

THOMAS, W. L. INTERVIEW

#8596

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THOMAS, W. L.

INTERVIEW.
BIOGRAPHY FORM

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION.

Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name Ethel Mae Yates.

This report made on (date). September 21, 1937. 1937

1. Name W. L. Thomas.

2. Post Office Address Elk City, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 416 West 7th St.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month November Day 13 Year 1857.

5. Place of birth Illinois.

6. Name of Father George Thomas. Place of birth Tennessee.

Other information about father Fought in the Civil War.

7. Name of Mother Mary Thomas. Place of birth France.

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 5.

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Ethel Mae Yates,
Interviewer.
Sept. 21, 1937.

An Interview With W. L. Thomas,
Elk City, Oklahoma.

I came from Texas to the Indian Territory in the year of 1889 on a train of the Santa Fe Railroad. I came to Ardmore, which was a very small place, and put in a barber shop.

I had sent my brother on ahead to make the run. He made the run and set down his stake but another man claimed that he had set down his stake ahead of him, so my brother did not get a claim.

Not very long after I went into the barber business, three Indian men came into the shop and one of them sat down in the barber chair. I asked him how he wanted his chair out.

He just sat there and grunted so I got the clippers and started right down the middle of his head; he jumped down from the chair and began to run and squall and he was not long in letting me know that he did not want his hair out.

I stayed in and around Ardmore until 1900. I had been hearing about this country so Mr. Albright and I left our

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families and came to see about it. We filed on some claims three miles south and four miles west of where Elk City is now, about a mile from Merritt.

There was not any Elk City then; there was a little store called Bush, about three miles from where Elk City now is, on the fork of Elk Creek.

Our post office was in Bush, in a dugout. A man named Sid Hill ran the post office.

I made a dugout back in a bank and covered it with dirt and my stock barn and chicken house were dug back in a bank and covered with brush.

There were no roads leading to our claims at all. Mr. Albright and I took our plows and plowed furrows for two miles and grubbed out buck grass so we could get in and out. We had to go to Weatherford for all of our supplies. I did not go for any of my building material as I used sticks and dirt and anything that could be found on my place.

When I got our new home all ready, I had my family come to Weatherford and I met them there and brought them to their new home in a covered wagon.

We had to grub shinnery roots and go over on Sand Stone and Timber Creek for our fuel.

There were lots of prairie chickens and some deer.

There were two antelopes that roamed on my place for two years but some one finally got them. The coyotes were so bad that we could hardly raise any chickens; they got so bold that when we set a hen with chickens off her nest the coyotes would get the whole bunch. One morning I took my shot gun and went and hid in a thicket and said that I was going to get what ever was stealing our chickens. It was not long until a crippled coyote came along and I got her so that put a stop to the chicken problem for a while.

~~The first spring we broke sod and planted seed in every~~
third furrow. We had to plant by hand and did not raise much cotton for a while but we raised lots of Kaffir corn and had good gardens.

Our first school was at Merritt in a dugout. It was taught by a man by the name of Gabe Tiswell. We had our church services there too; Brother Fullon could come over from Doxie and preach once

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a month and Brother Davis would come and preach some times; people would come to church on horseback or in wagons. Elk City was established in 1902.

Mr. Herring and Mr. Young were among the first to put in a store. They hauled their goods from Cheyenne in a wagon. I was the first man who ever ran a barber shop here. Almost all the stores and residences were in tents. Our lights were kerosene lamps; one night I ran out of oil and went over to a 'R. Hollis' store to get some. He filled my jug. I picked it up and started out and he said, "Where is the money?". I told him that I had not brought it, but would bring it in the morning and he said that I could just leave the oil; that he hoped to close the year without one charge tie at. I told him that I admired his way and hoped he could show me his books at the end of the year without any charge accounts.

I got tired of the barber business; the farmers would come in with long whiskers full of red dirt and it was impossible to keep a razor sharp so it was not long until I went back to the farm.

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We certainly had plenty of snakes when we first came West; it was nothing uncommon to see one crawling in the dugout.

One day my wife went to the cupboard to get some sugar and found a big snake, crawling out of the sugar sack.