

ODOM, SARAH.

INTERVIEW

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

ODOM, SARAH

INTERVIEW

12561

Field Worker's name L. W. Wilson

This report made on (date) December 17th, 1937

1. Name Mrs. Sarah Odom, half-breed Creek Indian

2. Post office Address 1219 Holden St., Muskogee, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 1219 Holden Street

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month April Day 24th Year 1850

5. Place of birth West bank of Arkansas River, near Ft. Smith,
Arkansas.

6. Name of Father James Akin Place of birth Kentucky
at beginning of Civil War.
Other information about father with Creeks headed for Kansas/

7. Name of Mother Lida Davis Akin Place of birth Alabama
Other information about mother a Creek Indian

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 _____

L. W. Wilson
Journalist,
December 27th, 1937

Interview with Mrs. Sarah Odom
1219 Holden Street,
Muskogee, Okla.

Father: James Aklin, a white man, born in Kentucky.

Mother: Lida Davis Aklin, a Creek Indian, born in Alabama.

Mrs. Odom: Born on the west bank of the Arkansas River,
near Fort Smith, Arkansas, April 24th, 1850.

She will be eighty-eight years old on her next
birthday and is a half breed Creek Indian.

Removal of the Creeks
to the Indian Territory.

In Alabama, the parents of Mrs. Odom were born, reared
and married. They like other Creeks were farmers, had plenty
of land to cultivate, because the land was owned jointly by
the Creek Tribe and a man could cultivate all the land he
cared to.

Civil War

Many of the better educated Creeks kept in close touch
with the brewing of the Civil War and they in turn talked
over the affair with the rank and file of the tribe. None
of them cared about this war and said it was a white man's
trouble and not theirs. Some of the wealthier Creeks owned

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slaves and they believed in slavery. Many preachers and teachers did not believe in slavery, and the Creeks who were just poor, old plain Indian farmers had to only listen to and act on their own judgment and this set was divided between the North and the South.

Moneys due the Creeks were held up and some said the reason was because they were afraid the money would go to help the South whip them and this alone made some of them feel the Government was correct and if they fought with the North, maybe they would get the annuities due them.

I was only eleven years old, and I was living at North Fork Town on the Texas Road near the present town of Texana, when Albert Pike came from Park Hill to meet the head men of the Creeks, Choctaws and Chickasaws to get them to fight with the South. I remember the whole village talked of nothing for days except to discuss what must they do.

Some of the Creeks said, " we will go and sign up to fight with the South" but my father was one of the many who would not abide by the treaty and fought with the North. The Creeks really had a civil war among themselves and the Northern Creeks won at first and then finally the South whipped the Northern Creeks and they headed for Kansas.

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My father was with the Creeks who headed for Kansas and I never saw nor heard of my father anymore. He was either killed fighting or froze to death enroute to Kansas, because the Creeks fled to Kansas during the winter of 1861 and it's said that many of them died of cold and hunger before they reached Kansas.

Mother and I never left the Indian Territory but took refuge under the wings of the Northern Army stationed at Fort Gibson.

Reconstruction Days
after the Civil War

The whole Cherokee and Creek Nations were in a pitiful condition after the War.

Meetings were held by the Government and by the headmen of the Creeks. The Creeks were so torn by civil strife that it was almost impossible for them to agree to anything, although the War was ended, but they were made to understand that they must free their slaves and give them rights and give up some of their land to the Sac and Fox, Kickapoo and other wild Indians. The land was to be paid for by the Government. The Creeks agreed to do all these things.

During the days of reconstruction, Mrs. Odom lived around and near the village of North Fork, Fishertown and

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at points on Little Elk Creek.

Her first home after the War was in a dugout. Father having lost his life in the War, it was hard for herself and her mother to make a livelihood, but game, wild fruits and berries were plentiful and by raising a patch of corn and some potatoes they managed to exist.

While living in the dugout on Little Elk Creek, their meals were cooked on open fires and in ovens built of rock.

On this creek was built a toll bridge by the Drew's. Mrs. Nannie Drew operated the bridge and also cared for emigrants who traveled the old Texas Road.

We lived for two years in our dugout home and then moved to the North Fork neighborhood on Garr Creek and Sandy Creek at Standing Rock near the South Canadian River. We were then four miles from Fishertown, four miles from Texana. Our new home was a one-room log cabin, with puncheon floors, the windows and doors were made of boards, the boards being split out with a frow. These doors and windows were opened and shut by strips of hides used for hinges.

Fishertown was a little village of possibly one hundred people. Mr. Henry Fisher and Bill Fisher were the founders of the village. Henry ran the store and Bill was the blacksmith and wagon maker. In Henry Fisher's store was the post-

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office and he was also the post-master. The second post-master was George Grayson. George Grayson ran the Inn. Boo Scott and the Wadsworth and the Wells, Carrs, Butler and Stidham families were notable at Fishertown in those days.

Miss Fisher and Miss Wadsworth taught school and taught in the Creek language. The church was of Baptist Faith. In the summer, meeting was held under a brush arbor and in the winter time at the Old Stage Stand near the Inn conducted by Bob Grayson.

North Fork Town had no post-office. New Blackhawk ran the store. George Delair was the black-smith and John Collins cared for the emigrants that preferred to eat at his place rather than to camp. The Gentry family was very notable around the village. Scott Gentry later operated a ferry across the Arkansas River east of the present town of Haskell. He is buried about a quarter of a mile east of the present highway bridge across the Arkansas east of Haskell.

While living at Fishertown, the M.K.& T. Railroad was going to build through the Indian Territory and surveying parties came through the country, surveying the right-of-way which was in accord with the treaty the Creeks had made with the United States. The Creeks wanted no railroads, sensing it meant white people would invade their domain. However, they

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finally agreed to the railroad being built.

The first party of surveyors was massacred by the Creeks at North Fork Village. Some United States Marshal tried to apprehend them but could find out nothing and finally agreed that if more men were sent they would not be molested.

The second party showed up in due time and the Creeks at North Fork kept quiet but the ones at Fishertown took the scalps of this second party. I knew some of the Creeks who helped to kill them. They are all dead now so I don't mind telling their names. There were the Grayson Boys, Stidham Boys, Gentry Boys and others. This second killing caused lots of excitement and the Principal Chief and other officials of the Creek Government signed a treaty or an agreement that they would protect the next party if it took all the Light-Horsemen in the nation to do it.

The third party came through, and were protected as promised. It was about two years after the third party surveyed through the Creek Nation before construction of the road was begun.

With the construction of the railroad the town of Eufaula sprang up. Eufaula at one time was the largest town on the railroad. I remember well the first train that came into Eufaula. It was a work train with three or four cars, a little

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engine and the cars were loaded with ties and material for the building of the road, further south.

Indians, white people, men, women and children all met the train. It was wonderful to them. I was so thrilled I just can't tell all the details about it. I remember none of the women and children would go within a quarter of a mile of it and few of the men. Everybody was afraid the thing would blow up and kill all of them.

I remember Mother and I did very well until they would ring the bell and start blowing the whistle and then we really did get scared.

Henry Fisher from Fishertown built a little slab house at Eufaula and started the first store. At first, his supplies came by wagon train from Fort Smith, Ark., until the railroad started hauling in freight. This store grew and he soon handled a full line of everything. The next store was owned and operated by John Hadsworth. The first barber was Dean Collins from North Fork Town, his father had been a barber at North Fork Town in the earlier days.

My Grandmother operated a stage stand at Eufaula. The stage ran from Eufaula to Fort Smith, Ark. The Cook Boys stole two teams from Grandmother while she operated the Stage Stand. Frank Cook and Bill Cook were well known to

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her for they were cow punchers and had worked for some of our relatives before they really became outlaws. The father of Jesse, Frank and the other James Boys was an uncle of my Grandmother. Daddy James lived near Coffeyville, Kansas. He was a nice man and in no sense accountable for the acts of the sons. Before any of the boys were outlaws, they used to punch cattle out on the F. S. Ranch run by Capt. Severs. I knew them well and used to see them when they came to Eufaula and Checotah to get cattle from the train and drive them back to the ranch.

I saw the town of Checotah start long after the town of Eufaula. It was more at first just a place to unload cattle. The railroad put in a switch and the ranchers built a large splitrail corral to unload cattle in until they could get them started to the ranches.

Bob Gentry was one of the first merchants at Checotah. I remember some of the cow punchers who used to unload cattle at Checotah, Ed Hart, John Black, Alex Todd and his brother Sam, George Elliott, Sr., Frank Cook, Jake Simmons, the Dalton brothers, Gentry Brothers, James Brothers, the Cook Brothers. Checotah is comparatively a new town which sprang up in what we call pasture days.

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My first marriage was fifty-one years ago, to a man named Sterling Flood. He died in 1935 and is buried in the cemetery at Checotah. My next marriage was to Mr. Odom. It was of short duration on account of objections to my children and I only lived with him six months when we separated. I guess I was too old to live with anyone except my children and these little grand-children.

Indian Cooking

Berries were eaten only during the berry season as no canning was done as at present. The first canned fruits and berries were put in tin cans. They were cooked thoroughly then placed in the cans, the tin lid was placed on the can and then we poured scalding wax around the lid to keep out all air.

Such vegetables as potatoes and turnips were buried in the ground, pumpkins were stored in corn cribs with the corn to prevent their freezing. Skinned corn or hominy as we call it now, we would shell the best corn from the cob, (white corn), place this corn in large kettles, cover it with water and add wood ashes and cook until the skin slipped off the corn. We had no lye which is the reason we used ashes. We baked green corn in the fireplace by taking the ear, shucks and all and covering them with ashes and let it roast until it

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was ready to eat.

We had soup and sometimes dried venison, deer or buffalo meat was sliced and placed in a kettle of water. Potatoes, corn (green corn) were added so this soup was something like the present day soup. I never saw a tomato until I was fifty years old.

Our bread was made of meal (corn bread). The meal was secured by beating the corn in a mortar with a pestle. We finally came into possession of a hand grinder to grind our corn. This corn meal was mixed in the salt water and the shortening in some instances was a butter from hickory nut kernels, but lard was usually always on hand, for hogs ran wild in the woods. After the dough was made, we placed it in iron skillets with iron covers and placed in the ashes to bake.

Our food once prepared was usually eaten, if it could be handled with the hands, from the pots and skillets, but soups were eaten out of bowls either bought at the store or in some instances bowls were made from clay and baked to harden them. You could not cook in bowls made of clay as we were afraid of breaking them.

Forks were usually sharp sticks and spoons were made of wood whittled out with a hunting knife.

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Indian Dyes and Paints

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The skins, cloth, arrows and all articles nearly, that were used by the Indians, were either dyed or painted. These dyes were made by preparing berries, barks, roots and herbs.

Poke berries dyed red; Sumac made yellow; Oak Bark made different shades of blue; Indigo also was used to make all shades of blue.

The Indians painted their faces, bodies, weapons, and even their horses, in many instances. These paints were nothing more than dyes, except on their faces they also used soft stones and clays as well as soft slate to make a blue black.

Indian Clothing

Many times Mother would give me about twenty pounds of cotton at night as we sat around the fireplace and I had to pick out the seed that night before I went to bed. There were no cotton gins in those days. The cotton was spun into thread with a spinning wheel. After the thread was spun and dyed in one of the bark solutions, it was then put on shuttles and run thru the loom and made into cloth. Later some sheep were raised and the wool was used in place of cotton.

The Creek women and men wore underwear. The woman always wore long dresses, wrapped themselves in shawls and wore

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moccasins and just around home they went barefoot. Stockings were unknown but Creek women wore leggings made of skins in place of stockings. No hats were worn by the Creek women.

The men wore caps made of coon skins, skunk hides and some had caps made of bear skins. The shirts and trousers were all homespun, that is made on the loom. Some Creek men wore moccasins and some made shoes out of hides which they had tanned. The soles of these shoes were put on with wooden pegs. My father used to make me whittle out these pegs for him when we lived at North Fork Town before the Civil War. The shoes were sewed with squirrel skins and later with thread waxed with beeswax. The beeswax was from the hives of wild bees in the trees. To get wild honey which was our only honey, it was necessary to cut a bee tree and rob the bees of their honey.

An awl was made from metal. A nail sharpened was good; however, they could be bought at the store. One would ask for a pegging awl as that was what they called them in English.

When a woman was all dressed up in her homespun dress and shawl of bright colors, leggings and moccasins she wore beads, ear-rings, bracelets, fancy combs and jewelry of all

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kinds. Sometimes the Creek women made beads from berries, clay and tiny shells. Beads were always available at all stores and trading posts, as well as all kinds of cheap jewelry.

The children never wore anything except long shirts until they were at least twelve years old.

When women wore hoops and bustles and rats in their hair. I never wore rats in my hair but I have worn hoops and bustles and hip pads, and they were home made. All stores carried hoops, bustles, hip pads and rats but we used to take hickory saplings, split them and made them into hoops and then with a cloth strap made at home we fastened these hoops together and then fastened them to a belt made of the same kind of straps and fastened the whole affair around the waist. Later we suspended them from our shoulders.

We took long blue stem grass and plaited it so as to make it hollow and then filled the hollow with grass and this made a bustle when attached to home made straps and fastened around the waist. We could make them any size. Hip pads were made in the same way.

Mighty few Indian women used "rats" in their hair. White women liked them but they were made like the bustles or if they went to the store and bought one it was made out of wire.

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Allotments of Land

My mother and all of her children received allotments. My allotment is Number 2357 under the name of Sarah Hood as I was married to Mr. Hood, when the allotments were made.

I received a hundred and sixty acres in the vicinity of Standing Rock and about four miles from old Fishertown and North Fork Town. I disposed of my allotment at the insistence of my children. It bears the Number 719 and Sarah Hood's Number 2357. My allotment certificate bears my name, Sarah Hood, Number 2357 and the Number 719.

Schools, Tribal Laws and Customs

The Creeks had their peculiar form of government different from others of the Five Civilized Tribes. We used the same kind of government as we had used in Georgia and Alabama. We had three towns as we called them, Muskogee Town at present Muskogee, Okmulgee Town now Okmulgee, and Coweta Town now Coweta. At each town was a Town King, and these three Town Kings constituted the House of Kings and there was also a House of Warriors selected by the people of each town. We had what you might call today a law-making body like Congress. The Kings were Senators and the Warriors were Representatives. We had a Principal Chief. His duties were similar to that of our governor. These

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bodies of government made all the laws and cared for all the interests of the Creek Indians and handled business of the Creeks with the United States Government.

within each town were District Judges, Prosecuting Attorneys and instead of a Sheriff of each county as we have today, the men who enforced the laws were called Light-Horsemen. The man in command of the Light-Horsemen was known as a Captain, and the rest were assistants. The women of the Creeks had no voice in the government and did not vote. Sometimes the Creek men voted orally, other times the voter would tell the clerk how he wanted to vote and the clerk would record his vote. In order for a man to be a legal voter in the Creek Nation, he must be twenty-one years old, a member of the tribe and a male citizen. White people or others than Creeks had no voice in the making of the Creek Laws. Men of white blood and members of other Indian Tribes could vote if they had been made citizens.

Some of the Principal Chiefs were Perryman, Childers, Checote, Esparhechar Tiger and the last Chief before Statehood was Pleasant Porter.

Throughout the Creek Nation were many schools and Missions. I never went to school in my life.

The Creek Orphan Asylum at Okmulgee and the Makusukey

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School was at Wewoka and the ~~W~~ahaka School was close to Wewoka.

Near the present town of Leonard, then Wealaka, the ~~home of Chief Pleasant Porter~~ was the Wealaka School.

At Sapulpa there was a school for the Creeks,

On the Pecan Creek west of Arkansas Town (Muskogee) there was a negro school.

At Coweta Town (Coweta) was a Creek School.

At Eufaula, I. T., now Eufaula, Okla., was a Creek Indian School.

My children attend Bacone College northwest of the present town of Muskogee.

Ranches

I lived in the days when people grazed cattle through the Territory from Texas to Kansas because there were no railroads, but this ceased after the "Katy" or M. K. T. R. R., was built through this country. At Eufaula, I. T., cattle were received from Texas and driven to different ranches to be fattened and then would be reloaded or driven on to market. I have watched the cowboys about town waiting for the train to arrive with the cattle so they could unload them. They would loiter about the wagon yards, depot, barber shop and the corral *

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made of split rails. Some cowboys would water out of the creek, filling large hogheads with wooden spigots in the bottom so the water could be released at will to fill large troughs made of hollow logs from which cattle could drink.

I have seen carcasses of cows which had died enroute dragged from the cars and given to the Indians to eat and young calves born enroute were usually given away for they were too weak to be driven to the range miles away. Some of the cattle were headed for the F. S. Ranch. The F. S. Ranch was owned by Captain Fred Severs at Okmulgee.

I heard the cowboys talk of the Gentry Ranch, Miller Ranch, Half Moon, Circle Bar, Turner, Spaulding, Blackstone, Lynch, Choate, The 16 and the Mule Shoe.

Ghost Towns

I never traveled much, just lived around Fishertown and North Fork most all my life until the railroad (M.K.T.) was built and these two places finally died out. The people all moved away to the new towns along the railroad.

Comment by Journalist

Mrs. Odom is a remarkable old lady to have no education other than that acquired in a practical way. She talks the Creek Language fluently and her English is fairly good,

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but it seemed hard for her to tell her life's story and experiences in English, often saying, "Oh! if I could tell it in Creek, I could tell it so much better." She could have told much of the Green Peach War, The Snake Uprising, of Stage Routes, Salt Springs, Old Road and Trails, Hunters, transportation and drivers, happenings in Creek but not in English, more than I have written.

Mrs. Odom has the appearance of a white woman, more so than that of a Creek. She is by no means old fashioned as one might expect but has kept abreast with the times as much as one could expect for a lady her age.

It's women like her that have braved the storms of hardships, a native born Oklahoman eighty-seven years of age, surely merits attention of the present generation, for she like other women have brought children into this world to fight the battles of life and to face the stern responsibilities of life and make this the great State that it is today, with its churches, schools, coal mines, oil developments and homes, ^{of} all of which we are justly proud.

We certainly pay tribute to Mrs. Odom for all the kindness and good she has done for us and hope that she lives to see many more birthdays if it is God's will and when her earthly work is finished that she will be rewarded with a crown of glory and life everlasting.