

Oral History Interview

with

CLARENCE N. RICE

August 29, 1972

Homesteading, Roosevelt County

By Mrs. John Burroughs

For the Eastern New Mexico University Library
Oral History Project

BURROUGHS: This is Mrs. John Burroughs. I'm visiting in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Rice. Today is August 29, 1972. We're sitting here at the kitchen table in their pleasant home having a good visit talking about old times. Which one of you came to Roosevelt County first?

MRS. RICE: I did, Mrs. Burroughs. I came in October of 1906. I was a little girl of three years old.

BURROUGHS: Where did you come from?

MRS. RICE: I came from Arkansas.

BURROUGHS: Of course you were with your parents. Will you name them?

MRS. RICE: My parents were Mr. and Mrs. George Sidney Hatch.

BURROUGHS: Who were their parents? If you can, name your grandparents on both sides.

MRS. RICE: My mother's parents, her father was Joseph Peterson, who was born in 1860 in Calloway County, Kentucky, he died in 1893 in Yo County, Arkansas. My grandmother's name was Mary Blagg and

I don't have any statistics on her. My grandfather's name was James Aron Hatch, he was born in Carroll County, Tennessee, his wife's name was Margaret Lucinda Suggs and they both died in Arkansas.

BURROUGHS: Were they ever in Roosevelt County, either set of your grandparents?

MRS. RICE: My grandmother Hatch was here on a visit a few times.

BURROUGHS: But then she returned to her home?

MRS. RICE: Yes.

BURROUGHS: Tell me about your mother and dad, when were they born and when were they married?

MRS. RICE: Mama was born in 1877 and Papa was born in 1869 and they were married in 1900 in Arkansas.

BURROUGHS: They both came from Kentucky or Tennessee?

MRS. RICE: My dad came from Tennessee.

BURROUGHS: And your mother came from Kentucky?

MRS. RICE: Yes.

BURROUGHS: How did they get to Arkansas? Were they farmers or were there homesteaders in that part of the country?

MRS. RICE: Not really homesteaders just farmers that came from the west all of the time.

BURROUGHS: The name Hatch is a very familiar one in Roosevelt County. Tell me something about the circumstances about your parents coming with you when you were three years old.

MRS. RICE: We were different from most families who came to Roosevelt County, most families came in search of a free home because of the home-

steading. We didn't come like that, my dad was a sick man and we came for my dad's health. The doctor said, "Go West Young Man." My dad was a young man even though he had a large family. He came out in May of 1906 with Mr. Marvin Littlejohn who was already here and so was Mr. Charlie Harris, who all of the old timers remembered and Heck Harris, Charlie Harris was his father. They were already here and had a grocery store or we called it in those days a mercantile store where they had everything. So we didn't come out here all together like strangers. My dad and as I said Mr. Littlejohn came with him, he had already been here, Mr. Littlejohn.

BURROUGHS: That Littlejohn, now is that Melvin Littlejohn's father.

MRS. RICE: No, uncle, I believe. So my dad came out in May and he returned in October, August pardon me. The family moved in October.

BURROUGHS: How did you come?

MRS. RICE: We came deluxe, on the train. (laugh).

BURROUGHS: By then there was a train here in Roosevelt County?

MRS. RICE: Yes.

BURROUGHS: Did you move all of your household goods too?

MRS. RICE: No, we sold everything, we didn't bring anything. We sold everything back in Arkansas. When we first came we lived in a house with Mr. C.W. Iceland and his wife who was a contractor here. It was in the vicinity of Doc Stafford's business is now, his car business. We lived there from the time we arrived until in the spring, it took quite a while to get our half dugout which was a building four feet deep and a house over the top.

BURROUGHS: Where was that located?

MRS. RICE: It was in the Doss Community about two or three miles southwest of the Tisley Crossing whichever way Roosevelt County is.

BURROUGHS: South. Or southwest.

MRS. RICE: Northwest.

BURROUGHS: Northwest. You did homestead out there?

MRS. RICE: My daddy filed on this land while he was here in the period he was here from May to October. He heard about the land event though he didn't come purposely for homesteading, he heard about the land when he got here and he did file. Maybe it would be interesting to know some things about how you acquired a home in those days.

BURROUGHS: Yes.

MRS. RICE: Each community, we'll say was about ten miles square and no more than that, I believe. And you think, my what a small place, but in this area there would be a family on each quarter section of land, which is 160 acres so you can see when that was settled, we had neighbors. It took five years if they went and filed and they could be away six months of this time each year, but it took five years to acquire your homestead, that way. They had to put a house on it, something to live in, pick out some land. But so many in the area would have to leave for part of the time and go back to Texas or where have you, and pick cotton in order to be able to stay here because there was not much means of support. If you chose to live on the place constantly without leaving, that took three years or if you chose to pay a little sum, I

believe it was \$200 you could. . .

BURROUGHS: You could get a quarter section?

MRS. RICE: Yes. You had to live on it some.

RICE: You could get title to it.

MRS. RICE: Yes, you could get title to it..

BURROUGHS: Not many had the cash to do that, though did they?

RICE: Lots of them didn't.

MRS. RICE: A lot of them just didn't make it because of no money and no support and they give up. Of course that's the reason that a lot of people in Roosevelt County acquired quite a bit of land because you could buy them out for a lot less than the land was worth then. That's true. We had a homestead but my dad would love to come to town and stay awhile, he would come to town and stay and work. He worked now, he was with the store, Mr. Harris's because they were our friends and Papa would work there, then we lived in town quite a bit. However, I started to school at this Doss Community.

BURROUGHS: That's the one that's out by Tinsley Crossing?

MRS. RICE: Yes.

BURROUGHS: It was a little school?

MRS. RICE: A little one room schoolhouse.

BURROUGHS: In that homestead community?

MRS. RICE: In that homestead community.

BURROUGHS: Mrs. Rice, when did you come on the scene now?

RICE: My family, of course I came with them to this country from Texas in 1907.

BURROUGHS: The year after Mrs. Rice?

RICE: Yes, in December though, in 1907.

BURROUGHS: That was a bad time wasn't it?

RICE: We came in three covered wagons and a hack.

BURROUGHS: What is a hack?

RICE: A hack is a two seated, oversize buggy. And it is different to the carriage, it's just a plain buggy with a top on it and curtains.

BURROUGHS: You had a team of horses for that, then?

RICE: A team of horses for that. We were on the road three weeks, we didn't travel on Sunday, that was against my father's religion. He went by the old rules, Sunday was Sabbath day to rest and for the teams to rest. They brought eight of us children.

BURROUGHS: Your immediate family?

RICE: The immediate family. There was one boy who stayed in Texas. Incidentally, he died the next year we was just fixing to come out here. We brought everything in the way of furniture, farming tools and even a coop of chickens.

BURROUGHS: You came much better equipped than most people then, didn't you?

RICE: Yes.

BURROUGHS: What place in Texas?

RICE: We came from Ballinger, Texas.

BURROUGHS: To Roosevelt County?

RICE: To Roosevelt County.

BURROUGHS: How did you choose Roosevelt County? What brought you here specifically?

RICE: My father had been investigating a year before we started, more than that he'd heard about this free land out here. We started here earlier but we had a run away accident with a team of mules, it broke my father's foot and we stayed in Texas another year for his foot to get well before we came on.

BURROUGHS: Are any of those eight children that came with your family, other than yourself, in the county?

RICE: Not in the county. I only have one brother even in the state.

BURROUGHS: So, they all scattered after they got older?

RICE: Yes, and three of them have died since then.

BURROUGHS: I see. Well, when you came were you anywhere close to the Doss Community that Mrs. Rice has mentioned?

RICE: No. We came to Portales all right, but we went then, you see this land around Clovis had already been homesteaded and we went south, incidentally we ran across what was then called locaters. Locater Thompson. There will be people in this town who will remember Locater Thompson, J.W. Thompson. For a fee they located the newcomers here, what was then called nesters.

BURROUGHS: He would take you out and let you look over the land?

RICE: He'd take my father to the land that was available. Now, some of this land that had been filed on had been relinquished back to the government, people wouldn't stay, they'd stay one year and relinquish it back. Or you could buy a relinquishment for almost any amount of money. That meant that they would relinquish their right back and then somebody else could homestead that land just like they did. That's how come my father to get land where he

did, twenty miles south of Portales and three miles east.

BURROUGHS: What community did that eventually turn out to be?

RICE: That was then already Cromer general store and post office.

BURROUGHS: Cromer?

RICE: Cromer.

BURROUGHS: I have never heard of either one of those communities.

RICE: Mrs. Burroughs there will be a lot of those old communities that people now don't know they ever existed. For instance, my first school was the Doyle Schoolhouse, it was a half dugout with a dirt floor, dirt banks only it was above the ground enough to have a couple or three little old windows, that's where I went to my first school.

BURROUGHS: Doyle?

RICE: Doyle school.

BURROUGHS: Who was your teacher out there?

RICE: Lenard Wilks, he was a homesteader, but he was a school teacher. There were other communities as I said, people now won't remember anything about them. One was Minco, which was north of us. It was established after we went there. Minco school, Minco store, Minco post office.

BURROUGHS: Every community had those three essentials?

RICE: There was, you might say a community or school in every township. The year of 1908, south of us four and a half miles, the post office and store was established at Richland. I knew very well the man who established it, Lee Beeman.

BURROUGHS: His name is rather familiar, still.

RICE: Yes, Beeman is still in this country. Lee Beeman was the man that established the post office. I remember very well them coming to a decision between that country and the government there, the name of the post office and they finally arrived at the name Richland, that's where they got the name, Richland.

BURROUGHS: That was very appropriate, wasn't it?

RICE: Yes, it was.

BURROUGHS: I've noticed some of the little communitites do have descriptive names. There's one called Redlake, which I'm sure describes the lake around that. Mrs. Rice, tell me something about your first school. Was it a dugout like Mr. Rice's?

MRS. RICE: No. And neither did Doss have a post office, we had to get our mail in town, we were only about eight miles from Portales. We didn't have a post office.

BURROUGHS: And you were about twenty miles?

RICE: Twenty miles south and three east.

BURROUGHS: So that made a difference in the mail delivery?

MRS. RICE: I began school at Doss and it was just a little white school-house. My first teacher was Miss Ada Crawford. Some of the people who went to school at this place will be remembered today and are in Portales. One is Miss Esther Breech, one more is Senator Ike Morgan and his brother Wiley Morgan.

BURROUGHS: Were they all in your class or just in the same school?

MRS. RICE: They were just in the same school. That was at my beginning. Ike and Wiley might not have started when I did, but they went

at a different time, you know. And Albert Stewart who lives in Portales. Otto Kaptina, you know so many people will remember Otto Kaptina. Wiley Morgan, Senator Ike Morgan's brother married Bertha Kaptina who was Otto's sister. As I said while ago, my dad would move to town and I was in the second grade at the old L.L. Brown school and my teacher was Mrs. Walter Jackson. Some of the people that was in my class in the second grade was Lisa and Risa Anderson, who are cousins to Anderson Carter and was nieces of Lee Carter. Mardell Morrison, which the Morrison's were old timers here, her dad held office in the county.

BURROUGHS: Were they relations to Seth Morrison or Josh Morrison?

MRS. RICE: Yes. I believe she was Seth Morrison's daughter. Then Maureen and Elizabeth Priddy.

BURROUGHS: They went to school out there?

MRS. RICE: No, they went to school here in town, we're in Portales now.

BURROUGHS: I see. And they were in your class?

MRS. RICE: They were in my class. Some of these that were in our class, my sister and I, Mrs. Gilbert Bonham, he lives in Tucumcari, we were always in the same class, our age was close together.

BURROUGHS: Well, how nice.

MRS. RICE: Then I would go back to school at Doss and my dad would move back out to Doss. In the later years is when Ike Morgan and Wiley and them, they weren't in our community but they drove a team and came in a buggy several miles.

BURROUGHS: In order to go to this school?

MRS. RICE: In order to go to this school. And our teacher, whenever we were out there, Mr. Sam Stinnett, who was Marion Stinnett's brother.

BURROUGHS: Brother, oh I thought it was the father.

MRS. RICE: No, brother.

BURROUGHS: Half-brother.

MRS. RICE: And we kids used to have a lot of fun. Mr. Stinnett would play ball during the noon hour, if we could get a hot ballgame going, Mr. Stinnett would forget to ring the bell, he'd be playing just as hard as we were.

BURROUGHS: (laugh). That was physical education.

MRS. RICE: Yes, it was. Then when I was in the eighth grade we moved back to town. Mr. L.L. Brown was my teacher, then. I'll just name a few of the people I can remember, a lot of them have passed on that was in our class. Odell McMinn(sp?). Do you remember Billie' McMinn?

BURROUGHS: Yes.

MRS. RICE: Her brother. Reid Marrell, Bolly Boykin.

BURROUGHS: I've talked to Bolly.

MRS. RICE: And his sister. And Peck Honey, who married Grace White and the White's were old timers. Lee Johnson was the son of Burl Johnson, and Alleyⁱ Warnica, who is Cybillian Horney's cousin and married Ted Forbes. And this Risa and Lisa Anderson I spoke of earlier that was in our class. Risa passed away, Lisa is Mrs. Gus Berson. Maureen and Elizabeth Priddy, Carolyn Bradley who is Mrs. Chambliss. Newt Turner, who used to be sheriff, his sister, and Thelma Pierce which was old Doctor Pierce^{earce}, Marge Thomas's sister.

BURROUGHS: Well, you certainly remember a lot of them and many have been named in this community.

MRS. RICE: Yes, they have.

BURROUGHS: Mr. Rice, you have a twinkling eye and I know you can recall some of your boyhood school escapades. Can you tell us about that?

RICE: Mrs. Burroughs, I'm not supposed to tell the bad ones. (all laugh)

BURROUGHS: Come on now, what do you remember of those days of the school in the dugout?

RICE: Well, there are various incidents I remember, of course. We boys were up to pranks and I remember one incident. We put a lizard in the teacher's desk one day. He never did find out who did it. And just things like that. The people I went to school with, it seems like most of them I've outlived, the biggest part of them.

BURROUGHS: You're fortunate.

RICE: But there is two or three here in town that I went to school with. One is Frank Cares , who is like myself, a World War I veteran and his sister, Mrs. Cullen Hightower, they were two of my school mates. Well, here in town, right now, I don't believe I remember any more of them. But there was Buster Swafford who's parents were old time settlers here, they were neighbors of ours. Buster and I what we didn't find to get into somebody else thought up for us. (all laugh).

BURROUGHS: I guess you were willing?