

DAVIS, JAMES E.

INTERVIEW

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BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

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Field Worker's name Ethel Mae Yates.

This report made on (date) November 18, 1937 1937

1. Name James E. Davis

2. Post Office Address Elk City, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) West B 925

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month December Day 17, Year 1866

5. Place of birth Rush County, Indiana

6. Name of Father Milton M. Davis Place of birth Ohio

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Louisa Davis Place of birth _____

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 _____.

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Investigator, Ethel Mae Yates,
November 18, 1937.

Interview with James E. Davis,
Elk City, Oklahoma.

I came to Cooke County, Texas, from Indiana with my parents in 1876 and settled five miles from Dexter.

There wasn't any courthouse there at that time and they would hold their courts under a tree. The outlaws would come from the Territory side and go on a drunk and shoot up the town, then go over back to the Territory side and wave their guns back at the law; when they got in the middle of the river they were out of the law's reach.

We lived on the Texas side four years then in 1880 we went over in the Territory in the Chickasaw Nation and settled on Mud Creek. While there, there was a post office built called the Leon Post office. We lived there two years, then moved sixty-five miles into the Chickasaw Nation, which was divided in two

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counties; we were in Pickens County. The Washita River was the line between the two counties with Washita County on the north. We moved fifteen miles from the north line of Pickens County; our post office was Erin Springs.

My father took a nine year lease from Bill Baldon, the captain of the militia. The Indian law was to lease one year at a time for \$5.00 permit and the person who leased land was allowed ten head of cows and calves. The Indians would go ahead and lease for \$5.00, then would come and want you to pay \$1.00 per head for your stock, and when you refused they would cut out one of your best cows and take it for their pay. After they had leased to men who had more cattle than the law allowed, the Indians rose up and were going to put the whites out so Bennett was called in with the soldiers and I have seen string after string of wagons headed for the Texas line, but when they got them to the river some of them would turn around and go back. Bennett was assisting and found that the Indians were breaking their own laws. He was letting them put the whites out until he saw who was at

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fault; then disbanded the soldiers and told them to go back to their post and after that the permits were stopped.

We lived in a half-dugout while here; dug down in the ground and three logs high, with dirt top.

I helped build a schoolhouse; we cut the logs just as long as we could get them for the walls and cut logs and split them and cut pegs and put in them for puncheon seats. We called it the Bear Schoolhouse.

While living here one of our neighbor's children died and there wasn't any way of getting lumber any closer than Gainesville, Texas, eighty-five miles away so I went up in a barn loft and took up lumber to make a coffin and covered it with black cloth and lined it with bleached muslin.

The Government had reserved the Cherokee Strip for the Indians' hunting ground but they had killed most of their game so the Government would let them come down in the Chickasaw Nation and hunt; these were the blanket Indians, Cheyennes, Arapahoes and the

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Comanches. Soldiers would come along to guard them and they would camp and hunt for two weeks at a time; would camp on Fish Creek and some of them would camp close to where we lived. They would kill lots of deer and turkey mostly with bow and arrows. They were peaceable and never did bother anything while there.

The Government had built houses and bought tools and tried to set the Comanches to work, but they would let fire get in things and burn them up and it cost the Government thousands of dollars.

In 1886 the Government wanted white people to go in the Comanche country and settle up and teach the Indians how to work, so my father and I came up in there but when we got there they already had the amount they needed, so we didn't get any land but got to attend an Indian dance while we were there. The Cheyennes and Araphoes gave the Comanches a dance and we went to it. Some of the Indians sat in the middle and beat a big drum, some of them tied terrapin hulls on their ankles, with shot in them, and some would tie bells on

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them and they would go around in a circle.

When we failed to get any land we went back home and we farmed and raised cattle and lived in the Chickasaw Nation ten years.

We made the run in 1893 but didn't get a claim, so went back to Canadian.

In 1887, while we were living in the Chickasaw Nation, there was almost an outbreak with the Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians. They had been drawing rations for several more hundred people than they had and the Government had cut down on their rations so they all painted up and hid their guns out. General Sheridan called in all of their Chiefs and told them that had better be the last outbreak or he would kill all of them.

We then went up into the Pottawatomie country near Tecumseh and stayed there for a while, then went over on the North Canadian River to a sawmill run by a man named Lesk Ball. We had come in covered wagons and had brought several cattle with us. This is where

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my mother died, November 2, 1892, and she was buried at the Maud Cemetery.

We stayed there at Canadian for a while and I left my father there with a friend to take care of the cattle and I went down in the Choctaw Nation and leased a place near Newberry and was going back after Father, but a big snow came and I was delayed. Just as soon as I could I went and when I got up there almost to where he was, there had been some fencing done, so I asked a man there how to get around to the house. He told me that my father was dead and had been buried three days. They had written to me but mail service was so poor that I didn't get the letter until after I got back home. He died January 15, 1895, and is buried by Mother.

I went back and lived there at Newberry until 1903; lived in a log house with dirt floor, board door, shutters and a stick and dirt chimney.

I moved from there then over on the Atwood Ranch and worked on the ranch. I leased sixty acres of land

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and the ranchman gave me all I made on it to look after his cattle which were about five hundred head.

We lived in a two-room log house here that had a porch all around except on one side and it had a rock chimney. It had just one outside door and where you went in you would have to almost back out. I lived there two years; we lived around there until 1928, at which time we came to Faxon, then in 1932 we came to Elk City in Beckham County and have been here ever since.

We have raised nine children, five are dead now and four living and all were born in the Indian Territory.