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Ben A. Norwood.

SOME SHORT STORIES OF THE EARLY DAYS IN THE INDIAN TERRITORY.

From a personal interview with the subject.

506 East Brown Street, Hugo, Okla.

Hazel B. Greene, Research Worker.

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Date of birth, Dec, 22 1867

Place of birth---Youbet, Mississippi.

Father-----A. A. Norwood.

Mother-----Harriet Norwood.

White.

Note by Research Worker.

In a personal interview, from time to time, but more just today, I gathered the following stories, and tell them just as he told them to me.

I happen to know the widow Willis mentioned in this story, also who was accused of killing her several husbands, but I have withheld the names for fear of offending living members of her family, who are very good friends of mine. But will furnish names if required.

Hazel B. Greene.

## Ben A. Norwood

I was born in Youbet, Mississippi, I don't know what County Youbet was in perhaps in Tippah County anyway we lived in Tippah County, and in 1877, we went in a wagon sixty-five miles to Memphis, Tennessee, to take the train to Paris Texas. We were moving out there. There was a big family of us. Eight in all. We left the hotel and we noticed that one of the boys was missing. Hiram, He was nineteen years old. We looked and looked for him. Father went back to the hotel, and didn't find him, then had the police looking for him. Then we decided that he had just backed our and meant to go back home, and stay with some of the kin folks. So we decided to just go on. So on the train we loaded, the whole brood of us. And there was Hiram, in a seat, fast asleep.

He said afterward that he was determined not to get left, and just got on the train.

In 1886, I came over into the Indian Territory, and worked around as a hired hand on farms,. There were a few big farms in this country then. The most of the people were Indians, and had small places cleared for gaddens and "Tom Fuller" patches. Then the more propserous ones had lots of stock, and I worked caring for them, I was just a day laborer.

My parents came over here in this country in 1888. They came by wagon, from Detroit Texas, near Paris,. They crossed the Red river at the old Oakes ferry at Frogville. Frogville was composed of a store,

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about like that. Now that was the Tom Oake's ferry.

The Everidges, Willis's and Oakes were among the higher class of people here in that day and time, and had large farms under cultivation.

Father built a double log house on the Everridge farm near Everridge Lake, and lived there two years,. Then he said he was going back to civilization, so he took the family, except me, and went back to Texas. I went over to Detroit and married Miss Alpha McClure, forty eight years ago, brought her over here to live, and we raised a family of six children. I own my home down close to Frogville now, but live in Hugo. When I settled down there, what is now Hugo was then bald prairie.

I lived and worked on the Willis farm about 25 miles S. E. of what is now Hugo. It was a large farm and belonged to a widow by the name of Willis. A man by the name of Christian had this farm rented, he and his brother Bill,. Then they sub-rented it to about four other families, among them were two tenants named Emmet and Hayes. More of them later.

Jim Christian decided to marry Mrs. Willis, or she decided to marry him. So he got me to go with him to get married. He was afraid to go alone. He asked me and my young lady friend to go along. He also told me to be sure and bring my gun, which I did. The wedding was to take place at noon but the preacher did not come. We waited till one o'clock and he still didn't come. So we, as many of us as could,

down east of the home of the bride to Wheelock Academy.

It is Wheelock academy now, I'm not sure it was a school then, but anyway I know there was a preacher there, O, Yes, I nearly forgot, about thirty horsemen escorted the bridal group, and they were all well armed with pistols, shotguns and such. He, Christian, had had word from another suitor of his bride-to-be that if he (Christian) came up there to her house again that he was going to kill him and tie him to his horse's tail and drag him off. So he had this bunch of friends along to protect him. They got married, and on their return, as they went through the town of Doakville, a shot was fired from, or near a house. They thought sure they were attacked, and it was pretty exciting for a while, till they found that they were mistaken. A man was shooting at a rabbit or something. They continued on to the home of the bride, where a wedding supper was prepared and they danced all night. The disgruntled suitor never showed up and the bridegroom was safe, That is he was safe for a while.

Six weeks or two months later one Monday morning, when they knew Christian would be down at the farm, Emmett and Hays, the two renters, started trouble. They had a load of cotton, going to the old Fulson gin, at the mouth of Kiamich river, where it empties into Red river. They and Christian had had some trouble, probable about the cotton, so they employed a boy to drive the load of cotton, and they walked along behind the wagon, watching for Christian. Sure enough, Jim and Bill [redacted] overtook them. Then the shooting begun and when the smoke

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Bill had attempted to get away. They shot his horse from under him, also holes in his clothes, and ran him about a quarter of a mile, but did not wound him. Neither were Emmett or Hays wounded. They proceeded on to the gin, which was a few miles east of the Willis farm, as if nothing had happened, and did not tell it; got their cotton ginned, before the news got to the gin, and started home. That night Emmett and Hayes disappeared, and nobody in this country every heard of them again. We just don't know what became of them.

Now this Willis farm was down on Red river near Frogville,. Mrs. Willis lived about 20 miles North and West of it, Doakville was about six miles East of her home. After Christian was killed, the disappointed suitor married the widow and was himself killed some time later, shot to death in the depot at the Railroad station of Goodland. Three Indians and a negro were accused of the killing and were kept in the Paris Texas jail for months, but escaped punishment for some reason or other.

The men folks carried their guns to church on Sundays. Things were pretty wild here then. Every man carried a gun, in six months after I came here, I carried one myself.

The most of the Indians, fullbloods, I mean, had only small log cabins, usually, two rooms, one for a living room and the other for a kitchen, built some distance apart, and a back porch on each to hang harness, saddles etc on, with no door opening our on it.

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The most of the Indians would dig snake root in the summer and spring and fall, and trap and hunt in winter. They would dig snake root all the week and then all load onto their little ponies each with his budget of snake root, and blanket and skillet, and ride in single file to the store, Never side by side. They'd trade their snakeroot, or hides, for food and whatever else they desired. Then they would camp for a night near the store, and go on their way home next morning. They would bring their blankets and wrap themselves in them and lie on the ground to sleep. They usually had a number of children along and usually carried them on their backs, supported by their blankets. They nearly always had a bunch of mongrel dogs along too. Couldn't leave them at home, any more than they could leave the children.

It had to be Extremely cold for them not to be barefooted. They kept a specially trained dog to catch terrapins with.

Arbors were built under which to hold their meetings in summer. They would load their bedding, children, chickens, etc, in wagons, drive along a fat beef or two and go to the meeting ground and camp, sometimes for weeks, and hold church services. Sometimes they had interpreters. The Choctaw Indian preacher would deliver a part of the sermon in Choctaw and the interpreter would translate it for the benefit of white people who were there, so they could understand the sermon.

A beef would be slaughtered, and hung or laid up, just anywhere out of reach of the dogs, and lay there through sunshine, rain or any kind of weather till it was all used up. Some said they preferred the meat tainted.

The men all wore long hair like the women and all wore blankets in daytime and slept in them at night. If it got very hot they laid the blankets off. They wore shirts and dresses of bright colored calicoes. Very full skirts, with ruffles of contrasting colors, and very long dresses too.

As a class I thought the Choctaws took their religion more seriously than any people I ever saw. More earnest too. A lot more than you see this day and time, unless you can go away back in the hills to a full blood camp meeting.

The first Indian Funeral cry I ever witnessed was at Horse Prairie about 15 miles S. E. of Hugo. It impressed me as the most solemn thing I ever saw. Between sermons at this camp meeting. Any one, sometimes several, would go off separately into the woods, and pile up leaves to represent a grave, and go and mourn over it. Sometimes there would be a group mourning over the grave, and sometimes a special day would be set for a sort of memorial service,. Friends would gather for miles around and camp there for days, and hold an "Indian Funeral Cry."

Delicious dishes were prepared by catching terrapins, rolling them in wet clay and roasting them in a bed of coals until done, just like roasting potatoes or corn. Then the dried clay is removed and the shell of the terrapin, and they say the meat was most delicious.