

McCOY, WESLEY

INTERVIEW

#12086

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BIOGRAPHY FORM
 WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
 Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

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Field Worker's name Comer Gower.This report made on (date) November 9 19371. Name Wesley McCoy (colored)2. Post Office Address Adamson, Oklahoma.3. Residence address (or location) Same.4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month July Day 4th Year 18565. Place of birth Kiamichi County, Choctaw Nation.6. Name of Father Jerry Williams Place of birth MississippiOther information about father Died during Civil War.7. Name of Mother Eva Caffery Place of birth MississippiOther information about mother Freed in 1857.

Notes or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and story of the person interviewed. Refer to Manual for suggested subjects and questions. Continue on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 7.

Gomer Gower
Investigator
11-9-37

Wesley McCoy, the subject of this sketch, was born on July 4th, 1856, on a plantation owned by Sam Caffery in what was then Kiamichi County, Pushmataha District, in the Choctaw Nation.

His father was Jerry Williams, a slave owned by Billy McCoy who lived on an adjoining plantation to that of Sam Caffery, hence his present surname of McCoy.

His mother, Eva Caffery, was freed from bondage by Sam Caffery in 1857, as were her children, and Wesley was one year old at that time. She did not leave the plantation upon being freed but remained in the employ of Sam Caffery until March 14th, 1867. In the meantime her husband, Jerry Williams McCoy, had died. Eva Caffery then took her three children, Wesley, Henry and Betsy, to a point about two miles west of Fort Smith and lived on a plantation owned by Jim Coleman, an intermarried white man, for one year and then moved to a point about two miles east of Scullyville, where she resided for two years and then moved to a point near Brazil Station in what was then Scullyville County.

Wesley's maternal grandfather, Jerry Carney, came from Mississippi with his owner, Alfred Carney, a full-

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blood Choctaw, at the time of the removal. Jerry Carney^{was}/held in high esteem by the Indians because of his knowledge of the curative properties of herbs and because of his ability to properly interpret the English and Choctaw languages. He died on May 7th, 1874. It is said of him that he never made any charge for his services when called upon to treat a sick person; he always left the amount to be paid to him to the judgement and generosity of the person treated. In the main, he was liberally paid. People came from the extreme parts of the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations for treatment.

Wesley McCoy followed in the footsteps of his grandfather, Jerry Carney, who had before his death conveyed to his grandson knowledge of the many herbs and roots which he had used in the treatment of the various maladies with which the Indian Territory was infested at that time. The result was that Wesley became no less noted than his grandfather as a successful herb doctor and received calls for his services, as his grandfather had done, from all parts of the Indian Territory. Responses to these calls involved traveling on horseback to all parts of the Territory and brought him in contact with most of the leading characters in the affairs of the

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Choctaw Nation. He personally knew all the Choctaw Chiefs; Tandy Walker, in whose favor Alfred Wade had resigned, Allen Wright, William Bryant, Coleman Cole, Isaac Garvin, Jackson McCurtain, Thompson McKinney, Ben Smallwood, Wilson Jones, Jeff Gardner, Edmond McCurtain, and Gilbert Dukes. He also personally knew such men as J. J. McAlester, Doctor D. M. Hailey, Thomas D. Ainsworth and many others who were prominent in the Territorial period. Wesley recalls being told by Colonel J. J. McAlester of his venturesome escape from the wrath of Coleman Cole, who was then Governor. Colonel McAlester escaped on a railroad handcar and fled across the Canadian River into the Creek Nation into which the jurisdiction of the Governor did not extend.

Upon the arrival of the Governor and his party at the trading store of Colonel McAlester, in what is now the city of McAlester, late one evening, Colonel McAlester was officially notified by the Governor that he and three other men were to be shot on the following morning for the alleged illicit mining of coal within the Choctaw Nation. Colonel McAlester was at the time was also engaged in feeding the workmen on the new Missouri

Kansas and Texas Railway, ordered the cooks to provide the Governor and his party with a bounteous supper of the best food which the market afforded and to spare no expense in entertaining the unwelcome guests. While the Governor and his aides were busily engaged in the enjoyment of the good things set before them, the Colonel, with the aid of two negro railroad workmen, placed a handcar upon the rails and with every muscle strained to the utmost, headed North for the North side of the Canadian River. In the mad race for the North side of the Canadian River, the Colonel would repeatedly shout to the negroes who were with him: "You black -----pump harder!", while he himself, with pools of sweat forming at his feet and with not a dry thread in all his clothing, assisted them with all his might. Finally, in the blackness of the night, a change in the sound of the whine of the handcar made them aware that they had reached the bridge which, after being crossed, would, for the moment, protect them from the Governor.

Later Governor Cole gave Colonel McAlester a legal right to develop coal mines in the Choctaw Nation in accordance with the tribal laws of the nation.

Wesley Carney also had a very intimate acquaintance with Green McCurtain who, knowing of his extensive travels

among the tribes men and of their confidence in him and his influence with them- often invited him to his home for consultations concerning political affairs in which the Chief was interested. On these occasions, sometimes extending into a period of a week to ten days, it was the custom of the Chief to engage him in a wrestling match before breakfast each morning; this being one of the ways in which the Governor took exercise. Both were large men with an admirable physique.

Some time after the death of Jackson McCurtain, his wife, Jane McCurtain, who was noted as the owner and lover of good horses, and who knew of the skill of Wesley McCoy in the treatment of animals as well as of ailing people, induced him to enter her employ for the sole purpose of taking care of the horses and cattle, which Jane McCurtain loved. Wesley says that she was an excellent and fearless horsewoman and even after she was quite old that she enjoyed nothing more than mounting a spirited animal and putting him through his paces.

Wesley Carney remained in the employ of Mrs. McCurtain for a period of six months and then went back to his previous roving life, riding all over the Nation,

visiting and treating old friends and acquaintances. His activities were not confined to the practice of his profession as a herb doctor. Being of an observant turn of mind, he, early in life, acquired the art of distinguishing the ownership of horses and cattle. In this he was regarded as uncanny as his observant eye and alert mind enabled him to recall just where he had seen an animal of a given description. He picked up many fees for aiding in the return of strayed or stolen animals to their rightful owners. Those who resided in the Indian Territory in the 1880-1890 period, as this writer did, will recall the recurrent raids which offending and unknown parties made into the mining villages, Krabs, Savanna, Lehigh and Coalgate, for the purpose of untying ponies owned by the miners and their sons from the stake-ropes with which the ponies were tethered out on the prairies surrounding the villages. Often times the village would be left without a single horse preventing a hunt for the strayed animals.

The miners could not afford to lose work at the mine by spending time in hunting for a fifteen dollar pony. This was evidently well known to the robbers as was also the fact that the disappearance

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of the ponies would soon cause a reward of five dollars for their return to be posted. The posting of a reward invariably assured the return of an animal which had been stolen. Untying ponies, thus allowing them to stray away, was horsetheft in the third degree and the return of the animal could only be had upon the payment of a reward, usually a third of its value.

In the payment of these rewards, in many instances McCoy became a beneficiary and served as contact between the interested parties.

He now lives at Adamson and is active in both mind and body and carries his eighty-one years of age lightly.