

OAKES, JOEL E. INTERVIEW.

Greene, Hazel B.
Research worker
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Interview with Joel E. Oakes as
given to Hazel B. Greene, field
worker.

Joel E Oakes lives 3 1/2 miles NE Hugo, Oklahoma. He was born January 15, 1859 at the old Oakes place at Goodwater Mission School. Right in hollering distance of the church and school. Father was Thomas W. Oakes born in North Carolina, a white man and a carpenter by trade. Mother, Harriet N. Everidge, part Choctaw Indian, was born in Mississippi.

In an interview with Joel E. (Dock) Oakes, he gave these reminiscences.

My father was sent by the Government, I mean the U. S. Government, to the Choctaw Nation to build the Capitols, or Council houses. He was a carpenter. The first council house he built was at Tuskahoma. It was built entirely of pine logs, and was located about one quarter or one-half mile east of the old Council house that stands there now--the old plastered one. He built others, but I don't know just where. I've forgotten.

When his contracts were completed, he came down in this country near Hugo and married mother, Harriet N. Everidge. Built his home right there at Old Goodwater Mission school. We went to school there, then we moved to near Frogville, and had to walk four miles to school. I finished the eighth

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grade at Goodwater, then father sent me to Paris to school one term. A Mr. Stock was superintendent of schools at Paris.

After awhile the Choctaw Nation took over the mission schools. Goodwater was a Presbyterian Mission school, as was also Goodland; and Skulleyville, 15 miles this side of Ft. Smith, was a Methodist school for girls. We sent three of our kids to Skulleyville--Gora, Virgie, and Lizzie all graduated there.

After the schools were taken out of the hands of Missionaries, my boy, Bert, went to Goodland to school. When he got through there I sent him to Business College in Hugo, Oklahoma. Then he married and died. He left two daughter, Lois Oakes, now Harris, and Noama Oakes.

About two miles east of my place there are some salt springs from which Salt Creek gets its name. In time of the Civil War, my father and old Bob Jones, a wealthy fullblood Indian who lived at Rose Hill, decided that they would make salt there, instead of goint with ox wagons to "Jordan" Saline, Texas for it. It would take them a week or two to make a trip, and all that time they would be afraid that soldiers of the Northern Army would catch them and take it away from them. So they made a kettle or two

and quit, deciding it took too much boiling, and they went back to the ox team and wagon route.

Merchants over here in the Indian Territory used to freight their goods and supplies by ox wagons and teams, from Jefferson, Texas. Sometimes steamboats would come up the river and bring goods and supplies, and we most always shipped cotton back down the river by steamers to New Orleans. We used a lot of it though.

My mother's mother brought her loom and spinning wheel and a part of her dishes, but not many, from Mississippi. They brought everything they were permitted to bring. My daddy, being a carpenter, made a spinning wheel and loom for mother and many were the nights and days, too, that I have kept the fire going in the loom house while mother wove the cloth. She had slaves to do her housework, but she preferred to do the weaving herself.

Two of these negro slave women never left us, said they didn't know where to go, and wanted to stay as long as "ole massa" would let them.

When I was a lad, I spent 3 years on a ranch out in Arizona. When I went out there, I took my four horses but I hired to a ranch owner who would have no horses on his ranch except his own. So I had to sell my horses. He paid

me good wages and furnished horses for me to ride. But I didn't like it out there--it was too cold and windy. It would get cold out there in October and not thaw out till late Spring, so I quit and came home. I bought, at auction in Tucson, a horse and buggy for \$65.00 and started home Sunday morning. Snow was 12 inches deep that November Sunday morning when I left, and the nearer to old Goodwater I got the warmer I got and the better I liked it. I got there about ten O'Clock Saturday night. There was a big meeting there next day at Goodwater.

That day I met the girl I afterwards married. Her folks came from Michigan, their name was Cronk. The old man was a sufferer of erysipelis, and was advised to go to a warmer climate or "peg out." They arrived in Texas near Clarksville in the springtime, and all land was rented. They went to Paris. Dr. White had a hundred acres in the river bottom not rented, so he let them have it. The old man had fine teams. Old timers here advised him to sell his horses, that they would die here, not being acclimated. He thought it was because people abused their horses and he would not dispose of them and sure enough they died.

Dr. White, of course, wanted good crops and wanted him to buy enough teams to farm the hundred acres. They disa-

greed about that, so Mr. Cronk moved over into the Indian country thinking he'd get rich, but he didn't.

In a few months Josephine Cronk and I married and I tried to make three crops on a little place I settled down there. Then in 1881, the third overflow came and ruined the crops and drowned lots of cattle. Father had me to bring out of the river bottoms 600 head of cattle to this high ground and we settled on this place. The first winter, we lived in a camp, cooked out of doors, and slept in the one 16 x 16 foot room I built. We sat by the camp fire till bedtime each night and went in to bed. Then the next winter I built the chimney you see standing there. As my family increased my house was too small, so I built this larger one. We had 8 children, 4 are now living. I hauled water for 5 years, folks said you count not "strike water" on this rocky dry land. One day I noticed crawfish holes in the yard, so I called me a buck negro and we begun digging and struck good sweet water at 20 feet. Later I dug the cistern that is there in the kitchen. Cistern water was supposed to be more healthy and I did not want my wife to have to go out of her kitchen for water.

I've been here 58 years and this place is never left alone. It has been left alone ONCE in the 58 years. Some-

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one always stays at home. Our old home place at Goodwater was a double log house with a hall between the two rooms, side rooms made of boxing plank and porches along back and front. But one could not see the place now. It is all grown up with trees and underbrush. One might see a mound where the chimney stood. Same at old Goodwater. There was a cemetery at Goodwater for the Missionaries, but it is doubtful if one could even find the tombstones in it, they are all fallen and broken down. The Oakes cemetery about a half mile away is kept in good shape and worked.

I served two years as deputy sheriff under a fullblood sheriff of Kiamichi County, named Wesley Sunny. Things were pretty "squally" here sometimes. One woman was married six times and every husband was killed but one, he was smart and ran away. Her son was murdered and had been dead so long when they found him that he had stiffened. He had on some fine hand made square toed boots, and they buried him in those boots. He was Dock Willis. One son of a prominent citizen took up with some negroes and was living with them. His brother went over to the negro house to persuade his brother to leave them. He found the brother lying across the bed. He walked in and slapped him on the back; the brother on the bed had his gun beside him,

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grabbed it and fired, killing his brother instantly.

("Little" Britt Willis killed Jim Willis a halfbrother).

Their father kept fine racing horses and lots of carousing took place around his place. Another son of his was drunk, a friend undertook to take him home. He drew a gun and attempted to kill the friend, but the friend killed him. (Sim M. Folsom was the "friend" who killed Hamp Willis).

Colonel Sim M. Folsom is supposed to have killed 19 men. Once at his gin at the mouth of Kiamichi river, a fellow by the name of Nance who sometimes asked questions when he should have been quiet, asked him how many he had killed. He replied that he had killed 8 that he knew of, and had stood trial at Fort Smith for only one, and came clear of that. But he said, "Young man, don't ever kill a man. Run if you must, but don't ever kill one. You can see them every time you close your eyes to sleep."

Colonel Folsom's daughter said that when he would get drunk he'd have snakes in his boots, and try to kill everybody and everything in sight, and that dozens of times she had run around the house and he after her with a gun. He died peacefully in bed about 1901.

And it was no uncommon thing to find boys and girls

out in the hills far away from the schools who did not know their A.B.C'S., but they were gathered up and sent to the Government schools and taught to speak English. Lots of them could not speak a word of English.

Joel E. Oakes, in spite of his many years, is fairly erect and moves about quickly and alertly, has never used eyeglasses and read the Dallas News or any other newspaper without the aid of glasses, although he admits that his eyes are beginning to fail now.

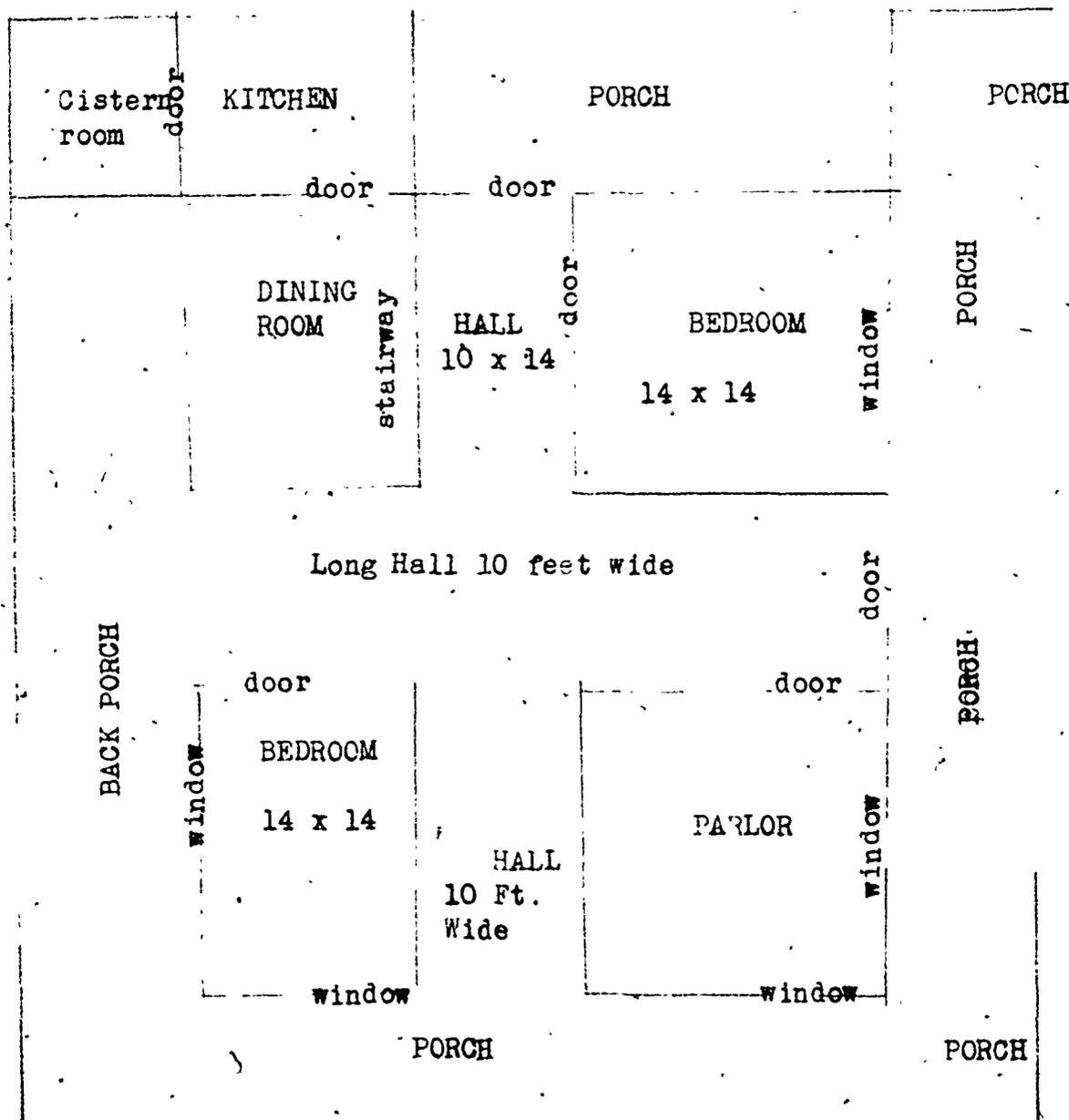
The "parlor" has old fashioned straw matting on the floor, the center table with family pictures on it and the swinging lamp hanging from the ceiling above the table. An organ in one corner, and old fashioned sofa in another corner. Some hats which were stylish 40 years ago were in the closet, also an old cap and ball hand-make rifle.

Out in the yard stood an old split log wash bench. The old grind stone stood nearby, both under an immense oak tree. Years ago the old man decided to go "modern" and bought a car. It stood in the barn nineteen years without being driven, after the first few times. Then a progressive grandson came along and traded it in on a "pickup" to be used around the farm. The first radio was brought into the house since the first of this, 1937.

In speaking of the days when they were settling this country. Mr. Oakes said, "Then was the good old happy days, I wish it were like that now. Everybody was happier."

The house is built in a square, with porches all around. A sketch of the plan is attached.

"Dock" Oakes Home $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles N.E. Hugo



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ALL the usable space in the attic was just the same as the ahll below and that was where they "bed" the hay hands and on the roof of the back porch. Built about 1885.