

EDWARD R. AND OLLIE MAY FRANCE

By daughter, Dora France Butler

In the spring of 1887 our Father Edward France and his brother William, left their home in Carrol County, Missouri, and came to Indian Territory, Oklahoma. They visited the area later to become Northwestern Pottawatomie County and Northeastern Cleveland County. The Shawnee and Pottawatomie Indians, with whom they made friends, told them this area would never be troubled by floods or tornados. They also said the country was good for dug wells. Thus it was no accident that they settled claims in this area on April 22, 1889. Edward's homestead was located in the northwest quarter of section 35, township 10, range 1 west.

Two other France brothers, John and Lanace George, and the John Gilkey family settled claims in the same section as Edward, while William located on an adjoining section.

Shortly after her uncle John Gilkey had settled, Ollie May Payne came to live with the family. Her arrival followed the death of her mother, Mary Gilkey Payne. The Gilkeys utilized some of the France acres for the longhorned cattle they had brought from Texas and Ollie May became acquainted with Edward. They married in Norman on October 17, 1894. Ten children were born to the couple. Anna Marie died in infancy and Alice France Strong died in 1945. The surviving eight children are Ethel, Nellie, Eldon, Gladys, Ted, Dora, Paul and Rachel.

Our Mother's ability to organize and our Father's resourcefulness enabled them to feed, clothe, educate and occasionally doctor their nine children, and the children learned at an early age to share in the work. The laundry was done in two days over a boiling pot in the back yard with the use of a rub board. The water was carried from the hand dug well. Each piece of clothing was starched and ironed with a flat iron heated on the wood stove in the kitchen.

Baking was managed so that on certain days bread was made while other days were set aside for baking cakes and pies. The baking was done by the girls, later on, and Mother devoted the time to sewing and the making of quilts. In the spring and summer there was canning, apples and peaches were dried. In the fall hogs were butchered. Pumpkin, apples, turnips and other foods were stored in the cellar. There were trips to the mill in Denver community to have the corn ground into meal. Sorghum cane was taken to Thornhill's to be made into molasses. It was a special occasion for the

younger children to go with Dad on these trips. They watched the horse go round and round to grind out the juice of the cane and then saw it cooked in large pans. The molasses was a sweet treat for the children and was used by Mother to sweeten her pumpkin pies which were topped with plenty of whipped cream. We ate well and I recall school lunch buckets filled with gingerbread, sausage sandwiches, hard boiled eggs and fried pies made with the dried peaches and apples.

In the fall Mother traveled to Norman where she shopped at the R. C. Berry mercantile store for material. She made everything we had to wear except longhandles, shoes and long stockings. Later Papa would take her to stop 21 (located at the intersection south and west of the present Westinghouse Corporation). There she would catch the interurban to Oklahoma City where she would shop at the Freeman Langston store for two days. Dad would pick her up on the evening of the second day and the wagon would be loaded with boxes of shoes, long underwear, material for dresses, shirts, pants and coats. The girls would be kept busy caring for the younger children, cooking and housecleaning while Mother made our winter clothes.

The 4th of July was a double celebration for us for it was also Mother's birthday. We had picnics and in later years Dad went to Norman for ice, which he wrapped in paper and quilts and used to make ice cream. He also brought strawberry, orange and lemon soda pop. Later still, fire crackers were added to the celebration.

All of the nine children attended school at Blackburn. Our Father helped construct the building and dig the well, as well as serving on the school board. Wood for the big stove was provided, in turn, by the people of the school district. The school board members usually went to Norman to hire teachers and helped to find them a place in the community to room and board.

During winter blizzards or the heavy spring rains, Dad came for us in the wagon. He also took other children home who lived in our direction; we lived the greater distance of 2 1/2 miles from the school. Mother usually had molasses cookies or cake for us when we got home from school on these days.

The last day of school was a day of celebration for students and parents alike. Everyone took baskets of food and picnicked in the nearby woods.

The Baptist Church in our area originally had its beginning in 1900 in Center Point School and Sunday services usually consisted of singing, due to the lack of a preacher. Every fifth Sunday the meeting was an all day affair with dinner on the ground. In 1906 our parents helped to move the Church to the Franklin Community and to construct a new building. No collections were ever taken, the support came voluntarily and was generous, usually in the form of bales of cotton or other fruits of the harvest. The Church is still in use today although the structure was remodeled in 1966.

Dad served as a deacon in the Franklin Baptist Church until moving to Norman in 1926. In the early days his duties were to prepare the lights and start the fire. The first lights were coal oil lamps but later gas lamps

that had to be pumped full of air were added. After the service Dad made the fire in the big round stove safe to leave and extinguished the lights. Dad recalled that upon checking the building before putting the lights out, he often found a sleeping child and on these occasions he would take the youngster home to his parents.

Often when there was a death in the community and a preacher was not available, Dad would be called on to officiate at the service and help with the burial arrangements. Caskets were made of pine, padded with cotton and lined with white muslin or sateen. Wild flowers were used in season and mistletoe was used in the winter.

In the summer a brush arbor was built for the usual two weeks of church revival meetings and the ground was covered with straw for the children to sleep on. The preacher usually came on a horse and both were given room and board by the Church members. At the close of the meeting a baptizing was held in Little River and they always sang "Shall We Gather at the River." People came from miles around to attend these special meetings.

The Christmas tree at the church for the entire community was another occasion no one wanted to miss. The children participated in the program and Santa came with treats for all.

On December 5, 1917, there was a double wedding in the Franklin Baptist Church. Nellie France was married to Charles Fisk and Pearl Wright to Luther Rollins.

Our family traveled to church in the wagon in the fall and winter. In the spring and summer months, however, we walked. Dad believed the team, having worked all week, was also deserving of a day of rest.

We gave up friends and a good life to move to Norman in 1926, we adjusted to the life in town but retained fond memories of life on the farm.

Our Father passed away in 1951 at the age of 86. Mother died in 1960, at the age of 86. Both are buried in the IOOF Cemetery at Norman.