

NELSON, ELLA MAE

INTERVIEW

#8010

267

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8010

Interviewer, Ethel Mae Yates,  
July 26, 1937.

Interview with Mrs. Ella Mae Nelson,  
Lik City, Oklahoma  
322 N. Adams

Born January 16, 1866,  
Neosho County, Kansas.

Parents Jacob Down  
Marguerite Down

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I was born in Neosho, Kansas. My father died when I was one year old and my mother died when I was four years old. My mother gave me to my uncle when on her death bed. When I was five my aunt died. However, my uncle married again soon but his second wife died when I was thirteen.

From this time on I just drifted from post to pillar and did not see any more of my people until I was twenty years old.

When I was seventeen I came to the Indian Territory. This was in the year of 1884. I came to the Territory with a family by the name of Bennett with whom I was making my home at that time. We came in a covered wagon and were on the road one day and night. We settled within eight miles of Bartlesville.

NEISON, ELLA MAE. INTERVIEW.

8010

Mr. Bernett came for the purpose of leasing land and he leased land from an Indian by the name of Albert Curly-head.

The bernetts had promised me if I would come to the Territory with them that they would give me a cow and a hog but when I got here they turned traitor and dián't do anything they said they would do.

I went to the home of a rancher, William Lodge, and asked if I could stay with them a few days until I could get back to Kansas. Mr. Lodge was a white man but his wife had some Cherokee blood. He was a way from home quite a bit. They seemed to like me and I liked them so they asked me to stay with them. I made my home with them three years and this was the best home I ever had in my life.

There was lots of game, but as Mr. Lodge was a cattleman he did not go hunting much.

The cattlemen would have round-ups. Each cattleman would have a certain brand and would claim all cattle branded with their brand.

We would go down in the bottoms and gather strawberries by the water buckets full. There were lots of grapes,

NEISON, ELLA MAE. INTERVIEW.

8010

plums and blackberries also. People didn't farm much in those days.

There were not any schools or Sunday Schools. Mr. Dodge took us down on Big Creek to camp meeting one time. It was twelve miles there, which was a long way in those days.

When we came to the Cherokee Nation there were two tribes of Indians there, Delawares and Cherokees. The Government had made provisions for them and they were allowed to draw so much per month, according to their families. Some of them got to where they had so many wives that the Government passed a law that if they had more than one wife they couldn't draw anything.

Albert Curlyhead had two wives. One was young and was his oldest wife's niece, her name was Mandy. The Government told him that he would have to give up one of his wives if he got to draw anything, and asked him which one he wanted to keep. He said, "I want to keep my Mandy." I went back to Kansas in 1887 and stayed until 1901, then came to Weatherford and drew for a claim but failed to get one. I then went to Oklahoma City and picked out a place on the map and filed

NELSON, ELLA MAE. INTERVIEW.

8010

on it. This place was in the middle of a cattleman's pasture, two and one-half miles from Grimes, about fifteen miles west of Cheyenne. This is at the head of Starvation Creek, not far from where the Custer battle was fought.

I dug a dugout and while I was making it, a cattleman, Mr. William Bennett, came over and tried to scare me out. I told him that it was the first time that I had had a roof of my own over my head and that I was going to stay.

Grimes was then a postoffice and one store.

In order to prove up on my place, I would come to Elk City and work to make a little money and go back and fix a little on my place. I managed to get my dugout fixed comfortably and my farming land fenced. I planted some corn, cotton, maize, and some garden.

The cattlemen would give me a half calf a year for my grazing land.

I stayed on my claim nine years, then sold it for \$1,000. I was single at that time; I never married until I was almost fifty.

This is the story of a woman coming West by herself for a home and making a success of it, in spite of all of the hard-

NELSON, ELLA MAE. INTERVIEW.

8010

ships and drawbacks. I still have some of my dishes and a few other things that I moved with me when I went on my claim.