

WILLIAMS, SARAH E.

INTERVIEW

10269

450

WILLIAMS SARAH E.

INTERVIEW.

Form A-(S-149).

10269

451

BIOGRAPHIC FORM

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

Indian-Pioneer History Project Oklahoma

Field Worker's name ZAIDEE B. BLAND

This report made on (date) MARCH 17, 1938

1. Name Mrs. Sarah E. Williams
2. Post Office Address Altus
3. Residence address (or location) 801 North Grady Street
4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month November Day 15 Year 1862
5. Place of birth Tennessee
6. Name of Father Stephen S. Kirk Place of birth Illinois
Other information about father _____
7. Name of Mother Milly Spicer Place of birth Tennessee
Other information about mother _____

Notes or completed 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 8

Zaidee E. Eland
Journalist
March 17, 1938.

Interview with Mrs. Sarah E. Williams
601 North Grady St. Altus, Oklahoma.

Mr. Williams, my husband, had a brother-in-law, Mr. Kilpatrick, living out here and Mr. Williams came out in 1889 to look around. Land was so very high in Tennessee that we had despaired of owning the land we wanted to raise our family on and it was to seek more and cheaper land that we left the state of our birth. Mr. Williams found a half section that a man would relinquish to him for \$500.00. He paid that much down on the land and came back to Tennessee for me and the children.

We sold out everything but our bedding and clothing and took a steamboat at Butler's Landing. We were on this boat two days and nights and the food and all was furnished. We traveled by boat to Memphis and here we took a train. The train had to cross the Mississippi River on a boat but it was night and we did not know when we crossed the river. We did not get off the train to eat; neither did I have a lunch basket but Mr. Williams would get off when the train stopped at a station long enough and buy things for the children and me to eat. I had a nursing baby and did not like to get off of the train. The older children would get off with their father sometimes. I think we were eight days making

the trip from the time we left home until we got to Vernon, Texas.

Our brother-in-law met us at Vernon and brought us across the Red River to his home where we stayed until a place could be prepared for us on our own claim. I thought this the most desolate country I had ever seen. I felt like we had struck another world. Everything looked so dry and dead. It was February and the river looked just like a dry waste of sand apart with no water or vegetation. Mr. Williams fixed a dugout for us with one room built over the dugout. We cooked in the dugout and slept in the room above. This dugout was 18 by 20 feet and had three windows in it. I was not too worried about the appearance of things for I had been told what to expect. The second night I was here there came up one of those sudden north winds that would shake a hole in the ground and it sounded so strong and lonesome that I never batted my eyes all night in sleep for I expected every minute for us all to be blown out of our beds. I soon learned better than that but have never gotten used to the sand and I still hate the dust.

Everything was hauled from Vernon but even that far back we hauled a little coal for fuel, it was so far and so dangerous to get wood from the Nation. Mr. Williams got wood, besteads, chairs and tables and two coal stoves at Vernon as soon as the dugout was ready

for us to move in. I tried to go to Vernon twice a year to buy in supplies but of course the men-folks often went as often as once a month and some one, a neighbor or whoever went, always brought back all the mail and whatever was needed for the whole neighborhood.

We bought teams, a cow and a dozen chickens that first spring. I raised a lot of fryers. The whole country was alive with little cottontail rabbits and the children could go out and twist a rabbit out of a hole in the ground most any time of day and when I would fry a chicken I would usually fry a rabbit and the children never seemed to be able to tell the difference between the meat of rabbit or chicken. We brought from Tennessee enough meat, lard and preserved and canned fruit to last a year or two and after that we had only the native plums for fruit until we could have an orchard of our own, which was not long for we put out peaches, plums and apricots that did well. Quinces did pretty well but apples and grapes would not grow for us. The ground was too sandy we thought.

We had a good well of water and people haul water from that well to this day, it is so much softer than the water from most wells. That first year we broke out nearly one hundred acres of land. We had a good garden and corn. Mr. Williams planted eight

acres in cotton and the neighbors just hooted at him and said, "We came to this country to get away from cotton and now you are trying it out here." But it was not a success that first year. It rained a good deal and the stalks grew higher than my head but did not have time to fruit before the frost. We did not make a bale on the whole eight acres. I shipped my sewing machine with our bedding and were we popular when Spring dressmaking time came!

There were not many birds here as there was no timber or water. Quail and prairie chickens were plentiful and we usually had one or the other to eat every day. The children kept traps set for them and I have known them to catch twenty quail at one time in their traps and there were always a half dozen or more every morning. The traps had to be tended every morning just as we did the other chores. We built a house and put a foundation under it and it was nothing unusual for quail to come up and roost with my chickens if the weather was cold or snowy, and it was seldom that there was not a covey of quail roosting under the house if the ground was wet or covered with snow. We planted black locust and poplar trees and after they got up to some size mocking birds and other song birds came.

Hawks were bad and wolves would come right into the yard and help themselves to the chickens if they could not get out of the way. I had an old hen once that went to setting. I did not have the eggs to set her with and she was contrary and would not stay off the nest so I tied her with a string to one corner of the house. A wolf came right up and ate her in the yard. I did not like to hear the wolves howl. The first time I heard them I did not know what they were and I thought their howls the loneliest sounds I ever heard. One wolf can sit down on a hillside and howl to the moon and you will think there are a hundred. Wolves caught little calves and pigs sometimes but they were not dangerous to people and I was glad of that. We would take our lunch with us and stay all day plum hunting and bring home a wagon load at a time. It would take us a week to put all these plums up but that supply would do for that year. We did not go fishing much but there were plenty of fish in Deep Red and Otter Creeks.

I had corn bread three times a day because we liked it better and thought it healthier. We had biscuit once a day and light bread sometimes once a week. We liked egg corn bread but mostly we liked what I called a corn pone made with hot water

and cooked on the top of the stove. I cooked in what we called a Hoecake Baker, that is a flat iron plate with a very small rim. I had ^{an} iron tea-kettle, skillets and pots. My stove had the name on it and Joe, one of my boys learned his letters on this stove and on the pots.

When we planned a trip to Vernon the day before we would get our "suggins" out (quilts, blankets and pillows) in a roll. I would cook up a lot of grub for we would have to spend a night in the wagon yard at Vernon. Every one did. There was a place there where you could make coffee and fry meat but no place to eat except by your own wagon. We did not have much to take with us to sell from the farm but had to have the money already with us. We were not long in getting quite a little herd of cattle and we usually had a yearling to sell when we needed a little cash but a lot of the years were very lean.

About a quarter of mile south of us was a little one-room house known as "The Little School-house". We all went to church here and the children went to school three months out of the year. They had benches to sit on but no desks to write on.

It was not long before we got an organ for the girls and then they would meet at our house nearly every Sunday night for singing. We did not have preaching every Sunday by any means, just when a

preacher would happen to be coming near us and there would be an announcement of the Sunday preaching and we did not have Sunday School until the house was built at Cross Roads about a mile farther on. I think the first two years I was out here I got to attend church only once.

We were putting out potato slips once when Sue, our little daughter, was playing along the rows in front of us, stopping to sit down occasionally. She sat down on what she took to be a limb as she was used to sitting in trees in Tennessee when the limb began to sing. She had sat down on a big snake. There were a good many snakes and I always killed everyone I saw if I could but the snakes never gave us much bother. The rattlesnakes do not live in the sand and the other snakes were not poisonous.

Joe learned to ride before he was large enough to climb on a horse's back. He would watch his father plowing in the field and when his father would "take loose" to come to the house Joe would run as fast as he could to meet his father and his father would always put him on one of the horses and let him ride to the lot. When a postoffice was established within about a mile of us we would put Joe on a horse and send him for the mail. The postmaster would either bring the mail out to Joe or someone standing around would help him back on the horse after he had

slid off and gone in the house for the mail. One day when Joe was coming home with the mail, when he got to the crossroads, there was a new bottle full of pepper sauce someone had lost lying in the road. Joe slid down and picked up the bottle of pepper sauce but could not get back onto his horse so had to walk all the rest of the way home and lead his horse.

We lived far enough from the river for it not to be dangerous for us but I have seen a lot of high water. I raised my family with three square meals a day with meat on the table every meal. Meat was the foundation around which every meal was built and milk, butter and eggs were always present at meal time also.
