, if they had none of those commodities, they could still get meat, and better luck next time went in lieu of trade. Such men as these, and there were many others, laid the foundation for the pioneer homes of Oklahoma. Oklahoma, make your bow to Kansas. Kansas set you a good example.

A year of southern Kansas passed as we sat at the feet of the Prophet, as Mr. David Payne was often called by his ardent followers, and Indian Territory was still unsettled. Then, in the fall of 1884(now history will bear me out in this), the Honorable Grover Cleveland was elected, and after his inauguration he promulgated the slogan which still holds- "To the victor belongs the spoils". He proceeded to make appointments just as happens now when we have a new President, and my father, being one of the faithful, was given the job of measuring hay stacks that had been put up by the ranchers. In that way,

we began to come in contact with the cattlemen and cowboys, another class of people that I cannot see as they are generally represented on the screen and in the lurid literature of modern newstands.

Now, my father was a friendly man and soon came to know and fraternize with these men with whom his work brought him in contact. The cowboys liked him and dubbed him "the parson", and came to visit him whenever they came to the state with cattle for shipment. I have never been sure whether they came for spiritual counsel or just to sample the ham and eggs, and southern biscuits that usually graced our breakfast table, but be that as it may, they were always welcome and from them we heard many tales of adventure, of merry happenings, and of more privations as they experienced them in the cattle country.

In the summer, there were terrific prairie fires, such as, in the fall of 1885 when it was very dry and father and his partner, Mr. James Penny, were

caught by two terrible fires when working several miles south of the Salt Fork, and they tried to ride it out. They came to a deep hole in the Wild Horse creek about three miles southeast of what is now Pond Creek, and plunged in and were forced to cover their frantic horses' heads with their jackets to hold them in the water. They stayed there until the fires had burned out all around them so they came on home minus their outfits.

Then came the terrible blizzard of January, 1886. I do not remember the exact day, but it was the worst time I ever knew. After a perfectly balmy morning and a pleasant noonday when our school in the village of Corbin had gone to visit the Spring Creek school and tried to spell them down, the wind came out of the north with a terrific driving force, sending slivers of ice against our not too well protected little bodies. We started for home. There were about thirty pupils from our school, so Mr. Gillock, our teacher, organized us for the trip. He put a big boy, whom he knew he could

trust, as leader, then he ordered a small pupil to hold on to the leader, then a big one to hold on to him, alternating us, big and little, down the line. Just north of Spring Creek school, there was a rather deep canyon, and we dropped down into it and started out with the teacher bringing up the rear and we had orders to hang on tight even if we were cold. Now, by wagon road, it is three miles, but it surely was much farther down in that gulley, but we were somewhat protected from the wind. I am sure none of us will ever forget that trip, and that our brave teacher marshalled us all in and no lives were lost there. But we fared much better than the poor boys out on the range who had to try to protect the stock, much of which was still out in the open as it had been a warm winter so far, and feed had been scarce, so most cattlemen were still depending on the buffalo grass. The country to the south was strewn with the carcasses of frozen cattle and I know of at least three cowboys, friends of my father, who lost their lives trying to

get their cattle to shelter. The blizzard raged for three days, icy pellets, for it was not snow, were piled high and lay in vast drifts all over. It was not beautiful snow, it was dirty ice and when it finally melted, left ridges of mud where it had lain.

Then, in time, the sun shone and the grass grew; summer came apace, and we knew that God was in his heaven and all was well with the world.

There was again hay to be measured and, joy of joys, we could go with the men in to the Indian Territory again and visit the ranchers whose generous hospitality I fear could not be duplicated today anywhere in the world.

I had long heard of the Sewell Stockade, down near the Salt Fork, which had been built many years before as a protection from hostile Indians and I was going to visit it. Of course, at that time it was not used for its orginal purpose, but what child of twelve would not get a thrill from peeking within its walls, or from being held up to look through the portals and imagining taking a shot at a red skin through a hole

in a six-foot wall of logs and sod. Now, perhaps, I am not accurate in this, but I see it thus. It stood in an open space quite a little ways from the timber, to me it seems to have been about eight or ten feet high(remember, I was just a little girl) and the walls were about four to six feet through, and it was without a cover, and to my mind it seems about forty feet across. At the time we were there, it was used as a stock shelter by the Pond Creek Ranch, and was more or less of a shelter until the very rainy spring of 1892, when the waters of Osage, Pond Creek, and Salt Fork, were merged and washed it down until there was little even of the earth work left to tell where it had once stood.

I am glad a monument has been erected there, although it was the dream of my father and me that it might some day be restored so that the future generations might see a real stockade and be thrilled by the sight even as I am still thrilled by the memory of it.

All these years we were still waiting for the opening of the cattle country to settlement by the white man, and at last, our waiting was to pass. A law was enacted that all cattle must be removed from the Cherokee Outlet, or the Strip as we called it, but the ranchers did not see it so. They had long been in possession and felt that this was unjust, and while there were many train loads going out daily, still there were some that were staying and finally, in June of 1893, the soldiers came with flying flags and slimy boots to say that they must move. Now, some of the cattlemen were of the mulish type and said, "make us" if you can", and well I remember when the officers came up into southern Kansas offering good pay to men who would help to move them, but there was a clause in the Enabling Act, by which this country was to be settled, which said that any man who was on this land between the time of the passage of this Bill and the 16th of September, 1893, would

be disqualified to participate in the race for land at that time. Almost everybody wanted to come, so the soldiers found that if they were going to remove the cattle, they would have to do the work themselves. Then, as the grass became dry, they finally resorted to burning the range so the stock would have to move in search of food.

I can still close my eyes and look off to the south and see the brilliant red light which said the cattle would move, and they continued for many weeks before they were all out; and at last we were to enter the promised land, and dear old father, the only one in our family who was eligible to take a homestead made ready for the great day.

He had a tall, bald-faced, white stockinged horse that could take long steps and take them fast, some of us rode him every day so he would be in condition for the trip. Oh yes, father had been all over it and he knew the fertile spots and just where he

he wanted to live and who he wanted to go with him and be his neighbors, so they organized and went west from Caldwell about five miles so they could go nearly due south on level land and ride for the Pond Creek bottom.

Now, it chanced he had a youth in his party who had just turned twenty-one and was new to hardships and as they were riding rapidly looking off toward their goal, but yet several miles away, it chanced that his young friend, Billy Bowles by name, had the misfortune to ride into a prairie dog hole and his horse had a broken leg. They young man was frantic at the thought of being left alone so far from home and he tried to follow on foot, leading the poor animal limping on three legs. Now, I am not idly boasting when I say my father had a heart and he waved his hand to the rest of the band and said, "Ride on boys, we are staying here". To the youth he said, "Stake here, Billy, and I will go a half mile and set my stake and come back to help you". And so he did, and when the

dust had cleared away, he looked to where he had set his heart on owning a claim and saw the smoke of "sooner fires" rising all along the Pond Creek bottoms. He felt sure he had not done so badly by helping a fellow when he needed a friend.

The others rode on and all found contests except one. Now, I am not claiming that every man that was there ahead of them was a sooner-a few may have had faster horses than they, but they had to have a good one to beat that gang. Well, my father got a good claim and was never really sorry.

His claim was staked and he had broken some sod with his saddle shovel, then returned to his friend whose poor horse was in such agony that they borrowed a gun from a passing rider and ended his suffering. All this had happened in a little over an hour from the time the opening gun had been fired on the Kansas line, sixteen miles to the north. He went to Enid and lay on the sand and ate dirt just like all the rest of

them to get his filings on, then came back to get ready to move on his newly acquired land.

He built a small house, it was all he could afford, and it consisted of a basement 16 x 18, plastered on the dirt and small windows, and a box house of the same size on top. Now, how in the world were we going to live in that? Six of us and we were leaving a ten room house, fairly well equipped. Where would we put our stuff? Sell part of it? Of course, but what? We had family heirlooms and we had more modern stuff. Of course we youngsters voted to take the modern stuff, but thanks to a mother who could sometimes assert herself. She stepped in and said, "No, here is stuff my parents owned before the war, and here is stuff that we started housekeeping with, and it is going, even if it has to be put in a tent", and much of it came. Sorry as we were to see the newer, shiner stuff sold by the auctioneer, now I am glad for

after nearly forty-four years I have some treasures with which I would not part; my grandfather's clock, an old Seth Thomas clock more than a hundred years old which still bears the scar of the ax where it was chopped from the wall when the Union Soldiers were burning his home because he had a step-son in the Confederate Army, still keeps perfect time. I still make pie with the rolling pin turned from apple-tree wood as a wedding gift to my father and mother sixty-seven years ago, and I still have an old walnut wood drop-leaf table of about the same age, and a few other treasurers that grow dearer every year.

Well, soon, assisted by our neighbors (Isn't it strange what a large part in all our lives our neighbors play) our household goods (I nearly said gods for it had nearly come to that) were loaded on to wagons and there was the old brown cow, and a crate of leghorn hens accompanied by a lordly cock,

and the horses were hitched and we started out before it was light and drove and drove all day long, stopping only for lunch and to feed the beasts and refresh them with water when we could find it, and on again until darkness had fallen and we were going to a lonely, dark house tired and hungry, and behold, when we had crossed Polecat Creek and had come up on the raise, there was a light and what seemed a small bon fire-there were the neighbors again. Mr. Satchell and Mr. Ohler, two men who I had never seen but who had aided father in building our shelter, had gone to the shanty and had hot coffee and boiled potatoes, and pancakes ready to fry. No banquet can take its place in my memory.

We moved in and began to see our neighbors and there were quite a few who were there as soon as we were.

So very soon there must be something doing, and as Mr. Satchell had built a fairly roomy sod house(since they were that kind of citizens), it was decided that we would start Sunday School and Church and held it in his house; and those kindly people housed the church

and Sunday school for more than two years, and we all went in and out as one people, and that district is still called Satchell's Valley though few are left who remember Pa and Ma Satchell and their funny old team called Leb and Deek. Now, Leb was long and rangy and stood full seventeen hands high, and had a frame to carry a lot of meat if he had had the feed, and Deek was built just the other way. He was short and chunky, and not very far from the ground, though he was an easy keeper and always looked plump in spite of privations. I can see them yet as they jogged along to Medford, a long nine miles away, and they would always take other folks and their produce along. Yes, it would take nearly a whole day, but what was a day more or less. We had it, and we all hoped for many more.

Now the people in that community drive to town in the morning, then go home and to Blackwell or Enid in the afternoon, then after doing the chores, have

back to Medford to take in the show and at the same time they complain of the hard times. And we can look back to those days and we fail to remember very many wails about the hard times, but we had them and many of the settlers had to be helped, but there seemed to be no stigma attached to that brand of charity. No, we seldom saw an eyebrow raised in disdain of our poorer neighbors and no one said, "They are on relief".

We all went to the meeting and sat together, Baptist, Presbyterians, Methodists, and what not, willing to let someone expound the Word. There were dear old shouting, praising, hallelujahing, Abraham Strouse's long drawn out Free Methodist exhortations, and calm, dignigied, ritualistic Brother Helmie of Episcopal persuasion; and there was doctrinal Baptist Brother Rhodes, all of them preaching to the same group of people and all getting a quiet hearing. That is what laid the foundation for our broadminded younger generation.

No, we did not confine all our activities to church going. No, indeed, there were literary societies, picnics, and parties, not with wonderful decorations and caterer's refreshments. No, we often just met out in the grove where there was plenty of room, and we sang without piano accompaniment, and played games; often refreshments were just yellow corn parched over an outdoors fire, and sometimes sorghum molasses candy, pulled and twisted by the whole crowd. But they were good parties just the same.

Well, I grew up as most girls do and when schools started in this country, I began teaching in a little sod school house on the banks of Polecat Creek. We were not organized into districts yet, and there were no taxes and no funds to pay teachers or buy supplies, but in most communities the settlers got together and built shelters to house these early institutions of learning and then came the question of how to pay. Some folks had some money, some folks had flour, and some

had canned or dried fruit brought from the States and we pioneer teachers got our pay in whatever the settlers had to use for money.

But these conditions only lasted for a short time and are only mentioned to show how Oklahoma's wonderful school system was started.

Now, in the early days, I met a young man(as most girls do) who had a wonderful gray team(great foundation for romance, was it not? But it still seems sufficient, since from admiring the gray horses my eyes sometimes wandered to their owner), and you know the rest, for in 1897, I was married to William Hammond, and came to live on the same homestead where we now reside and have gone on for forty years, seeing the country change from bare prairies to pleasant homes, bidding farewell to early friends and welcoming the new ones, even as we bade farewell to the dear old gray team and the worn out buggy, and welcoming the shiny new automobiles. Yes, times have changed, and our hair is white, but pioneer life has been good to us and our neighbors.