

COPELAND, WILLIAM FELIX.

INTERVIEW

9043

385

BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma
COPELAND, WILLIAM FELIX. INTERVIEW.

9043.

Field Worker's name Ethel B. Tackitt.

This report made on (date) October 15, 1937. 1937

1. Name William Felix Copeland.

2. Post Office Address W. F. Copeland.

3. Residence address (or location) Lone Wolf, Kiowa County.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month December Day 10 Year 1855.

5. Place of birth Overton County, Tennessee.

6. Name of Father Wilkerson Copeland. Place of birth Tennessee.

7. Name of Mother Pollie Deck Copeland. Place of birth Tennessee.

Other information about mother Much younger than Father, his
second wife. First wife died. Too old for the Civil War,
the Father was.

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 _____.

COPELAND, WILLIAM FELIX.

INTERVIEW.

9043.

Ethel B. Tackitt,
Investigator,
October 15, 1937.

Interview With William Felix Copeland,
Lone Wolf, Kiowa County, Oklahoma.

Relates a story of brother lost
To the family before the Civil War
And located in Indian Territory in
1898 to 1937. (Experiences).

I was born in Overton County, Tennessee, December 10, 1856. My father, Wilkerson Copeland, was a native of Tennessee and so was my mother, Pollie Copeland. They were farm people and also raised stock for a living. My father had been married before and had several children by his first wife, who was then dead. My half brothers and sisters were much older than I and most of them were grown when I was born.

My oldest half-brother, Foster Copeland, went away from home when I was quite a baby and the family did not know what had become of him. Mother and Father and his brothers and sisters grieved for him and did their best to find some trace of him. He had gone away from home

COPELAND, WILLIAM FELIX.

INTERVIEW.

9043.

-2-

with a band of sheep which were being grazed to market and part of them belonged to him. The Civil War came on and no one knew whether/^{he} had been killed or not. He was of age when he went away and was the oldest of the family. I grew up with the desire in my heart to find my brother and everywhere I went I made inquiry and asked my friends to assist me in the search.

As I grew up I followed the usual occupations of our family, farming and raising cattle. I have driven hundreds of head. of stock, through the hills of Tennessee to Lexington, Kentucky; from there we would ship them by train to Cincinnati, Ohio, for the market.

I married Samantha Allen Sewell, who was also born in Tennessee, January 23, 1858. She was the daughter of a Hardshell Baptist preacher and we lived in Tennessee until 1891 when we moved to Dallas County, Texas.

My half-sister, Louisa Copeland, had married Clay Bilber and in the early part of 1870 they had moved to the Indian Territory as she, like the others of the family, were still hunting for her brother Foster and she had hope

COPELAND, WILLIAM FELIX.

INTERVIEW.

9043.

-3-

of finding him in the Indian Territory. Sister Louise was left a widow with several children and she later married a Chickasaw Indian of the name of Fred Watkins. He was an intelligent man but not very well educated but he and my sister worked together and he expected her to look after their business matters, so in this way they prospered and owned much land and property in the vicinity of the little settlement of Arthur, which is now in Stephens County twelve miles southeast of Duncan. Mr. Watkins had also been married before and had two children, a girl, Lucie, who married Will Little, and a boy, named George Watkins.

In the early part of 1890's I came to the Indian Territory to visit my sister Louise and also to see the country and while here she and her husband insisted that I buy a few head of cattle and leave the cattle with them on their range and they would take care of them along with their own and in that way they could accumulate some stock for me and be at no expense themselves. I purchased the cattle and my sister and her husband took care of them

COPELAND, WILLIAM FELIX.

INTERVIEW.

9043.

-4-

but I, of course, came back from time to time until in 1898 my herd had reached such a number that I felt it was asking too much of them to care for my cattle any longer, so I moved my family to the Indian Territory and settled on some of their land near Arthur.

I farmed and raised cattle and prospered rapidly, but continued to inquire about my brother Foster. One day a man who had come to be my friend, of the name of John Blue, came and told me that he was going to make a trip over on Wild Horse Creek and he knew of a man who might be my lost brother and wanted me to go along with him. We went in a two-horse wagon. There were no roads except wagon tracks as that part of the Territory was thinly settled. In the afternoon we drove up to a board hut with a lean-to on the side, down on the creek where the brush was thick as a jungle. There was a rail and brush fence around the yard and John Blue said, "This is the place where I think you will find the man". I got out of the wagon and Blue sat still. No one can imagine my feelings as I went around that cabin, for I saw there

COPELAND, WILLIAM FELIX. . INTERVIEW. 9043.

-5-

was someone behind the house, I did not know a great deal about the home conduct of the Indians and I had learned that this place belonged to a Chickasaw by the name of Wolf.

Behind the hut sat an Indian woman churning with a wooden dasher in a big old fashioned big-at-the-bottom and little-at-the-top cedarwood churn, bound with brass hoops. Near by, leaning against the wall, stood an old man, unshaven and ragged, with clothing as dirty as it was possible for garments to be. He spoke and I said, "I am looking for Foster Copeland" and he replied, "That is my name". I said, "I am Felix Copeland of Tennessee and I want to find my brother". He was very much like an Indian, he said, "Who was your Father?" and I said, "Wilkerson Copeland" and I happened to remember that my half-brothers and sisters had called my mother Polly, so I said, "I am Polly's oldest boy. At that he grabbed me by the hand and began to weep and said, "Yes and you are my baby brother". We were both so happy and I told him how we had searched for him and

COPELAND, WILLIAM FELIX.

INTERVIEW.

9043.

-6-

how near Sister Louisa and our brothers Joshua, Burl and Jim had been to him all the time, as they were all living at Arthur. I learned that the War had taken him away for a long time, then he had drifted into the Indian Territory and married a Chickasaw woman. They had lived in the Arbuckle Mountain region and had reared one child, a daughter. I do not remember her name. Then his wife had died and the girl had married and he had come to live with the Wolf family. At last I thought of John Blue in the wagon and I told brother who was with me. He said he knew Blue well. He introduced me to the woman and said she was the wife of his employer. She insisted that we remain all night, but Blue, finding that I was in the right place, said he must go on.

I remained but they were all Indians and queer to me. I did not know how they might feel about me. But Wolf came home and I saw that Brother was general manager of the stock and everything about the place. Wolf was a wealthy man and owned a great number of stock.

That night they put me to sleep in the lean-to on a straw tick, but I did not sleep. There was a little

COPELAND, WILLIAM FELIX.

INTERVIEW.

9043.

-7-

square window in the side and I watched those Indians all night as they kept up a continual coming and going all night.

Very early next morning I heard Brother tell Wolf that I wanted him to go home with me and spend a while. Wolf said, "Well, why not go? That is the thing to do". Brother said he thought we were society people and he had no clothes fit to wear. Wolf said he would get some clothes for him, and the next morning told brother to take two saddle horses and ride over the country and show me all I wanted to see, then take a load of apples for they had as fine an apple orchard as ever grew in Tennessee, and drive over to Davis and sell them, then go to a certain merchant and tell him that Wolf would pay for anything Brother wanted and to buy himself a suit of clothes.

We did as Wolf said and sold the apples in Davis, then when we went to purchase the clothing, the merchant put out the suit we wanted him to have and Brother balked. He said it was too fine for him, but we insisted and I

COPELAND, WILLIAM FELIX.

INTERVIEW.

9043.

-8-

told the merchant that if Wolf should object to the price I would pay for it myself and that I wanted my brother fitted out with everyday clothes also; and, for Brother's benefit, I told him that my family were not society people but that we dressed and lived like our associates and had as good living as we could afford. Brother took the clothing and we went back to the ranch. I had him gather up all his clothes as I told him my wife and daughters would want to fix them up for him. He picked them up from all over the place, the lot, by the side of the fence and in the corners until he had two cotton sacks full. Mrs. Copeland said, "I never saw such rags".

He went home with me, but acted just like an Indian in standing off to himself. He seemed glad to see all the family and our sister. They fixed up his clothing and he visited with us several days but he returned to his ^{home} on the Wolf Ranch. He often came back for visits.

I formed a partnership with John Horton and we put in a store at Harrisburg and we did a fine business, taking in a large amount of money.

COPELAND, WILLIAM FELIX.

INTERVIEW.

9043.

-9-

One afternoon, and the weather was very cold as it was Winter, John Horton and I were alone in the store. Two men rode up on horseback and came in at the rear door. The building was large and long. They came to the stove and I asked if I could do something for them? One said that he wanted some Star Chewing Tobacco which was at the far end of the store. I took it out and he said that he would take the plug but for me to cut it up for him so he could carry it easily. I did so and he handed me a ten dollar bill from a great big roll of the raggediest, dirtiest bills I ever saw. Horton had the money, which we had on hand, in a bag in his pocket as we were fixing to close up. He had about two or three hundred dollars, the one day's business. Because the robberies were common in those days we always sent any large amount of money to Duncan, and we had sent over several thousand dollars the day before. Horton started to hand me the change when I heard a gun click in the hands of the fellow walking behind me and I saw the other one draw on Horton. They said, "Hand it all over", and he

COPELAND, WILLIAM FELIX.

INTERVIEW.

9043.

-10-

did. Horton's twelve year old boy came in about that time and they stood him up beside us. They marched us all down the steps and made us stand beside their horses which were covered with guns and ammunition. They jumped on their horses and kept us covered until they got out of sight, then they began to shoot and were joined by six others who had stolen horses and mules. They had even gone into the lot of the Richison family while they were at supper and taken their horses and a new buggy with the harness.

This was the Casey Band of outlaws and they knew where everything in the country was located but they missed our money by one day; however, they got some of our stock. They made a wholesale robbery and the settlers were so enraged that they formed a great posse and I hastened my eldest son, Joe, to Duncan to inform the officers and ^{ask} ~~that~~ they come to direct the hunt for the thieves and the stock.

The whole country took part in the chase and soon the officers at Wewoka in the Seminole Nation notified us that they had captured some of the Casey Band together

COPELAND, WILLIAM FELIX.

INTERVIEW.

9043.

-11-

with some of the stolen stock which had been hidden in the brush about one mile north of the present town of Wewoka, which at that time was nothing but ^a village with a few white people and a lot of Indians and negroes. One of my neighbors who had seen the robbers went with me to identify the men. One of the outlaws had been killed and I found him to be one of the men who robbed me and Horton; the other men I could not identify as I had not seen them, but Casey, who was the other man in the store robbery, had gotten away and gone back to the Arbuckle Mountain, to which place a posse trailed him and, running in on his camp, forced the outlaws to run for cover and one of the possemen grabbed Casey's own gun, which he had left, and shot him with it.

This was the last of the Casey Outlaw Band and the last robbery raid in that part of the country, of which I have any knowledge. We got back most of our stock and I made other trips to Wewoka to bring them back as I was acquainted with the rough country through which we had to travel without roads.

COPELAND, WILLIAM FELIX.

INTERVIEW.

9043.

-12-

I learned that my brother Foster was well liked among the Indians and was known to them as Dad Copeland or just Dad. He continued to live among them until his death a few years later, then we brought him to Arthur and buried him in the cemetery there.

In 1903 I moved to the Kiowa country and settled on a farm three miles north and three miles West of Lone Wolf. I still own that farm which I farmed until recent years when I have grown too old to work. I have now bought a home in town and live in it, while my grandchildren are in business around me. My wife, I am happy to say, is yet also living.