

JONES, RICHARD C.

INTERVIEW

12504

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

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INTERVIEW

12504

Field Worker's name James Russell Gray

This report made on (date) December 23, 1937

1. Name Richard C. Jones

2. Post Office Address Hartshorne, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 1 mile North of town

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month September Day 3 Year 1865

5. Place of birth Denton County, Texas

6. Name of Father L. A. Jones Place of birth Texas

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Mary Brown Place of birth Texas

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.

James Russell Gray
Hartshorne, Okla.
W.P.A. Project S-149

Richard C. Jones
A Biographic Sketch
From a personal interview with the subject.
(Hartshorne, Oklahoma, General Delivery)

I have ridden through Oklahoma, then Indian Territory, when a man could travel all day and not see a house or a human being. I have read that Oklahoma is now one of the richest states in the Union in oil, coal and other minerals, . but it was just a wilderness then.

I am seventy-two now, and I came to the Territory first when I was thirteen, so you can see that I am really an old-timer. I didn't come to make my home, though; I just trailed along with my father to help him drive some cattle. We took the cattle down on the Poteau River west of Cameron; some rancher bought them.

Most of my boyhood was spent in Arkansas near Hackett City and Greenwood, but I was born in Texas. I was born in Denton County on September 3, 1865. I can't remember a thing about Texas though, as we left there when I was two years old.

My father's name was L. A. Jones, and he was born in Texas in 1821. Mother was Mary Jones, nee Brown, and she was also a Texan; born in 1829. Father died when I was thirteen and Mother when I was twenty-one, and they are both buried in Arkansas.

When we first moved to Arkansas in June of 1867 we settled at Greenwood, but about two years later we moved again, this time to Witcherville, and lived there until Mother's death. Witcherville was about ten miles southeast of Hackett City and about nine or ten southwest of Greenwood.

I've already told you about going to the Territory when I was thirteen. Then I went there again when I was sixteen, and got a job on a cow ranch near Cowlington. My boss' name was Tom Overstreet; he sold his cattle mostly at Fort Smith, but lots of times he would sell right at the ranch to beef contractors who drove the cattle away to other places outside the Territory.

I worked for Mr. Overstreet for maybe three or four years, off and on, but never for over a year at a time. I'd work for him a while and then go back to Arkansas.

I liked to wander around when I was young; I did most of my wandering in the Territory, and it was an interesting place to be, even if rather unsettled--

it was the last frontier in the United States, and you know that would draw a romantic, adventurous boy.

I remember being in old McAlester when I was seventeen--that would be 1882--and there was nothing there but a depot, a residence, a general store (run, I believe, by J. J. McAlester), and a shack with a few canned goods in it that pretended to be a grocery store. There was an old Choctaw named Jones who lived in the Gaines Creek bottoms about ten miles from McAlester, and I didn't see another house on my trip between the two places.

When I was nineteen I made a trip through the Indian Territory with a young fellow about my own age. We started from Fort Smith, and went through Skullyville. We hit Gaines Creek and headed for McAlester. We passed close to where Hartshorne is now, but there wasn't any such place then.

From McAlester we went west and south to a place called Stonewall. It was fifteen miles or so south and west of where Ada is now; it was supposed to be forty miles from McAlester, but it was the longest forty miles I ever rode. There may have been houses off the road, but we didn't see a one between McAlester and Stonewall. We went from there to Pauls Valley, and we didn't see any houses on that trip, either. That was the Chickasaw Nation; plenty of Indians lived in

that country but we just didn't happen to see any of them. We didn't see a house or a human until we hit Pauls Valley.

From Pauls Valley we went north to Fort Reno. Between the two places there was one cow ranch; it was Love's Ranch, on the Canadian River. There was a man from Texas grazing some cattle about fifteen miles northwest of the Love place, but his outfit was more a camp than a ranch. Up the river west of him was the Long O Ranch; it wasn't on the road to Fort Reno, though; it was off to the west.

Between Pauls Valley and the Love Ranch, about ten miles southeast of the ranch, lived a man named Pugh. He had a small farm there.

And north of the Love Ranch was a place that called itself Silver City; that name was a bit misleading as the "city" consisted of just one house where a fellow ran a store. I remember that his stock wasn't much; we tried to buy some bread but couldn't get any. No, I don't know his name; people didn't go around asking others for names. It wasn't healthy in the Territory in those days.

The next place north was Fort Reno. From there to Caldwell, Kansas was said to be one hundred and fifteen miles, and between the two places, as we went north, we passed only three habitations.

There was a ranch called the Spear Anchor; it was twenty miles from Fort Reno. North of that was a country store. And twenty-one miles south of Caldwell was a house; we gave the man who lived there two dollars to take us across the river in a canoe. We swam our saddle horses over.

We did our business in Caldwell, staying there two days. While there we met a fellow who told us he meant to go to Texas. He had a team of horses and a big covered wagon, and he was taking his wife with him. We made a deal with him to all go together; he was to haul food and supplies in his wagon, and his wife was to cook for the crowd. In return we were to furnish the groceries and horse feed.

Just below Caldwell, on the return trip into the Territory, we overtook a bunch of soldiers. The captain was a white man, but the soldiers were negroes. They had wagons with them, and I remember what a hard time they had trying to get those wagons across the Salt Fork.

A big mulatto riding a dun horse undertook to carry a rope across the river. Everything went all right until he got about half way across; then his horse got tired of swimming or something, and the man had to swim for himself. I saw him go down, and yelled, but he nearly drowned before they could get him out.

The captain of the soldiers told us that the Cheyennes and Arapahoes were on the warpath, and that he had been sent to restore order. When our companion who owned the covered wagon heard this news it almost scared him to death. He asked me if I thought there was any danger of our getting killed.

I guess I was too young and ignorant to get scared, but anyway I didn't. We went right on until we were almost to Fort Reno. We camped on the Canadian north of the fort, and that night along came a man and his family going north. He said he was getting out of the country before they were all massacred. Of course this sort of talk didn't do our friend of the covered wagon any good.

That guy got on my nerves. The next morning he came running to me and hollered that the Indians were coming! There they were just across the river, hundreds of them! I looked across the river and saw that it was a herd of cattle. But I was tired of the fellow, so I told him that it was Indians, sure enough. You should have seen him hitch up his horses and head back north.

My young friend and I went on to Fort Reno, and there we found out that the Indian uprising wasn't so much; it was finally settled without much trouble. We went on to Pauls Valley again, and I decided to stop over a while at the Holford Ranch.

By that time I had lost my desire to go to Texas, so after staying at the ranch for two weeks I saddled up and went back to Arkansas.

In two years I was back in the Territory working for Overstreet again.

There was a ferry where the Poteau River emptied into the Arkansas, and there was another called Ainsworth's Crossing about nine miles from Fort Smith, back up on the Poteau.

I knew lots of U.S. Marshals, though I can't remember many right now. Here are a few: John Trimble; George Williams; Heck Thomas; a man named Marchaund.

I came to the Choctaw Nation to live in 1891. I was married by then, and ready to settle down. The land that I leased was on Brazil Creek at the foot of the Sans Bois Mountains; north and east of Red Oak. The road ended right at our house; there wasn't another house for forty miles to the northwest of us.

I leased the land from a Choctaw named Sampson McCurtain, a cousin to Green McCurtain, the Choctaw chief. Sampson had a son named Billy. I paid Sampson \$3.50 an acre a year for his land.

The house we lived in that first year was a one-room log affair with a little lean-to, or sideroom. There was a well on the place and a small log barn. I improved that place quite a bit while I was there, though; I built a good three-room plank house, for one

I built another log house, too. I thought I was doing well; why, I even had two renters on the place two years after I moved there. They were sub-renting from me.

There was more game than you could shake a stick at. There were deer, turkeys, wolves, and once I saw bear tracks. We let our hogs run loose, and lots of times a hog would come up at night bleeding from a wound inflicted by some wild animal--wolves, I guess, because there were plenty of wolves.

I've seen panthers, too; one followed me for a hundred yards one day. I was riding in a farmwagon, and I guess that is the reason he didn't attack me.

The squirrels were so thick that a man had to go around his cornfield every day to keep them from ruining his crop. I've killed as high as eleven in one day, just shooting them in my corn. One of the renters killed fourteen one day. We didn't eat them; we fed them to the hogs. I had about eighty-five hogs at that time.

We lived on that place three years and then went back to Arkansas. After two years in Arkansas we moved back to the Territory at Short Mountain near Cowlington; ^{lived} /a year there, then moved to Cache Creek for a year. We moved to Wilburton and lived there about seven years; then a jaunt to California, ending up here at Harts-horne in 1905.

That gives you an idea about what I've done and the places I've lived.

After we came to Hartshorne I hauled lumber for Jim Brazell. He owned, among other things, the lumber yard that belongs now to John Martin. He was one of the officials of the First National Bank that stood where Paul's Drug Store is now. He was one of the important men in the history of the town before statehood.

His father, J. H. Brazell, brought the family to McAlester from Mississippi to claim tribal rights. Jim was a Deputy United States Marshal for about seven years before he came to Hartshorne in 1898.

I worked for Brazell until just before statehood; since then I have been in business for myself, running a restaurant, a grocery store, and of late, farming.

James Russell Gray