

MUTHART, HARRY I.

INTERVIEW

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

MUTHART, HARRY P.

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Field Worker's name Anna R. Barry,

This report made on (date) April 12, 1938. 193

1. Name Harry P. Muthart.

2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 1110 South Macomb Street.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month _____ Day _____ Year _____

5. Place of birth Barton County, Kansas.

6. Name of Father William Muthart, Place of birth Pennsylvania.

7. Name of Mother Jennie Clemens Muthart Place of birth Pennsylvania.

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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Anna R. Barry,
Journalist,
April 12, 1938.

An Interview With Harry P. Muthart,
El Reno, Oklahoma.

I first came to Oklahoma in the fall of 1890 and settled on a little place out in the western part of the state in what is now known as Woodward County. I built a dugout for my first home and plastered it inside with a substance called gyp. I made a mixture something like cement which when dry was very white and quite hard. I built a much larger dugout than most of my neighbors; in fact, I lived in luxury as I had two rooms besides a built-in clothes closet and pantry. I dug the pantry a considerable distance back in the wall of the kitchen, consequently in it was most as cool as an ice box. I was a bachelor in those days.

I like to think of myself as quite a gay, irresistible young blade. I myself had worked in the East before coming to Oklahoma, was better educated than most of the men in this part of the country, could sing fairly well, and play almost any kind of an instrument, so was in demand at every sort of entertainment. I organized a singing.

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school that winter, which was in existence for years. Needless to say, I was singing master, and led the singing with the aid of a tuning fork for pitch. A few of the neighbors had guitars and mandolins. One or two had banjos, I had a cornet and altogether we made a rather imposing orchestra. Anyway, our music was considered very fine, indeed, for dancing at the community gatherings.

There were many cowboys in that part of the country, and it was my pleasure to become great friends with most of them. It has always seemed to me that of all the people I have known in different lines of work a cowboy is the most naive of any. He seems never to outgrow his boyhood. He appears never to be too tired to participate in some prank on a fellow cowboy, or anyone else who happens to be at hand. I recall one such incident which occurred during the first spring "round-up" I ever saw.

There was a cowboy in this outfit they called "Pink".. (I imagine because he had such a pretty pink and white complexion). Well, Pink was deathly afraid of snakes of

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any kind, even worms were a source of great discomfort to him. One evening, one of the boys known to everyone as "Big Jawed" Haynes (a descriptive name, as you may have surmised) took some rope and, at great inconvenience and work, fixed it up to look convincingly like a snake. Seen coiled in a poor light, it was enough to give anyone the creeps. This he arranged in the middle of "Pink's" bunk somewhat at the back, so it would lie in the shadow of the top bunk. That evening after "chow", when the boys had all gathered in the bunk house to retire, Pink came in as usual, and sat down on the edge of his bunk to unlace his boots. He hadn't noticed the pseudo snake, but just as he turned to hang his sock across the end of the bunk, Haynes made a rattling noise and Pink saw the "snake". He let out a screech that would have waked the dead and tore out of the bunk house. He came limping back quite some time later with his feet full of stickers from cactus which he had been too scared to notice. His feet were so sore that Haynes was forced to do Pink's work for several days which evened up the score some what.

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In this neighborhood there lived an old fellow, a sort of derelict. We never knew anything about him, except that he had drifted in with other settlers. He was perhaps fifty years old, and besides being illiterate was slightly "deaf", but he was a harmless old fellow and everyone sort of looked out for him, seeing that he had food, etc. A Mr. Perrin allowed him to build a dugout on his place and he fished, hunted and cut enough wood for his fire. He was always wishing he could find a woman who would marry him, so Haynes and his bunch of cowboys decided to play a prank on the old fellow. They persuaded Pink to play the part of the bride, and made the old fellow believe they had fixed up a marriage for him. He cleaned up his dugout, slicked his hair back with bacon grease, did the best he could to make his clothing presentable, rubbed oil into his boots, and was ready for the ceremony. The boys finally appeared with the blushing bride and a pseudo minister to perform the marriage. They were married and, after toasting the couple in a fitting manner and playing pranks, the boys left. The old man waved them farewell with one hand,

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while holding his "bride" tightly around the waist with the other arm and grinning fatuously; but when he found the boys had played such a good joke on him, things began to hum. He was so mad, he nearly shot Pink before he could get away, and once more Pink was the one who suffered, for he ran out of the dugout with his flimsy dress on which was torn on brambles and bushes as he sped to safety. Of course, his hands, face and body were scratched, dirty and bloody. In all he represented a most startling appearance, resembling a wild man, as he slunk along through the bushes, praying he'd meet someone soon who could give him some decent clothing, and afraid he'd encounter some stranger or a woman. He finally came in sight of a shack he knew belonged to Perrin's herder, so made for it, intending to ask for breakfast and clothing. When the herder looked up from the pancakes he was making and saw that tattered apparition in his doorway, he reached for his gun. Only very quick action on Pink's part saved him from being shot full of buckshot. He finally convinced the herder that he was Pink, and wanted food and clothing.

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He bound the herder to silence concerning his predicament, for he knew if the others ever found out, he would never hear the last of this affair.

Another amusing incident that occurred in those early years was one time when Haynes, Pink, another cowhand and myself were sitting up with a corpse. An old fellow who lived alone on his claim had died, evidently of some sort of poisoning as he was terribly doubled up when discovered by a cowboy who was hunting a stray in his neighborhood. We couldn't tell how long he had been dead, but it had been long enough that rigor mortis had set in, and he could hardly be straightened at all. In those days it was too far to go for a coroner or undertaker, so the neighbors performed whatever rites were necessary. A Mr. Dalton, who seemed to know something about such things came and helped to "lay him out". As fast as we straightened the old man out, he'd double up again. Mr. Dalton said we'd have to fasten him some way so he'd stay straight, for we couldn't think of burying him looking so uncomfortable, it didn't seem the decent thing to do. We finally conceived the idea of

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fastening wires around his shoulders, then down his back, around his legs above the knees and on down to the ankles. Well, this seemed to be satisfactory. It was too late to bury him that night, so we four were detailed to sit up with him until morning. We had him in front of the window lying stretched out on a board in one room, while we sat in the kitchen playing pitch. It was a little past midnight when we heard a "zing-g-g" kind of noise from the other room and all rushed in to see what it was, and were just in time to see the old fellow rise to a sitting position and jump out the window head first. We nearly trampled each other getting out of the house, and ran until we came to Dalton's place five miles from there. We were all young men under 25. Needless to add we were all scared green. We got Mr. Dalton out and told him the old man had come to life and had jumped out the window and we didn't know where he had gone, but we were all sure he had left. Mr. Dalton said, "Impossible, you know he was dead. In fact I think I know what happened", and he began to laugh. We tried to join him, but it was a sickly effort. However,

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we returned with him and two of his older men and we found the old man, just as Dalton said we would, standing on his head outside the window. The wire had broken which released his body and it came upright with such a jerk, it was thrown out the window. But say, that was the most terrible experience I ever had. I can still remember the creepy, weird feeling that came over me when I saw that old man going out the window. I imagined he leered at us as he went out.

Those were interesting times, and enjoyable, too, especially so to me as it was an entirely new experience. I loved going on the fall round-ups when the cattle were all brought in and the young mavericks branded. There is nothing to compare to the satisfaction one feels roughing it on a round-up. The early rising before it is even light, rounding up of the horses, then breakfast and out on the prairie hunting down the cattle. In the evening after the supper is over, the boys gather around the fire; some one gets out his mouth organ, and starts a tune; it isn't long until everyone is joining in singing the old songs popular at that time. The cowboy led a

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free happy life, but it wasn't all pranks and fun. He could be just as ready and efficient in an emergency.

It was on one of these round-ups, that Haynes happened upon a tragedy which still saddens me to recall. In following some cows up a lonely ravine miles to the north of Dalton's place, Haynes came upon a little shack which he at first thought to be deserted. As he was preparing to ride on by, he heard a whimper that sounded more like a tired, frightened puppy than it did like a human being. He decided to investigate, and walked softly to the door and looked in. He almost gasped aloud at what he saw. A woman was lying on the floor in front of a high chair in which sat a baby and just back of her were two diamond black rattler snakes coiled and rattling angrily. They seemed undecided about what to do, they would reach up their heads toward the baby, then lower them and rattle loudly. Of course it was the baby who was making the whimpering noise. It was a tiny thing, and looked tired and hungry. Haynes stood there wondering what was best to do, he was afraid that if he shot one of the snakes, the other would then

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strike the baby before he could shoot again, if he could only figure out some way to get where he could reach the baby. He investigated the windows, but found they were too small for ingress that way. He finally decided the only way he could rescue the baby was to attract the snakes away. He scraped his foot on the sand outside the door, and the snakes immediately swung around. One of them struck, missing him about an inch as he jumped back. Before it could coil again, he shot it, but in the meantime, the other one darted out of the shack and struck him in the thigh. He killed it, and proceeded to administer first aid in the only way he knew how. He bared the wound, took his knife and made a gash across the place where the fangs had gone in, and sucked as much blood out as he could, then tied his handkerchief tightly about his upper leg. He then went into the shack and looked at the woman. She was breathing, but was discolored and much swollen. The snakes had bitten her several times. She had evidently tried to save the baby at the risk of her own life. He lifted her onto the bed, but realized by the effort required, that he had better ride for help quickly before he became

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too ill. He took the baby and came back into camp. Dalton sent two men and the wagon back for the woman and took Haynes home. He was quite ill all night but was soon all right. The women folks took over the care of the baby, and when the mother was brought in, she was given all the care possible, but never regained consciousness. Two of the boys went to the shack to wait for the husband to come home. He had gone to the nearest settlement for some provisions, which necessitated his being gone two days and one night. Everyone in the community assisted in this time of need, everyone giving what he could thereby making it possible for the man to take his wife back to her home for burial. He never returned but wrote Mr. Dalton asking that he sell his place if he could find a buyer. Mr. Dalton bought it himself giving the young man a good price for the property and what little stock he owned.

Those early days were full of rich experiences, which if possible to collect it all, would furnish material for the most interesting book one could imagine. There are lots of other incidents, some tragic, some humorous

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and others romantic which occurred through the early years of the settlement of Oklahoma, it would fill volumes if it could all be recorded. Yes, there has been plenty of color in the making of our fair state, and I am glad to be counted as one of its early pioneers.