

PRATT, LAURA

INTERVIEW

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Charline Culbertson,
Investigator,
March 14, 1938.

An Interview With Laura Pratt,
North McAlester, Oklahoma.

I was born in Middleton, Tennessee, in the year 1877. My parents were William and Mary Jane Huff. Father is buried at Fort Smith, Arkansas, while Mother is buried near Red River at a little town called Willis. I came to the Indian Territory in 1882 when I was five years of age. We came direct from Tennessee making the trip in six weeks. One night we stopped to camp at what was called Little River. It was here that our teams were stolen and we had to stay at a neighbor's home until we could get a train on to our destination. We located just across Red River at a little Indian village called Willis, which was in the Chickasaw Nation. We took a farm of about fifty acres planting it in corn and cotton. We hauled our cotton to Demison, Texas, where it was ginned.

Our house was made of hewed logs as well as the other houses in that settlement. We were the only white family living there. There were three stores in Willis. The

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only store I remember was operated by a Chickasaw Indian named Willis after whom the town was named. I attended school there and in good weather the teacher taught under a brush arbor where we also held church services. The full blood Chickasaw men had easy lives as they spent most of their time hunting and fishing. The women did the farming and ^{would} help cut logs for their houses. Their foods consisted of Tom Faller, Pashofa and shuck bread. The Chickasaws had mortars where they would husk their corn. These mortars were made from tree stumps in which they would burn out holes. The Chickasaws had very little furniture and what they did have was home-made. Some made their beds on the dirt floor while others had beds made from hickory poles. Some did their cooking on open fires.

They made dyes from barks and they also made medicine from different kinds of herbs. They would beat their clothes clean with paddles and would chew some kind of a weed which they then would spit on the clothes. This they said made the clothes clean. Our water was from a spring. I have seen an Indian woman carry as many as

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three buckets of water at one time. One bucket was balanced on her head and she would carry a bucket in each hand. The Indian women could ride as fast on their ponies as the men. The women would have their babies tied on their backs in shawls. They wore lots of beads, rings and bracelets. Our camp meetings were held at Brownfield.

There were many robberies and murders going on in the Chickasaw Nation but no one ever seemed to know who was doing these things. It seemed the proper thing to do was not to talk much about them. It was quite a common thing to go through the woods and see an Indian man hanging from a tree.

The Chickasaw Indians had their big fish fries which I have attended on the banks of the Washita River. The Indians had a way of catching the fish by hand and this would be done by putting some kind of weed in the water which would make the fish come to the top of the water and in this way the fish were easily caught. The fish were then fried in big pots and then eaten with corn bread.