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Hazel B. Greene,  
Journalist,  
Feb. 24, 1938.

Interview Mary Ellen Phillips Wynn,  
308 South 7th Street, Hugo, Okla.

My father, John Wesley Phillips, was born in Arkansas. He died when I was about three years old and is buried in Arkansas. My mother, Maggie Buchanan Phillips, was born in Tennessee. I was born in Arkansas, February 21, 1885.

My mother is still living about fifteen miles southeast of Hugo, on Choate Lake. My mother, with her parents moved from Arkansas, to Arthur City, Texas, then when I was four she was married to a widower with ten children. His name was Charles Oakes and he lived about fifteen miles southeast of where Hugo is now, in what was later the Ervin community.

I had seen him before they were married but I had never seen his children and had been told that they were nasty and black and I had my mind thoroughly made up that I would never claim them for my brothers and sisters. Mr. Oakes looked like a white man, but he really was one-quarter blood

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Choctaw Indian and his first wife had been almost a full blood Choctaw Indian. She was Judy Belvin and was raised an orphan by the parents of Judge Thomas Hunter, I believe. The day that Mother was married I cried and didn't want to go home with her, and after I did, I didn't want to play with those little Indians. But in a few days I was reconciled to playing with them and by the time I was eight years old I was speaking the Choctaw language until I had almost forgotten my English. My mother nearly beat me to death to make me quit talking Choctaw; I was grown before I could speak English plainly.

Mother had eleven Oakes children. Papa Oakes always said he was the father of twenty-two children. He claimed me, too, I was the twenty-second one. He lived to be eighty-four years old. He died in 1924 and was buried at the Oakes family burial ground at Goodwater, in Choctaw County, about eighteen or twenty miles southeast of the present town of Hugo.

He used to tell us tales of the early days and of their customs. He said that all of the children and some of the

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Indian men just wore long shirts and no breeches. He said he had never had a pair of breeches when he married; he was eighteen years old and was married in his "shirt-tail". That was the custom then and nothing was thought of it. In summer, just lots of the Indian men and boys wore nothing but a breech clout. He told us that he had seen white people scalped by Indians. Mr. Oakes said he was so mean when he was a boy, he would hide in the bushes close to a field and wait for the negro boy plow hands to come near enough for him to shoot the plow handles out of their hands. He said that his mother had some old negroes who never left them; even after they were freed, they stayed with them and worked.

His parents had a loom house and two old "Aunties" made cloth for the whole plantation. They also made the dye for the cloth out of barks and herbs and berries. Red oak bark made almost black dye, bois d'arc bark made yellow, and with copperas it made what we call khaki now. Dried walnut hulls made jet black, green hulls made brown (a reddish brown). Of course, poke berries made red and they would sometimes combine the barks and berries for shades.

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When I was a girl, dances were the biggest social events of the winter time. I learned to dance right at home on the floor with my Mother. There was such a large family of us that we could almost have a dance without any outsiders, but that would have been no fun. A few could come in and bring a fiddler almost any night and we'd have a dance. Telephones were unknown then but the crowd got around by the 'grapevine route.' Dock Everidge was a good fiddler and it was not so far to their place and we could nearly always get him. We never heard of a guitar until I was grown and married. To lend variety to the fiddling some fellow would get him a couple of little sticks about the length of a lead pencil, or a little longer, and whittle them out right pretty and smooth and beat the fiddle strings in rhythm with the music. Occasionally a girl would create a sensation by learning to "beat the strings" and the girl who could put in a few jig steps as she went through the square set was eagerly sought after by the boys for a partner. I remember one, especially, who would "jig" all through the set; we other girls just hated her. She came

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over from Texas to a few of our dances, but we considered her such a "showoff" that we didn't treat her warmly and she didn't make many trips over here.

We would go as far as fourteen miles over in Texas to dances. All the livestock would be fed early and all the work done up early so that we could get started about four o'clock. Hay would be piled in the wagon bed and pillows and quilts were put on top of the hay, and all the youngsters were piled in there. In addition to the spring seat, which was occupied by Papa and Mamma and usually the baby of the family, boards were placed across the wagon bed for the grown girls to sit upon and sometimes each grown girl had a beau to sit upon it with her, while our boys 'beaved' the other boys'sisters to the dance. But more often the boys went horseback and would then ride home with the girls and let one of our little boys ride their horse to the home of the girl he was with, so the pony would be there when he got her safely home and then he would ride to his home. If the dance was in our community, and the girls would not have more than a mile or two to walk the boy would ask for her "company home" and walk with her and lead his horse. Or,

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if he could borrow one of 'Dad's horses he would proudly come to her home and take her to the dance, too. But more often, the boy did not accompany the girl to the dance, she got there just the best way she could and then the boy would beg for her company home; that was a custom then.

Girls were considered grown when they began to look like it, whether they were twelve or sixteen. I was large for my age and began dancing when I was eight years old and married when I was fifteen. We put on long dresses just as soon as we began to look grown. They were as long as the dresses that are worn now and then a wide circular flounce or ruffle was set on to that length and made to sweep the floor. Oh, how we "swished" those full skirts!

Each fall cotton was picked and hauled seven miles across the country to Grant to the gin, then it was taken to Paris to be sold. Every child that was big enough to pull a cotton sack, did so. An account of the weights was kept and each child was given credit for the amount that he had earned by picking, just like they were hired and the amount of the earnings of each was spent for his or her clothes.

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Of course, the older ones required more but they earned more, too. However, the little ones always had sufficient clothing. Mamma and Papa made one trip a year to Paris, Texas, for our clothing. That was in the fall when they sold the cotton. We big girls each got a nice wool dress for best-wear, for parties and church. Each one had only one "Sunday" dress all winter, then a pretty calico dress was made for second best and heavy cotton checks for the everyday wear. That was what it took to stand the field work that we had to do. Sometimes we would have two calico dresses in a winter. Mother also bought about a bolt of white lawn, so that each of us could have a white dress for summer wear. Every girl had a white dress in summer for best wear, also a white bonnet. So, by the time each of us had a white dress made off of the bolt and maybe the "current" baby got a dress off of it, too, there was none left, because frequently ten yards was used for a dress.

Before they went to Paris to buy our clothes, each child's foot was carefully measured for his or her shoes. We never knew what it was to have a pair of shoes fitted.

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They were usually gotten a little bit big so they wouldn't pinch, and I had many a shoe that rubbed my heel because it didn't fit. Papa said we should be thankful for any kind, because he went barefoot when he was a boy until he was big enough to work, then he didn't have shoes until it was freezing cold, and they were home-made shoes. His father made his lasts, tanned the hides, made the shoes and put them together with tanned strings of squirrel skin or cowhide and pegged the soles on with wooden pegs. Papa could cook Indian dishes, too, but Mamma would never learn how to make them. He made mostly Tom Fuller and shuck bread which was very much like hot tamales only not seasoned with meat and pepper, they called it something else when they put meat in it and the Indians didn't use pepper in their dishes.

We used to go to big camp meetings at Goodwater, and have the best things to eat. People would come there and camp for weeks and attend the meetings. Beeves and hogs were barbecued and everybody had plenty to eat.

They used to have big suppers at the dances, too, I recall once, when the boys made up \$28.00 and gave it to my mother and two other ladies to cook a big midnight supper

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for a dance. They sent to Grant and got some few things to kind of dress up the supper, such as "store" pickles, but we had just everything that one would usually need for we had a big orchard and raised just everything to eat. Ours was a big log house, with two big rooms and a big hall between them, then some side rooms. Now that house was really full. The beds had been taken down to make room for the dancers in one room, and were put up in the other room so that the mothers could put their little ones to bed when they got sleepy and leave the mothers free to dance. Many a time the weather would change and we'd have to loan quilts to wrap those little sleepy children in to go home. Of course, all of Papa's family was never at home at the same time. Some were married when I came into the family and they kept marrying off and going off to the schools, so that our house was not so crowded.

We went to school at Goodwater, I never went anywhere else for I was not Indian and not entitled to go to the Indian schools. It was four miles to Goodwater and we went horseback. I never got much schooling because we could never start until cotton was picked and by that time it was

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so cold that we could not go regularly. Going to school was a lark for us; we liked it because we got out of so much work at home when we went to school. We didn't have sense enough to know that the more we worked then the more we'd have a little later.

The logs of Charles Oakes house are in a residence at Choate Springs cemetery, and people are living in it. I guess those logs must be seventy-nine years old and they are still good. He cut them and built the house when he was eighteen years old, soon after he was married the first time. He never held a public office in his life. He just followed farming and stock raising. The children of his first marriage who are living now are Mrs. Sue Denison and Wellington Oakes at <sup>1</sup>dabel, Mrs. Henryetta Dickson at Grant, and Chris Oakes of Hugo, (Ervin Route). Of his second marriage, there are living, Willie and Frank of Ervin Route, Hugo; Mrs. Lavana McFarland, Hugo; Mrs. Belle Bennett, Ervin Route, Hugo; Mrs. Harriet Cody, Hugo; Albert Oakes, Soper; Mrs. Martha Smith, Grant; and Mrs. Florence Dodson, Hugo, Oklahoma.