

HARKINS, LAVINIA MURRAY

INTERVIEW

#12084

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Journalist,  
Nov. 11, 1957.

An Interview With Lavinia Murray  
Harkins, Fort Towson, Oklahoma.

I was born in Denton County, Texas, 1872.

My father's name was Bill Murray, and mother's name was Martha Murray.

I think that my father and mother were both native Texans. Father died and was buried in Denton County Texas where I was born and raised and lived until his death, when Mother rented our farm and came over to visit relatives at old Shawneetown, south of the present town of Idabel in McCurtain County and just stayed on. Mother died here at my home and was buried in the Swink cemetery.

It was at old Shawneetown that I met and married James H. Harkins, a little while before I was seventeen years old. He was a three-quarters Choctaw Indian. I am all white. I do not know what his father's name was, but his mother was a Garland, I believe. He was raised an orphan by old Mr. "Dick" Crowder who lived down below Garvin but later moved up into the west part of Choctaw County, in the Soper community or what is Choctaw County now. It was Kiamichi County then and there was no Soper either. It was just a

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bald prairie then where Soper is now. I mean that there were no houses or fencing on it. There was grass stirrup deep to a horse.

On that prairie all over where Soper is now, there roamed a world of cattle and it was no unusual sight to see a herd of deer out there grazing, especially in the evening, and prairie chickens were thicker on that prairie than quail are now anywhere in Oklahoma I guess.

We moved up there with "Uncle Dick" Crowder, and lived on one of his places for several years. He settled and improved a lot of land and a number of places up there, after he got into some trouble with some full blood Indians down in what is now McCurtain County. He was afraid they would kill him and indeed I believe they did attempt it perhaps more than once. But he was a good man and a good citizen. No man had more friends than did Uncle Dick Crowder.

We lived near Soper with Uncle Dick for a few years and then moved to Doaksville and my husband clerked in the Wilson Brothers store. Johnny and Willie Wilson and someone else owned that store, but I have forgotten who that other partner was, but I distinctly remember my husband and Mrs. Belle Wilson, Johnny's wife, putting to rout some full blood

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Indians who had come in there to "get" Johnny and Willie. It had been about twenty years since the "Wilson War", but some of the younger generation would get "likkered up" and remember stories of it, as their parents had told them and they would strike out to get revenge on the Wilson boys. Many a time did my husband guard Johnny to his home, down south of what is now Swink, to keep some Indians from ambushing him.

One night the Indians had threatened to come and kill Johnny, and my husband and John Lick sat up all night and patrolled the place and guarded him.

Back when I came to the Indian Territory about 1889, the Indians over here were pretty bad about killing each other, especially when they got drunk, but they didn't bother white people much, because they usually just quarreled among themselves. The Wilsons were mixed breeds and the full blood Choptaws undertook to run them out of the country and did. They attacked the Wilsons at the family home and store at the water mill on Clear Creek and wounded Johnny in the knee and ran the family over into Texas, where they remained about six months before they dared to come back.

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At the time that my husband clerked in the Wilson Brothers store at Doaksville, that store was west and a little north of the old Fort Towson and we lived about six miles down Doaksville Creek on the site of the original Doaksville, which was supposed to have been the earliest settlement of southeastern Indian Territory. It was settled by a couple of brothers named Doaks who had been Indian traders among the Indians in Mississippi and who came out here about ten years ahead of the general influx of the Choctaws, with their goods and established a trading post on this little creek at a military post. This little creek was named Doaksville Creek and the trading post was called Doaksville. Doaksville Creek runs about a half mile east of my present home which is about three miles east and a half north from Fort Towson, and flows south into Red River. At the old site of the Doaksville trading post are the "Witch Holes", which were the pet superstitions of a lot of Indians. At night one could frequently see lights in the witch holes. The old timers called it "Fox fire".

One old Indian told me that he had killed several men and that he threw one of them into one of the witch holes because he knew this man would never be found, as the wells were

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supposed to be bottomless. He also told me that the reason that the people moved the town to the west of the Fort Towson when it was established in 1824, was because they believed that the chalybeate water there was what was causing so many deaths. This big chalybeate spring gushes up at the edge of the creek. The water is hard and leaves a yellow sediment upon vessels that it is allowed to stand in and the Indians decided that that was evidence of poison in the water.

Colonel Sim N. Folsom told me that there was a large cemetery at Old Doaksville but I lived there about three years and never saw a sign of the cemetery.

Colonel Folsom told me, too, that the military post was on Doaksville Creek for only about one year and then it was moved to the east bank of Gates Creek on a high bluff, overlooking the creek about a hundred feet below. But he did not tell me the name of the first military post.