

LYDA, SYLVESTER.

INTERVIEW

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

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Field Worker's name Ethel Mae Yates

This report made on (date) April 13, 1938

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1. Name Sylvester Lyda

2. Post Office Address Elk City

3. Residence address (or location) 919 West Avenue A

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month April Day 6 Year 1861

5. Place of birth Missouri

6. Name of Father Frank Lyda Place of birth Missouri

Other information about father Father died before I was born

7. Name of Mother Carolina Lyda Place of birth Missouri

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 _____

Field Worker, Ethel Mae Yates,
April 13, 1939.

Interview with Sylvester Lyda,
Elk City.

My parents were Mr. Frank Lyda and Carolina Lyda. Mother came to the Territory later and died here but she didn't pioneer here. They were both born in Missouri and so was I. I, with my family, a wife and four children, with two other families came from Missouri to the Territory in 1901. We came to Kansas and I worked in the wheat harvest a month, so all told we were on the road two months; camped out all the time and cooked on stick fires. For part of the way, water and wood were very scarce. When we would see a stick of any kind along the roadside we would stop and get it and haul it along so that we might have fuel to cook with.

We stopped at a house in Kansas where there was a windmill and asked for water; the lady of the house asked us where we were going and we told her that we were going to the Territory. She said that we could get water, but that we were crazy to go to that old dry

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Nation and ought to go back, but we had heard that we could register and get land and we were home-seeking and not easily discouraged so we came on and all got through alive. A child of one of our friends fell in a creek one evening as we were camped on the bank; we rescued him before he was hurt very badly and one of the women got her dress afire, but we soon got the fire under control and she was not seriously burned. We brought with us one wagon and one team, fixed the over-jet on top of the side boards with our bed on it where we six slept and put our few belongings under the jet. Three covered wagons of us left Missouri and on the way two more wagons fell in with us so there were five, wagons of us for a while. It later turned out so that there were three wagons of us and when we got to Weatherford we made camp and another man and I went and registered for land and he got a claim but I did not but while there I traded my team of horses for a span of little mules and with my family I came on to Elk City and got here on August 10, 1901. We came to Elk City with a man whom we met at Bridgeport. This man went with me

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and helped me to locate a claim eight miles northwest of Elk City so I moved my family out there and we stretched a tent to live in. A night or two after we got there one of the mules got loose. I just knew that he had gone back to Weatherford so I had to leave my family and start out afoot to search for him and I was gone three days, leaving my wife and children who were so scared that they didn't know what to do. They made their pallets on the ground in the tent and slept with a gun beside them but there was not a one who could have shot it if it had been necessary.

It took \$14.00 to file and I didn't have it so I wrote to my mother-in-law and got the money and after I had filed we went over into Greer County and picked cotton that Fall. Not one of the children had ever seen any cotton, and picking was slow but we got 50 cents per hundred pounds for picking cotton. We lived in a tent and picked cotton all Fall. Some weeks we just made \$4.80 and had to pay 80 cents a bushel for feed for our team.

We traded one of my mules off for a horse and got some difference and when the weather got so bad that

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we could not pick cotton we went back to our claim, and I dug a dugout back in a hill, walled the front up and covered it with shiplap lumber and when it rained we were almost drowned out so later I covered the dugout with dirt.

Our dugout was about eight by ten; our furniture was a home-made bedstead, table and a monkey stove and two or three chairs. We later got a wooden box from a store and nailed it up to put our few dishes in. We would go down in the canyons and gather sticks and brush for fuel and if we found a stick as large as my arm we thought we had found something. We carried all the water we used from a spring that was a half mile away and not long after we came from Greer County I went to Elk City to get some supplies and on the way home this horse that I had traded for gave out and I unharnessed him and let him go. I then hooked the mule on one side of the wagon tongue and I got on the other side and put a trace chain around me and helped the mule pull the wagon on home.

Our food was water bread and sorghum and part of

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the time bacon to fry to make gravy. One day the children were down in the canyon hunting wood and met a man who lived about a mile and a half from us. He asked them if they had any milk to drink. They told him "no" so he told them to go to his home after that and get milk and sometimes we would buy butter from him.

In February my wife's brother came to visit us. I got him to stay with my family and I started out afoot to hunt work. At noon I came to a little store and bought 5 cents worth of cheese and crackers for my lunch and after I had eaten I started on and met some men who told me if I was hunting work I had just as well turn around and go home for there was no work to be found. I went on and stayed that night at a ranch house where they gave me supper and breakfast. The next day, I got to Texola and paid 25 cents to sleep on a pallet on the floor that night. The next day I went on and walked all day; night was coming on and I began to look for a place to stay. I came to a railroad camp which was full up. I found another camp but it was full of negroes and I began to wonder if I was going to have to stay with the negroes that night, but on looking

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around I saw a man cutting wood. I went to this man's house and stayed two nights and he helped me get a job digging a well for the railroad company. I dug this well twenty feet wide and did not have to dig very far until I struck water. He gave me a part-time job to help pay my board. I worked a month and had \$17.00 coming to me so I went back to Texola and stayed all night but didn't get my pay so I went home and stayed awhile, then went back to Texola to see about my pay. I got the \$17.00 and a job working on the section, where I worked awhile. The foreman wanted me to go on down in to Texas and work for a \$1.50 a day but I told him that I would go home. He said that he didn't see why I wouldn't go to Texas as I began to work almost for my board but I went back home and worked on my claim until Fall and then went over into Washita County and picked cotton and made pretty good money as cotton picking went to \$1.00 a hundred. I worked until the weather got so cold that I couldn't make anything and I had saved \$30.00 so I went home and made our dugout twenty feet long and walled the front up with lumber

and put a shingle roof on it.

We went through some very drouthy years. I call to mind one time when I was plowing it was hot and dry and the sand was blowing and I had the blues. I unhitched right in the afternoon and went and put the team in the lot and went to the house and asked my wife if she didn't want to go buggy riding for we had gotten a buggy. She said "where will we go? There isn't any place to go." I said "We will just ride," so we got into the buggy and rode and rode and the next morning I got up and went to plowing with my blues gone. I had seen while out riding that I was no worse off than my neighbors. The neighbors all seemed to have the blues so all of us who lived anywhere near got together and agreed that we would all meet at each others' dugouts. All would come to one one Sunday and another the next until we got around to all the neighbors' dugouts. Then we would start over again. In this way we forgot most of our blues.

One summer day we were having a picnic over on Sandstone Creek. I had been sick and was feeling down and out. I looked over and saw a man leaning against

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a tree looking about the way I felt. I went over to him and told him who I was and we got to talking and soon we saw another man looking blue and we called to him and he came over. We soon saw another and called him. We all forgot that we were strangers and soon were having a good time.

In those pioneer days there wasn't a stranger in the midst long for we were soon neighbors and every one helped to bear one another's burdens and when there was a dance or party in the country there were not just one or two in a family invited but the whole family was invited. The whole family would get into the wagon and drive for miles to a dance in some dugout and we would have some real times. Then I remember another time when it hadn't rained for a long time and we got into the wagon and started over on Sweetwater Creek fishing; we got over south of Berlin and camped and a rain came on us that night and the next morning we got up and went back home for this ended our fishing trip.

In later years we built better improvements on our claim and lived on it for twenty-two years and in the year 1923 we moved to Elk City and have lived right

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here ever since and lived in this house that we are
living in now except the first year that we moved here.