

ENSWORTH, EMILY

INTERVIEW

#7993

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Interviewer
October 27, 1937

Interview with
Mrs. Emily Easworth
Commerce, Oklahoma

HOME IN THE INDIAN TERRITORY

Father chose for his home here the land where North Miami now stands. Our land reached both south and west of there. The tallest old trees in the north part of North Miami are on the spot where our house stood. Here father built us a comfortable six-room house and along the south side of it was a long room where he gave dances.

DANCES

The room was so large that four set of square dancers could dance at once and leave room for the crowd. On the north side of our house we had a large dining room and here at mid-night father always served supper when he gave a dance. He charged a dollar for dinner for a couple. He served everything, roast young pig, chickens, turkeys, ice cream and different kinds of cake and pies.

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Father was a baker by trade and for some years had a bakery in Baxter Springs, Kansas. It would take several days to get everything prepared. Then, too, just off the room where they danced was a stand where cigars, ice cream, chewing gum, candy and lemonade were sold.

Father hired a young man from Baxter Springs, whose name I do not recall, to call for the dances. He also hired the music. He gave at least one dance a month and sometimes an extra, as on Christmas or some other holiday. He looked after the order himself and allowed no one to attend who was drinking.

People from Baxter Springs, Kansas, Seneca and Neosho, Missouri, as well as from Chetopa, Kansas, and other towns came to these dances even in the days before we had any roads. During the time that the soldiers were stationed south of Baxter Springs, they would come by the wagon loads across the prairie driving big mule teams. West of the house we also had a race track and here many races were held and men would bring their horses from all the surrounding towns.

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No drinking was allowed but betting was and bets were laid on everything from the horse to a hat. There were people who did not have much money and they would bet even their farm machinery.

HOME LIFE

We raised everything that we ate and bought only sugar and coffee. Father took two hundred acres for himself and mother and for each one of us four children.

My land lay south of home on what is now the west side of Highway 66. The G. A. R. Cemetery is on my allotment.

When Brother Will's son Jack died, mother allowed his body to be buried there and soon others wanted to place their people there as there was no cemetery close to us and they did so. Finally after there were several graves there, I sold it to the G. A. R. people in the early 90's, thirty-six acres for \$1600.00, reserving the four acres in the southeast corner for a church that I wanted to see built there.

Just across the road south of this, Father had

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set aside an acre of my land and the neighbors with his help had built a small school house. The schools were subscription schools but this was the first school where my children and most of the others who were young then first started to school. The "Used Car Lot" is now on that corner.

Our house was struck by a cyclone at one time. It was not blown completely down but was badly twisted and wrecked. I was sick at the time and my brother Will, James K. Moore and my husband made a rest for me in their arms and carried me out to the barn. At another time the top story of the house where we were living was blown off.

There was lots of wild game in the country then, also a drove of wild horses west of us on Elm Creek and along the Neosho Bottoms.

We fenced our fields and some of the boys looked after the cattle that ranged on the prairie. Each man had his stock, both horses and cattle, branded. There were cattle everywhere on the prairie which was covered with a bluestem grass in places as high as your head.

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ROADS AND FERRIES.

In those days we had no roads but we had a trail worn soon that went north just west of Commerce and north and east to Baxter Springs and east and a little south of Seneca, Missouri. However, as more people came, other trails were made and later, when there was more travel, they were called roads and for a long time the only change was when some of the neighbors would get together and maybe build a bridge over a small stream for the larger ones had ferries.

There was a ferry on Spring River east which ran when the water was high; there was a ferry at Bigknife called the Bigknife Ferry, one across the Neosho River, where the old Military road crossed, called Pooler's Ferry and the crossing north and west of us on the Neosho was called Stepps Ford. Later, they put in a ferry across the Neosho south of Miami and as travel increased others were added.

MUSKOGEE FAIR

When I was about seventeen, a group of neighbors,

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five covered wagons of us, decided to attend the first fair to be held in Muskogee. We went east to what was then called the Line Road. This road was along the state line and there was much travel over it. People moving south who were afraid to cross the Indian country would take this road. We camped along the road and stayed about a week in Muskogee.

We got so tired on the way that Florence Wade and I would get out of the wagons and ride some of the horses that were being taken along. We were gone nearly three weeks.

CATTLE THIEVES

We had no protection from the law in those days and we had many cattle on the open range and lots of herds were being driven through here to Baxter Springs, so of course many of the cattle would disappear and could not be found. The men began watching and they found that there was a ring of men working. Part of them would round up the cattle and drive them some little

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distance and turn them over to another thief and the first man would return to work and be on hand the next morning ^{as} so/not to be missed nor suspected.

By watching our men, we spotted nine who were doing the "rustling." We waited till we caught them in the act, then they were all shot and hung to trees. This happened about a mile east and north of Horseshoe Lake which lake is just northwest of Miami on the river.

Another time they heard a darkey at night out among the cattle. They followed him to Tar Creek and placed a rope around his neck, threw the rope over a limb of a tree and then fastened the rope to the saddle horn and drew him up and then tied the rope to the tree and left him there as an example for others to see.

One night I went to a dance at a neighbor's and some men were there who were drinking and trying to break up the dance. One of the men who was drinking was shot and they brought him into the house and stood his dead body up in the corner, and then went on with the dance.

Another time on the road to a dance some of the folks found a man who had been frozen to death; they

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picked up the body and brought it along with them and stood it up in the corner at the dance, thinking perhaps some one would know who the man was.

INDIANS

We came here with the Miamis after the chief had arranged for us to have land in the west part of the Peoria Nation and later we were adopted into the Peoria Tribe. This did not keep me from being afraid of the other wild Indians who were brought here. I was always afraid of the Nez Perces and the Poncas. When they were brought here they wore blankets and were watched by the soldiers. The Poncas were camped along Spring River and made a crop there. The Modocs were soon taken to the Modoc Reserve and were quiet and friendly and anxious to learn after they were brought here in 1873.

The Pottawatomies were for a while on a square on this side of the Neosho River at the northwest end of our land. Some of them lived in tepees and some had small log houses but they did not stay here long and moved to join others of their tribe farther down in the

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state. There are many of their graves on the Demo Farm west of Commerce.

We lived part of the time on the farm and a part of the time in Baxter Springs where father had a bakery.

MARRIAGE

On December 26th., 1875, I was married to Oliver John Ensworth, called by all who knew him John.

He was born February 9th., 1856, in Parke County, Indiana. His father was a white man and his mother was a member of the Brothertown Tribe of New York. His father's name was John and his mother's was Eliza Ensworth nee Dagnette. She died when he was six months old and his father died when he was three years old, and after his father's death his grandmother, who lived in Miami County, Kansas, went and brought him and his three sisters to her home there. One of these sisters, Mary, married Edward Black, assistant Chief of the Peorias under Peoria Baptiste, and after Black's death, married

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Frank Beaver, later the Chief of the Peoria Tribe.

My husband remained with his grandmother in Kansas, attending school there until he was sixteen when he came to the Indian Territory.

We built a comfortable home on my land and John broke our first land with oxen, increasing the number of acres each year till at one time we had eight hundred acres under fence.

ACQUAINTANCES AND FRIENDS

We grew to know many people, in those days. Among them I recall Paul Craig, who then lived in Baxter Springs and who would go about drawing pictures on the streets. For years he has drawn for the front page of the Denver Post. Miller, the father of the Miller Boys of the 101 Ranch, was a frequent visitor and we have visited him at his ranch. The James boys would frequently spend the night with us or would ride up for a meal. They would put their horses in the barn and then hang the saddles just above the horses. Once John had a horse they fancied and they offered him \$100.00 for the horse.

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John accepted the money and let them have the horse even though he did not want to do it.

A PAYMENT

Once we had to go to the Agency when it was near Seneca, Missouri, for a payment due us. Indians were guarding the place, stationed all around it, and we learned that members of some robber gang had been frightened away by the guards that morning. I had to wait till the very last one that day so it was late when we started home. My husband was driving a team of racers and I had a \$1000.00 in my purse and we were afraid that we would be held up and my husband said to me, "If we see anyone who looks suspicious, you throw the bag with the money as far as you can in the woods and try to remember where we were at the time and I will drive back and get it." Fortunately, we were not stopped and we made a quick trip home.

HOME AND FAMILY

We built different houses in those days from

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the ones we build now. Our houses then were more substantial. Our old smokehouse and barn are built of walnut boards and the floor in the barn is of walnut boards, three inches thick, and still not worn. Our smoke house had a double wall and the space between the walls was filled with sawdust. Overhead the loft was the same and each winter the men would fill this with ice taken from the river and packed in sawdust.

LATER LIFE

After Miami had been laid out for some years we moved to town and my husband and James Tharp, who is still living there, ran a livery stable for some years. Our children went to school there.

Later, we sold the farm and made our home in Miami all the time till my husband died some ten years ago. At the present, I live here in Commerce with my son.