

~~GAMBLE, MARY MELL.~~

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

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Field Worker's name Grace KelleyThis report made on (date) March 18 19381. Name Mary Mell Gamble

2. Post Office Address \_\_\_\_\_

3. Residence address (or location) Henryetta4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month \_\_\_\_\_ Day \_\_\_\_\_ Year 18585. Place of birth Arkansas6. Name of Father Mack Hollis Place of birth Tennessee

Other information about father \_\_\_\_\_

7. Name of Mother Nora Hollis (1st cousin) Place of birth Arkansas

Other information about mother \_\_\_\_\_

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 11.

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Grace Kelley  
Investigator  
March 18, 1938

Interview with Mary Mell Gamble,  
Henryetta, Oklahoma.

My father had come to the Chectaw Nation quite a while before my husband and I decided to come. My husband was a farmer but he died the next year after we came here so I lived with my father. We lived between Indianola and Canadian. Father took our cotton eight miles to Canadian to sell it and to do the trading. There were two or three stores at Canadian. Father traded with Mr. Tulley.

Mr. Bynum owned our farm which was a half mile from the South Canadian River. He was a white man whose first wife had been an Indian and he held land through her. There was a ferry about two miles from our farm but people forded when the river was down. The ferry was only used when the river was up and some Indians ran it.

Indian Stories.

When I first came from Tennessee I was so afraid of the Indians that I was miserable all the time. They would have big fish fries down on Mill Creek and would camp there for three or four days. My husband enjoyed going down there but I stayed at

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home. The Indians would whoop and holler until a person couldn't sleep. I thought sure that they would come in and kill all of us, but really they were just having a fine time.

#### Getting Acquainted.

I got so I wasn't afraid of the Indians for some of the young ones could talk English. There were two sisters, Indians, and one of them was well educated and she visited my girls. The other would sit and laugh with us the same as if she understood us, seemed to enjoy our company, and would stay all day or until the other girl wanted to go home.

There was an Indian church not far from our place which my girls attended regularly but the only time I ever went was once when they had a big baptizing. One of the Indian men would come to my house for milk and bread to take to the church. He couldn't talk English and I couldn't understand the Choctaw language but he would point at the churn and I would pour some milk into the big can he had.

Lots of times I've had Indians ride up, get down off of their ponies and ask for milk. I milked several cows so I never missed any milk that I gave away. I had a good well too and the Indians would stop for a good cool drink in the summer time.

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Father had a yard dog that never left the yard and this dog had to be driven back by one of us before any of the Indians could come in, I knew the Indians would have had to kill the dog to harm us.

Coonitcha Botched always wore a knitted toboggan or cap, to cover the places where his ears had been. The Indian law had punished him by cutting his ears off for having seven wives at the same time.

The Indians would ride by on ponies with no bridles nor saddles. The men had on no clothing that I could see. My husband said that they had on breech clouts but I couldn't see them. They looked naked to me.

My husband was a quarter Choctaw and another Choctaw named Boone wanted him to prove his rights but he said the Indians had such a bad name that he didn't want his children to be called Indians. I've later regretted my attitude toward the Indians. Some of them were bad but the educated ones made good neighbors.

#### Choctaw Law

When an Indian stole from a white person or committed any other crime against the whites he was taken to Fort Smith

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but when the Indians committed crimes against each other they had their own courts.

One Indian was sentenced to be shot, then they turned him loose after telling him when to be back. We knew he would never return so my brother went over there to see. At the appointed time this Indian returned by himself and sat down on a red blanket which they had placed on the ground and was shot.

#### Killing of Mrs. Lard

One of our white neighbors was a widower. His oldest daughter, Mary Martin, kept house for him for several years. She was pretty and smart as could be, a good housekeeper and cook. My brother courted her and would have married her if she had said "yes" instead of "no".

Her father married again and that made Mary mad. She married the man whom she knew her father didn't like. His name was George Lard. He took her away, I believe to the Seminole country for it was a long way northwest of us and quite a ways west of McDermott, or Okemah, Mary and her husband lived on an <sup>Indian's</sup> place. After Mary Martin had two or three little children her husband left her alone while he made a long trip.

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The owner of the land, I believe an Osage, and a strange Indian killed her and the hogs mutilated her body before anyone came onto it.

That almost killed Mr. Martin and the white friends and neighbors caught the Indians, had a parade and burned these Indians alive. Some of my kinfolk were in that parade for we had loved Mary. Burning these Indians was against the law so some members of the mob were sent to the pen. Everyone tried to prove that he was not in that mob and many men led worried lives for a long time. The brother of Gathis Mathis was one of the unlucky men who had to "go up" for it but none of them would tell who the others were. If they had told there would have been plenty of company for them in prison.

After the two Indians were captured the owner of the land where Mary lived, confessed to killing her and tried to get the stranger to confess too. This man, <sup>who confessed</sup> said that he was going to tell the truth no matter what they did to him, for if he told the truth he would go to Heaven.

#### Snake Uprising in 1901

Father took an eight year lease from an Indian named Spokogee. I believe Dustin was first named for him as it was

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on his ground. There was no settlement there when Father first went there. I lived on that lease in 1901 when the Snakes had their uprising. I was so afraid I could hardly sleep because we lived about a mile on the south side of the river and the Hickory Ground, their meeting place, was not over three miles from the river on the north side. I wanted to sell out and go back to Tennessee but in those days the women were not bosses; they did what the men told them to do, but lots of the people left until after this Indian scare was over. The Indians would ride past the <sup>white</sup> folks' houses shooting and yelling.

Then in 1901 the soldiers rode past our place; my man hurried down to the river so he could see what happened. He saw Indians peeping from behind trees and logs, hiding from the soldiers. All the Indians who could be found were captured by the soldiers but lots of them got away. They captured one of our neighbors.

#### News Didn't Travel Fast.

The wives of farmers knew less of what was going on than anyone. There were no telephones, and we didn't get any newspapers and we didn't live on a road so that no travelers stopped with us. My husband sold the produce and bought the groceries.

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If I wanted any dry goods he might get it for me but about once or twice a year I would go to town and pick out what I needed, but never oftener. Everyone was a stranger to me even the people my husband knew well. I did know the Riddles for we picked cotton for them and I knew the doctor but if I needed a doctor enough to send for him, there was someone about to die, so there was no time to visit. All we farmers' wives knew was how to work, keep clean homes, cook, raise children, which included doctoring them when they were sick. The worst sickness we had to put up with was chills and fevers. There seemed to be more malaria along the North Canadian River than in other parts of the Indian Territory.

It took two days to haul the cotton to Wetumka from around Spokogee. That is it took a day to go, then we stayed all night, and it took a day to return home. They got better prices for the cotton at Wetumka than anywhere else.

Dr. Ira Robertson.

Dr. Ira Robertson was at Spokogee; he is at Henryetta now. He was a good doctor but a young single man.

One time I got poisoned on some Chickasaw Chill tonic. We had always taken that when we had chills so when my husband

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went to town he bought a new bottle. I read the instructions after he went to work, which said to double the dose just before time for the chill to come on. Chills are as regular as a clock so you know when to expect the next one. I took the medicine and told my daughter that I thought I'd take a nap, then I started to be sick. My daughter sent for Dr. Robinson but he had gone to church with his girl. His girl was an Indian and their church started on Friday but Dr. Robinson <sup>came and</sup> worked on me all night and into the next day. Daughter scalded some red hot peppers, split them and tied them around my wrists and ankles and rubbed me with linament to keep me awake and to keep my pulse beating. They later told me that I had had spasms, was wild and would fight them, I don't know anything about what I did after I started to be sick. The two doctors at Canadian were Dr. Crowder and Dr. Johnson.

#### Wives of Railroad Men in 1902.

I lived close to Dustin when the railroad came through there. Dustin was very small then. The railroaders had a camp close to our farm but I was never there. Their wives came to my house quite often though to buy vegetables, chickens, eggs and milk from me. I found them quite ladylike, friendly but not

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as tough as other people say the railroaders were. They were just ordinary people trying to make a living.

#### Trouble at Dustin.

Everyone had cattle which all ran loose together. One person's cattle would have lots more calves than his neighbors' and his herd would grow by leaps and bounds. One of his neighbors would accuse him of branding yearlings not his own -- and the trouble would be started. That happened quite often in this new country but I was right in the neighborhood where it happened at Dustin.

Mr. Riddle, Mr. Brooks and his son Clifford were killed. John Brooks was shot but didn't die. Jim McFarland killed Mr. Brooks but I don't know about the others as there were several in that shooting scrape.

Jim McFarland was a mean man and everyone was afraid of him. My menfolk were pretty sure he had gotten some of our stock, but I don't think they had ever openly accused him of it. That wasn't his only meanness though. He hired a white boy from Kentucky to work for him a long while. The boy went to him and asked for his pay. They got into an argument and Jim killed the boy. The boy's body was put into a casket without even a coat on

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and he had a trunk of clothes at Jim's house. He was carried to the graveyard at sundown to be buried. My brother and Jim were at outs or he would have tried to put better clothes on the boy. Brother said that he had buried lots of people but that that burial hurt him most as he and the boy had been good friends. The boy's father came and put a tombstone at the grave. The boy had had a good pearl handled gun. The father first asked for the boy's trunk but when he was refused he told them he would be satisfied if they gave him the gun to keep as a keepsake of his son. He had to go home without anything.

Jim McFarland had married a good Indian woman and he was awfully mean to her. Her brother's horse was found grazing along the bank of a pond. Her brother had been shot and his body thrown into the pond. Nobody knew who did it but it was thought that Jim killed him because Jim had been afraid of him. Mrs. McFarland's brether didn't like the way his sister was treated by her husband.

One day Jim and his wife went to Weleetka, in a hack. Her half-brother and an Indian named Franklin rode their horses. Jim and his wife stayed until their shopping was done and started home. The two boys told him and his wife to go on and that they would catch up with them before they got home.

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Sarah, Jim's wife, said they heard a shot, Jim jumped out of the hack, looked at her wild-like and died. He had been shot in the center of his back. His wife, Sarah, looked and watched but never saw a person until her half-brother and the other Indian rode up. They put Jim's body into the hack and took it on home.

Everyone knew it was Jim's meanness that caused his death but some thought Sarah's brother had killed him, but that he was justified so they didn't try too hard to find the killer. Nobody except the killer really knew who did do it.

United States Marshals.

Joe Nail lived close to the South Canadian River and had a grown brother named Dick. He was part white and part Indian. We knew him well when we lived in the Choctaw Nation for he was a neighbor of ours. Joe Nail was one United States Marshal who was an honest and brave man. He was shot and killed at Fort Smith. There was a United States Marshal at Eufaula whom my husband called Grant. He was a very brave man and one who was well liked by the law-abiding citizens. He was also part Indian.