

ELLIS, NELSON W.

INTERVIEW

#8954

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BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for OklahomaField Worker's name Ethel Mae YatesThis report made on (date) October 15, 19371. Name Nelson W. Ellis2. Post Office Address Elk City, Oklahoma3. Residence address (or location) Gen. Del.4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month September Day 18 Year 18495. Place of birth Pendleton County, Kentucky6. Name of Father James Ellis Place of birth PendletonOther information about father Kentucky.7. Name of Mother Sarah Ellis 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 .

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Interview with Nelson W. Ellis
Elk City, Oklahoma

My wife, son Edward and I left Arkansas City on the twenty-eighth day of April in 1889. We brought with us three rigs; a buggy, spring wagon, and a large wagon, also a cultivator, two cows and some chickens.

We crossed the Salt Fork of the Arkansas on the railroad. We had to stop about a half mile before we got to the river, as the road was just lined up with people and we were almost the last ones. There was a string just ^{as} far a head as we could see. They laid three six inch boards across the railroad ties to lead the stock across. We were almost the last ones to cross. I led my cows across and was leading a six month colt across. All at once his fore feet fell through and the people thought he was a goner, but he gave a plunge and came out of it. We made it, then brought our vehicles across. It had been raining, the river was up and it sure did look scary. It was late in the evening so we camped and I never saw the like.

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People were camped all over the river bottom. The Indians were thick all up the river. They rowed out in the river in their boats. They would whoop and yell, trying to scare the white people, wanting them to go back. It was a scary old night but the "law" was there for protection.

The next morning we got up and started for the Cherokee strip. The "law" went all the way to guard the people from the Indians. I drove across the strip. We had come to make the run but when I saw all of that red dirt, I didn't like it. I had never seen any thing like it and didn't think it would raise any thing so I got on the line and watched the run. It was a sight to see. People ran in every way they could get there. Some of them broke down their wagons and had to make it a foot.

The second night we camped on the line. We went from there to Guthrie. As we were going up the railroad track we would meet trains just loaded down with people. They were on the sides, on top and just all over the trains. They would wave for us to turn and go back and I would

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wave that I was going on.

We lived in Guthrie six months. I travelled around quite a good deal and saw some fine corn that had been raised on the red land and got to where I liked the Territory. I dug almost the first well that was dug in Guthrie. There was a man there who had a drill but no horse so I told him that if he would furnish the drill I would furnish the horse so we dug a well. The drill was one horse power and would drill a hole from three to four feet in diameter. It was fixed so a man could go down with the drill; there was a pan that would hold about four bushels of dirt and when it was full he could change levers and bring the dirt up and the horse could keep going the same way. We dug the well and rocked it up in the same day. We had a fine well of water.

I had taken lots here and had built us a little house. In traveling around I came across some people over at Edmond who had come from Kentucky whom I had been raised

with, so I went over to Edmond and bought a hundred and sixty acres, one mile south and a half mile east, and improved it.

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I built a large barn for I wanted my stock to have shelter. I built a one room house and stretched the tent behind it.

We were right on the road that went from Texas to Kansas; we put down a large dug well right by the road side with two large oaken buckets. This well was known all up and down the road. Travellers from everywhere would come and camp there.

We dug a cellar and put a stove in it so when it was bad we would tell the travellers to go in it and cook.

We put out fifteen hundred fruit trees and put in our land. I would go over east of Guthrie in the black jack country and get black jack roots for fuel.

There was no law against hunting and hunting was one of my great weaknesses. The first year that I was in the Territory I killed nine wild turkeys. I killed only one deer. He was going into a thicket some distance away. When I shot him a man who was with me wanted to know what I had shot. I didn't know; I was afraid that it was a horse or a cow. He went a head of

me. When he got in the ticket he said that I had killed the nicest deer that he had ever seen. When I saw it, it won my sympathy. Its ears drooped down and its neck was so slick, it looked so innocent. If the other man hadn't been there I would have gone away and left it there. After that I would never kill another.

Every other year that we were there there would come a hail storm and hail us out but we never suffered the hardships that some of the pioneers did. I traded real estate and made some money and sold our house and lots in Guthrie and that helped us.

In the year of 1893 a man by the name of Eaton Classor gave four acres of land for the Central Normal School at Edmond. Our son Edward went to school there.

We stayed on our place four years and the last year that we were there ^{we} had the worst hail storm that we had ever had. It beat down our crops so I got discouraged and sold out. I got thirty two hundred dollars for it.

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Some years later there was an oil boom and the man I sold to sold it for twenty thousand dollars.

I came from there to Elk City and the first night I was here I had to sleep in a tent; this was in the year of 1901.. I got me some lots and built a house one story and a half high and built a flue and a foundation, the first in Elk City.

There was only one well in Elk City and it was at a wagon yard and every body there had to go there to get water. The demand was so great that ^{one}ny/wasn't allowed but a small bucket at a time so I wanted to dig me a well but couldn't find any one to dig it but found a man with a drill. I let him bore me a well which was a good one and the people flocked there from all around to get water. This was the second well that was dug.

Not very long after we were here, there was a bad storm so I dug a storm cave. This was the first one to be dug in Elk City. When a cloud would come up

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the people would flock in and pack in there like sardines. We hardly knew what it was to get down there. We would have to sit on the steps.

When I came to Elk City I went in the lumber business and almost lost everything that I had. I later got into the real estate and made pretty good. I came to Elk City right from its beginning and have watched it develop and grow and have shared many of its joys and sorrows and have never lived any other place since. I am now at a ripe old age. I am 88 years old, I guess I will spend the rest of my days here and feel that I have done my share to settle the country.