

BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

HOLT, W. THOMAS - INTERVIEW.

7872

Field Worker's name Grace Kelley, Field Worker.

This report made on (date) October 20, 1937

- 1. Name W. Thomas Holt
- 2. Post Office Address Henryetta, Route 2.
- 3. Residence address (or location) Two miles south of Shulter, one west.
- 4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month _____ Day _____ Year 1874
- 5. Place of birth Arkansas

6. Name of Father Gabe Holt Place of birth Don't know.

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Dovey Barnes 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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Kelley, Grace - Investigator.
Indian Pioneer History - S-149.
October 20, 1937.

Interview with

W. Thomas Holt.
Henriette, Oklahoma

My mother and father brought me to the Territory when I was ten days old, sixty-three years ago. I don't remember much about the trip but they located on the North Canadian river on Younger Bend which is sixteen miles below Eufaula. Between that time and when I was thirteen we moved to Cherokee Junction, my mother died and father remarried. I didn't like my step-mother so when I was thirteen I ran away and came back to Younger Bend. There was more stock-raising there than farming. It is known as Briar-town now but then there was nothing but bois d' arc and green briars.

That part of the country is known more for the home of Belle Starr than anything else. Her cave, the one known as Belle Starr Cave, was two and a half miles from her home. Both were on Dutches Creek which empties into the Canadian but she didn't live on the Canadian. I've played in that cave many times. There are good roads now and it would be about a mile by one of them. At that time there were only

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trails for horses and they always made a long way around to miss the impassable places.

Old Stage Line.

This old stage line was from Fort Smith to Mountain Station in Latimer county ten miles south of Wilburton, two miles from Shaws Ranch, to Boggy, and I believe it went on to Fort Sill and Fort Coffee but I wouldn't say for sure because I was only as far as Boggy.

Mail Route Fifty Years Ago.

This was a pony route from Webbers Falls to Gritts, the old Frost Starr place, Mooney's place which was later Briartown, then Whitefield.

Freighting.

Whitefield was a little bit of a place with three stores. Everything that was needed was freighted from Fort Smith by wagons. They were drawn by from four to six steers or four mules. There was a ferry on the Poteau right at Fort Smith where the bridge is now. That was the only stream of any size crossed and when smaller streams had to be crossed they were just forded.

Dwight Mission, 1838.

The different churches sent Missionaries here

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and started schools for the children, that is why you see Indians who are church workers now. I do not remember what denomination the Dwight Mission was but at first the white children were allowed to go without paying tuition. They had to furnish their own clothing but the school furnished the Indian children's clothing. I was fourteen years old when I attended there and we stayed from four to five months each year, then we went home. The orphan children were kept the year round and everything was furnished them just as in an orphan's home. We scarcely had any work at all to do. Miss Harriet Jones was the Superintendent, ^{she was} from Kansas. There was a large two story frame house that would cover a quarter acre of ground besides lots of smaller frame houses and out buildings. Their supplies were brought from Tahlequah as there was no Sallisaw then. The school was close to Sallisaw. I believe it was in 1890 that they started making the white children pay tuition and they had to pay until some schools were built for them years later.

Big Old Indian Cemetery.

About six or seven miles south and east from the school there was an old Indian cemetery. It was on Barn Creek.

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Moving the Squatters Out.

Thirty days before the Cherokee Strip was opened to settlement the Government hired men to go in and move the Squatters out. They were not driven out by soldiers as there were no soldiers among us. They were not farmers but were stock or cattle men. We drove their stock out and moved their household goods out. There were four camps and some were taken to Kansas and others were put into the Quapaw country.

Cherokee Strip Opening.

John Palmer, Enlo Palmer and I went to the Opening of the Cherokee Strip together, from Briartown. They are at Sallisaw now. We bought horses that cost from three to five hundred dollars to make the Run with. As we had helped move the Squatters out we knew where there was some ground that would bring us a good piece of money.

It took us seven days to go from Briartown to Coffeyville, Kansas. One of the boys drove the wagon and the other one and I rode horseback and took care of the horses. We camped out all the time from when we started until after the Run. When we got to Coffeyville we stayed in a camp of seven hundred for sixty days. I think they had all the

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camps cut up into seven hundred in a bunch. There was very little roughness in our camp; we got along fine until the Run was made. That was when the excitement took place.

Some of the widows just jumped over the line and drove their stakes into the ground without trying to run anywhere. ~~Others, like ourselves, had some certain piece of ground in mind and ran farther inland.~~ We ran forty-eight miles and when we got there somebody else had beat us to our places. We were disappointed and didn't want any other place so we didn't take a claim at all. At the beginning of the Run we passed a man who was riding a mule and we thought he wouldn't get anything with such a slow animal. We had good expensive ponies that were really going. At five o'clock their long stay at the camp was telling on them and they were run down. This same mule passed us and he was still running the same gait that he had started.

We went back to Enid where we stayed four or five days before returning home. There were about three, twelve by fourteen foot, wooden stores; a company or general merchandise store of stone which handled everything a person could want to buy, several long tent boarding houses, but we camped out; about a hundred fifty tents and lots of

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covered wagons. That was Enid in 1893 as I saw it.

Line Riders.

The Line Riders weren't cowboys but were Government men similar to the U.S. Marshals but their duties were taking care of the cattle immigration instead of out-laws. They had the power to arrest a person if the need arose

though. They were on the Arkansas-Indian Territory line from Missouri to Louisiana. I couldn't tell that they did any good but they stopped you at the line and held you over for ten days. During that time the cattle were treated for ticks, etc. After that we were allowed to cross into the Territory. We didn't have to pay anything to cross but the boss had to pay the Tribal Government for a permit for the use of the grass.

Working for Checotah Rancher.

I worked for Campbell Russell who owned the Ladder brand four and a half miles east and north of Checotah. He had about thirteen thousand head of cattle. Some of them came from Arkansas, some from Louisiana and some of them were home raised. All were native cattle which came from the east and wouldn't fight like the Texas Longhorns. They were medium sized and not bothered with the ticks

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like those from Texas. All the cattle ran out as there were no fences except the home pastures. When it came shipping time the cattle were gathered up and put in one of two pastures. The ones to be shipped were cut out and put into the other one which was closer to Muskogee than Checotah. The others were turned out on the range again.

We shipped from Muskogee.

Fall Round-up.

From October to the first of January we had our round-up. Each winter we gathered the cattle and put the old ones in the home pastures and fed them. The young ones were allowed to run out all the time for they wouldn't wander off like the old ones would. They would stay close to the feed pens and could get into the little draws where there was protection from the winter cold. In April all ~~were turned out to go where they pleased and weren't fed~~ any more.

Long Drive from Louisiana.

I believe it was on the first of October that eighteen of us and a chuck wagon left home for Louisiana with five hundred Indian ponies, some broken and some unbroken. We traded these for eighteen hundred head of cattle. The

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line riders held us over for ten days at the border and then we entered the Territory at Howe between Poteau and Heavener, but there was no town there, just cane brakes. We went straight through to Checotah.

Crossing the South Canadian.

~~When we came to the South Canadian river it was up~~
and we had to swim the horses and cattle. One horse is always the "leader". One of us started across the river on it and we forced a few cattle into the water to follow it and others behind forced more after them. Every minute of the day someone would be singing. We drowned thirteen cattle that time. There was no danger from the cattle to the leader for a horse can out-swim a cow anytime and the bunch couldn't catch up with him. Not every horse would swim and you never knew whether he would swim until you ~~tried him. If one wouldn't you just had to leave him on~~
the bank and go on.

Cowboy Songs.

Our three favorite songs were: The Dying Ranger, Lone Prairie, and the Texas Ranger.

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The Dying Ranger.

The summer sun was setting
He fell with a lingering ray
The branch of the forest
Where the wounded ranger lay.

Gather round me comrades
And listen to my dying words
I'm going to tell the story
While my spirit hastens away.

Far away in Northwest Texas
In that good old Lone Star State
There's one that for my coming
With a weary heart awaits.

I have a darling sister
Who's all my joy and pride.
I've loved her from my childhood
For I had no one beside.

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I've loved her as a brother
Who with a brother's care
I've tried from grief and sorrow
Her gentle heart to cheer.

My father he lies sleeping
Beneath the deep blue sea
I have no other kindred
None but Nell and me.

The Texas Ranger

When Texas was invaded
And called for volunteers
She threw her arms around me
And burst into tears.

Go my darling brother
And help drive these Indians from our shores
My heart may need your presence
But my country needs you more.

Note: I just remember a little of it as it was so long ago.

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Recreation.

It wasn't hard to get the cowboys to go to church for it was something you hardly ever got a chance to go to. I was a Free Will Baptist. I hardly ever went to a dance and I knew a lot of others who were religious men.