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Field Worker
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Interview with Mrs. R. D. Neal
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

I was born in Zanesville, Oklahoma, in 1860. My father is from Pennsylvania and mother from Ohio.

Father pioneered in Kansas in 1866 and settled at Humbolt, Kansas. He purchased 320 acres of land there and farmed and was in the cattle business. He reared his family there.

Before the opening of Oklahoma the Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians used to follow a trail from Oklahoma through father's farm to Leavenworth, Kansas. The children were small then and used to watch them in a long line following behind one another in buggies and on horses. Many times, a group of them looked like a mile long on the trail. Father put up fences, but when the Cheyennes and Arapahoes came through, they didn't want to follow section lines but wanted to continue on their old trail. When they came to the fences they just pulled them down and went through. Father tried to do something about it, but there wasn't anything he could do.

Father used to go from Kansas to Texas to get cattle. He would go through Oklahoma and drive back as many as five

hundred to one thousand head. He always took his cowboys with him, and they took their chuck wagon along. When he arrived with the cattle from Texas, all longhorns, we children would saddle our ponies and go out to meet them as they neared the corrals for we wanted to see the new herd of cattle. Father would graze them on grass over the summer and then ship them to market at Kansas City in the fall. Then he would go back to Texas after another bunch of cattle. He used to follow the old trails, but I was too young to know much about it. If I could have known of the discussion coming up now about trails, I could have received complete details of all trails from him before he died, as he was acquainted all over this state.

My husband and I were living at Chanute in 1889 and before the opening my father and my husband moved several hundred head of cattle to a pasture near Medicine Lodge until my husband came after us two weeks after the opening. He drove down in a covered wagon. Father was familiar with the country in Oklahoma and was a good horseman, so he led a party of people from Kiowa, Kansas in the Run into Oklahoma. He rode a pacing horse. My husband drove down in a wagon. I had a bedroom suite I was proud

of that he took with him in the wagon. He camped over night the first night before driving all the way into the city. My husband wanted a claim and father wanted lots in Oklahoma City. We did not know that we could take both then. Father knew of the fine farms around Fort Reno and we wanted to get a farm there but when they arrived they learned that the sooners had got all the farms taken. So my husband wrote me that he could get a good farm five miles west of the city and I wrote for him to take it. So there is where we improved and lived and own our farm today.

Father took lots in Civic Center and built a two story building there. He had the lumber cut and sawed in Kansas before the opening and shipped down here. He wanted to open the first store here. He opened a dry goods store and also operated a lumber yard. The first Masonic Lodge was opened on the second floor of the store building.

My husband built a two-room house on the farm where we lived. He had a pretty good team and he used to get up at four o'clock in the morning and milk the cows and take care of his chores and dress up in his suit and get to town by six o'clock with his team and two-wheeled cart to open store. They used to keep stores open till nine

O'clock in the evening and during the busy season the store was kept open till eleven o'clock.

We had a better house than most of the people had on the farm. It was weather boarded, while most of the settlers were very poor, and had one room shacks and no weather boarding. We wore our old clothes out in Oklahoma. Although we operated a store, we wore the same clothes that we brought to Oklahoma for five years before buying any new ones. We had no well on our farm the first year, but hauled water a quarter of a mile from one of our neighbors, who put down a well. We had a creek through our farm where we watered our stock. We never had any difficulty getting groceries; however, some were not as fortunate as we were.

We had a fine group of neighbors in our community. Nearly all of them were people from cities in the east. They were teachers, music teachers, lawyers, and people in other lines of business but when they came they had no money and many of them sold their places and left.

The first seven years in Oklahoma was a drought and the city people did not know how to make a living. Some, after selling farms, moved to Oklahoma City and tried some kind of business, while others left the state. They sold

their farms as high as three hundred dollars a quarter, which was considered a very high price then.

I spent nearly all my time on the farm with my baby. I used to get pretty scared of the Indians, Cheyennes and Arapahoes, as they came by our house when they came to the city to get their allotments from the government. They used to fool around our place. I was scared and always kept my doors locked. We brought a barrel of vinegar from Kansas and had the vinegar barrel on the side of the house, as we had nowhere else to put it. The Indians would come up around the house-you could not talk to them, as they would not say anything-but always fooled around this barrel. Later we discovered they were looking for whiskey and thought we had whiskey in the barrel. So we finally got rid of the barrel and were not bothered after that time.

There was an Indian scare when we had a young couple that got married out there and were given a charivari. The soldiers were stationed at Council Grove, and as the Cheyennes had been more or less restless that winter when the soldiers heard the charivari some of them rode with their horses at two o'clock in the morning as regular Paul Reveres and knocked on the doors of the houses and told everyone to get

to City as quickly as possible that the Indians were coming. We quickly got our team from the pasture and hitched them to our wagon, and drove along to our nearest neighbors, a young couple, and picked them up. This young lady's husband had a shotgun, so as he came from the house he shouted to his wife and asked where his shells were. She replied that they were on the wall and he finally got into the wagon. We then stopped along and got a family with seven children and put the children into the wagon and drove to the store where we stayed over night. But after we arrived at the store the young husband discovered that instead of having his shells he had his wife's clothes pins that he had taken from the wall. As for the family with seven children, one of them was staying with one of the neighbors' children, and nothing was mentioned of the seventh child until we arrived in the city. In the excitement we had left her in the country. All the firearms and shells in the stores in the city were sold out that night.

The first class of people in our neighborhood were a fine class of people. We used to gather in homes and hold Literary Clubs and we gave oyster suppers and had parties and dances. At all these gatherings the people were as

well dressed as in any city, as most of them were from cities in the East. Some in the group were music teachers and they formed an orchestra; and all was free. Some people by the name of Ossman moved in, in 1893, and bought 320 acres of land. They had some money and built a large two-story house, so after that time we held our dances at their house. On New Years evening we had a special orchestra at their home and dancing all night. A blizzard came over and it turned terribly cold, so we ate sandwiches and oyster soup, and danced till morning. Everyone was dressed at their best and everyone had a fine time. Many people came out from the city that evening.

The first winter we lived down here we had a heavy snow one night and when I woke in the morning there was a blanket of snow all over the top of my dresser. Our bed was one with a high back that kept the snow off our faces, but the lower half of the bed was covered with snow.

There was a lawyer from Tennessee, named Crosure, that lived there. His wife was a school teacher. He had cut some prairie hay and baled it with a baler. The first school we had out there in the country was on this lawyer's farm, and Mrs. Crosure was the teacher. We used one row of bales for

seats, and stacked bales two high for desks. We had a canvas covering overhead for a roof. Mrs. Crosure was paid one dollar per month for each student by the parents. We later held school in the homes. The Crosures later returned to Knoxville, Tennessee.

Many of the people received pensions from services in the Civil War, or assistance from friends and relatives out of the state or they would have been unable to endure the seven years' drouth we had. We had neither pension nor assistance, but were young and ambitious to make a home. I would not take anything for my experience in pioneering days. The settlers from the East could not conceive what it meant to get 160 acres free, and did not feel that there would be any future to Oklahoma at that time. They felt like they might do better by going back where they came from.

We held Sunday School classes and Church services in the homes. Every one went to church on Sunday. We held singing gatherings and prayer meetings and many prayed that had never prayed before in their lives.