

PAYNE, SOPHIA HIBBEN.

INTERVIEW

7865

89

PAYNE, SOPHIA HIBBEN (MRS.)

INTERVIEW

7865

Hazel B. Greene,
Journalist,
October 15, 1937.

An Interview with Mrs. Sophia Hibben Payne,
Hugo, Oklahoma.

My father, Thomas D. Hibben, was born in Boone County, Arkansas, and my mother, Mary Oakes-Hibben, was born near Goodwater Church in what was then Kiamichi County, Choctaw Nation. I was born at a place about a mile from Goodwater in 1887.

My grandfather Hibben was a Confederate Soldier and his company was encamped in Boone County, Arkansas, just about a day's drive from his home when he was taken sick with measles then with pneumonia and died. When his young wife heard of his death she took her team and wagon and went and brought his body home for burial. It was a good long day's drive from her home; the weather was cold and she contracted a cold, while on this trip, from which she never recovered. The doctor said she died from a broken heart as much as anything else. She lived just six months after her husband's death.

Their son, Thomas Hibben, was just three years old at the time his parents died and he was shifted from one

PAYNE, SOPHIA HIBBEN, (MRS.) INTERVIEW 7865

-2-

relative to another the balance of his boyhood. Nobody wanted him and nobody cared where he went. He was never sent to school a day in his life. Thomas D. Hibben was just tolerated by his relatives. They didn't care what he did, though he never did anybody a wrong. He was deeply religious and religiously kept the Sabbath Day Holy.

In his wanderings he came to the Indian Territory, Choctaw Nation, and worked as "snipe" on the new railroad that was being built through here. Later he went to work for and lived at my uncle's, Thomas Oakes, who was then County Judge of Kiamichi County, Indian Territory, Choctaw Nation. They lived down near Frogville not very far from the house of my grandfather, Thomas W. Oakes, who was the father of Lem W., Joel E. and George Oakes. My mother was teaching school when she fell in love with and married my father, Thomas D. Hibben. Uncle Thomas, in the capacity of County Judge, performed the ceremony. Father was twenty-three years old then and could not write his name nor read a word. Mother taught him after they were married. Each night she carefully and faithfully taught him his lessons.

PAYNE, SOPHIA HIBBEN, (MRS.) INTERVIEW 7865

-3-

Then when we children came along and were going to school we brought our books home with us to study and Father could work problems for us that we could not work and that Mother could not work.

Father was just naturally above the average man in intelligence. I can remember when he was Clerk of the Supreme Court of the Choctaw Nation and stayed at Tuskahoma a lot of the time. After Statehood he became one of the first county commissioners of Choctaw County. My uncle, Thomas Oakes, and Lee W. Ratliffe were the other two commissioners. R. M. Connell was Sheriff, W. J. Milam was County Clerk and John Willis was County Attorney.

We lived right close to the old Goodwater church site for a number of years. Then we built a home about mile away. Of course, I do not remember when it was a mission school. There are plenty of histories to tell when it was founded and discontinued as a mission school. But there was a frame building on the old site, and we went to school there until I was fifteen. I started to school at five. Then I went to Tuskahoma a year and started back another year but they were

PAYNE, SOPHIA HIBBEN, (MRS.) INTERVIEW 7865

-4-

so crowded up there that my sister and I and a lot of others had to go home in order to make room for less fortunate children, for there were some who had no school at all within a reasonable distance of their homes.

I believe the Goodwater Mission School and church was established before 1848 because two tombstones there were erected over graves that were made in 1848. They were all mossgrown but I scratched the moss off and copied the inscriptions in a little notebook and have carried it in my purse for years. One reads, "L. C. Downer, Missionary. Died October 1st, 1848." The other was "C. M. Belden. November 5, 1848. Missionary." There were a lot of old sandstone tombstones from which the inscriptions were worn off by the weather and were very likely older than the two which were inscribed, because they looked older, but the inscriptions on them were indecipherable.

There were many "lost graves" in that old cemetery. As far back as I can remember, graves were occasionally dug into when new ones were being dug. There would be no sign of one until the spades would turn out some bones or jewelry or buttons and a few coffin nails, the coffins

PAYNE, SOPHIA HIBBEN , (MRS.) INTERVIEW

7865

-5-

having rotted away.

Grandmother Oakes was Harriet Everidge, daughter of Thomas William Everidge and his wife, Sophia. She and my grandfather, Thomas Oakes, built their home right close to the Goodwater Church in Choctaw county about eighteen miles southeast of Hugo and when my parents married they lived there with Grandfather Oakes for a number of years, then they built a home about a mile from the church and that was where I was born.

Even though they were near the Goodwater cemetery they never buried any of their folks there. They buried them right there a few steps from the house, their children, grandchildren and the slaves who died. Grandmother said that a lot of Confederate soldiers were also buried in their family cemetery and that many of the soldiers were buried in the Goodwater cemetery and also many full blood Choctaw Indians. Some of those inscriptions showed that graves were made there forty years before I was born in 1887, and it is reasonable to suppose that in view of the fact that tombstones were not very common in those days, over the first graves in this cemetery there might not have

PAYNE, SOPHIA HIBBEN, (MRS.)

INTERVIEW

7865

-6-

been any tombstones. Hence, the large number of "lost" graves that would be dug into and not a sign of a coffin left, only nails. The coffins would be entirely rotted away. The Confederate soldiers were stationed in camp about the mouth of the Kianichi River between Grandfather's place and Fort Towson, but on the west side of the river I believe, hence, the burial of those who died in camp at the Oakes Cemetery and at Goodwater and every grave in their cemetery was marked by a stone but there were no inscriptions on these stones.

One corner of this cemetery was set aside for the slaves to be buried in. The bodies of the soldiers were buried at another place and the bodies of those belonging to the Oakes family at another in the Oakes Cemetery. My mother was the last one to be buried there in 1931. He laid her beside my father who died in 1915.

My grandmother, Harriet Oakes, was about eight years old when she came over the "Trail of Tears", in about 1833, and they settled at a place about two miles north of Goodwater church and school. She attended church and school

PAYNE, SOPHIA HIBBEN, (MRS.) INTERVIEW

7865

-7-

there all her long life and she lived to be nearly ninety. I have an old pewter wine pot that they used in taking communion. There were two of those quart size pewter pots.

Grandfather Oakes was a carpenter, cabinet and furniture maker and his house was full of those old treasures but they are all gone or scattered. One of the old hickory, split bottomed rocking chairs that Grandfather made is being exhibited at the Pan-American Exposition in Dallas now. The reason Grandfather did not go into service in the Civil War was because he was needed at home to make looms, spinning wheels and furniture for his people. The Government had sent him out here to do work like that and to build homes for the Indians and to build their Council Houses when they were first coming out here in the 1830's. Grandfather came along with some of the first immigrants.

In our home were home-made corded bedsteads, trundle beds, bureaus, candle stands, tables, chairs, wardrobes and desks. Grandfather was also a shoemaker. He tanned hides and made shoes for his own family and for half the people for miles around.

People freighted their cotton by ox-wagons to Shreveport

PAYNE, SOPHIA HIBBEN (MRS.)

INTERVIEW

7865

-8-

and returned with such supplies as they could not produce at home such as salt, sugar, coffee, yarn and lumber. However, they made some salt, not very much. They decided it was not worth the effort it took. It took two months to make the trip to Shreveport and to return loaded with supplies. Grandfather brought back the first jars for the canning of fruit that most of the settlers had ever seen. The jar I have is a half-gallon size and is of crockery ware. A lid fits into a groove all around the top and this groove is filled with hot sealing wax. But very little food was canned then. Much fruit was preserved when we could get the sugar and a big lot of it was dried. Preserves were put up in crocks and some of them would hold five gallons. But where there were large families it took lots of "sweetening". I can remember the water buckets, tubs and churns of cedar with brass hoops. I know that Grandmother Oakes' old cedar churn held ten gallons. A woman could hardly handle a churn with milk in it. Our smoke house was a sight. I say ours, because we lived with my grandparents for many years after Grandfather went blind.

That smoke house was built of logs and was about 20 X 22

PAYNE, SOPHIA HIBBEN (MRS.) INTERVIEW 7865

-9-

feet and high enough for a double row of joists running each way with wooden pegs eighteen inches apart on them to hang meat upon. When their family was growing up and they had slaves, Granny said, "They never killed less than twenty hogs each winter". They rendered lard in immense wash pots and put it up in two hogsheds and used the cracklings to make soap which they made by the barrel. This soap was made of lye dripped from ashes that were saved and put up in an ash-hopper out behind the smoke house.

Some of the soap would be firm enough to cut out in blocks that were carefully dried and put away in a container and saved for the washing of the nicer clothes. The soap that was in the bottom of the pot was soft soap, jelly-like. I imagine it was soft because of the lean meat. There were usually three barrels of soap made in the Springtime, "when the moon was right" to do the washing for the whole family and for the slaves.

Along each side and along the back of the smoke house were box-shaped troughs, hewn out of big trees, which were

PAYNE, SOPHIA HIBBEN (MRS.)

INTERVIEW

7865

-10-

used to salt the meat down in until it was ready to be hung and smoked with hickory chips to give it the right flavor. An immense meat block stood just outside of the door. It was a section of a giant oak tree. A ladder stood against the clapboard roof, which we climbed, wearily several times daily in Summer to spread and turn over fruit that was put there to dry for Winter consumption. Jars were too scarce to can much fruit. A few were brought from Shreveport along with nails, wire, little brass lamps, lumber, yarn, etc.

My grandparents were staunch Presbyterians. My father was a Methodist so Mother became one too. We went to Sunday School every Sunday if we were not sick abed, then home to dinner which was always cooked the day before. There was never any cooking or churning on Sunday. Granny cooked on the fireplace and my mother did too for years and in the Winter time things were sometimes placed close around the fire in that big old fireplace where they kept warm until ready to be eaten. After dinner Father and Mother took turns reading in the Bible all afternoon; then came our supper of bread and milk and more Bible reading and prayers.

PAYNE, SOPHIA HIBBEN (MRS.) INTERVIEW

7865

-11-

until bedtime and we kids didn't dare go to bed before prayers were said.

We used to have the grandest camp-meetings, Union meetings, Methodists, Presbyterians, and sometimes Baptists would come and camp for two and three weeks. We lived so close to the camp-meeting ground that we stayed at home and attended services regularly and we had as good a time as those who were camping. Relatives met there yearly who seldom ever saw each other any other time. Distance and slow and poor transportation prevented.

New dresses and new hats were always in evidence at those camp meetings. It didn't matter so much about new clothes the balance of the year just so they had new ones for the camp meetings. Our mothers began in the winter tucking our voluminous underskirts, chemises and drawers. They all had yards and yards of lace, tucks and embroidery, and we had to have lots of underclothing for the summer. We wore two, three and four petticoats at the time, depending upon the thinness of our dresses. Those girls who lived ten or fifteen miles away brought trunks full of clothes, with

PAYNE, SOPHIA HIBBEN (MRS.) INTERVIEW 7865

-12-

negroes to the camp meeting to do the cooking and take care of their clothes, but a girl would wear a new summer dress all Summer without washing it. We prided ourselves on keeping our dresses clean and nice. My grandmother had clothes packed in her trunk that she had had for thirty years, that "had never been wet in water". Some of them she had had even thirty-five and forty years and when we did get new dresses, pieces of them were sent to relatives and friends in letters for them to admire and put in their quilts and pincushions. Granny Oakes said that when she was young they made pretty buttons by covering acorns with material like the garment they wanted to put them on or covered with contrasting colors for trimmings.

I remember one Spring when a shipment of hats for girls and women came to Joel Spring's store from some commission house. They were very pretty too, even if sometimes a half dozen were alike, except as to color. They were all just \$1.50 apiece. The girls and women knew for weeks ahead that these hats were expected and

PAYNE, SOPHIA HIBBEN (MRS.) INTERVIEW 7865

-13-

saved their money for them. Some of them chopped cotton for their \$1.50 and some dug snakeroot for theirs and some had picked cotton the Fall before and some had sold hickory nuts in Paris, Texas, the Fall before and had saved their money in anticipation of the Spring hats being brought in.

A lot of the mothers made the boys' shirts, too. I recall one mother who made her boys' shirts with straight bands for collars and buttoned all the way down the back until the boys got the courage to protest when they were nearly grown; even then she gave up pretty hard. She was one of the kind of women who never even changed the style of dressing their hair.