

HARRISON, WILLIAM R.

INTERVIEW

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Form A-(S-149)

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BIOGRAPHY FORM

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name Maurice R. Anderson

This report made on (date) May 26, 1937

1. Name Mr. William R. Harrison

2. Post Office Address Wynnewood, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) \_\_\_\_\_

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month December Day 25 Year 1867

5. Place of birth Alabama

6. Name of Father J. T. Harrison Place of birth Alabama

Other information about father Deceased

7. Name of Mother Jane X Place of birth Alabama

Other information about mother Deceased

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 \_\_\_\_\_

AN Interview with Mr. William R. Harrison, Wynnewood, Oklahoma.

By - Maurice R. Anderson, Field Worker.

May 26, 1937.

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I came to the Indian Territory in 1877. My father and I left Alabama in a wagon, working two mules and two oxen. We were seven weeks on the road. We came to old Mill Creek in the Chickasaw Nation and my father rented some land from Governor Harris. We didn't have much money, so to keep ends meeting my father got a job hauling freight from Denison, Texas, to Mill Creek, and I did the farming while he was gone on these trips. He would work the two mules to haul the freight with, and that left the two old oxen for me to farm with. When father wasn't hauling freight we would use both teams in the field.

I remember there was a government stage line from Caddo to Fort Sill. I have seen the Indians hauling freight from Caddo to Fort Sill. There were forty-two wagons in this train, and there were six little mules to each wagon. A soldier from Fort Sill was the boss over this wagon train. I remember one of their trips they camped at Governor Harris' place one night and Governor Harris gave them a steer to eat. There were several white men at Governor Harris' place and

Governor Harris wanted to show the white men how the Comanche Indians ate. I was about eleven years old, and, boy-like, I wanted to see them myself. The Indians killed the steer and skinned it. They ate every bit of it except the heart and they never cooked it. After they got the steer skinned they were like a pack of wolves. I was standing next to the soldier who was boss over them and an Indian cut a big chunk off of the steer's liver and began eating it. I said to the soldier: "Why don't they cook the steer?" He said; "Why don't a horse cook hay?" Right then, I saw it didn't pay to ask questions.

My father got a contract putting up hay for the government and he would get an order for so many tons to be stacked at some stage stop between Mill Creek and Whitehead Hill. We would cut this hay and haul it to the place where they wanted it stacked. Some soldiers would come along and measure the stack and tell how many tons of hay there were in each stack. My father would say, "they measured the stacks and guessed how many tons there were in each".

On this stage line from Caddo to Fort Sill, they worked four horses and the driver would be sitting on top of the coach and the coaches looked like they were under-slung, or like a sway-back horse. They were putting up hay along this stage line near Cherokee Town on the Washita River north of where Wynnewood is now and I remember seeing them pass. The horses would be going in a long trot. Their schedule time was about ten miles per hour; they were like trains sometimes late. You could tell when they were late, the driver would be crowding the horses and making them do all they could. When they run into a stage stop, where they were supposed to change horses, another driver would have his horses harnessed up and ready to go. As soon as the old driver could drop the traces and run his horses out a new driver would run his horses in, hook the traces, and climb to the driver's seat, pop his whip and away they went.

When the railroad started building through Wynnewood, I was working for Mr. Noah Lael, who lived north of Wynnewood a few miles. Mr. Lael was a big cattleman and

farmer who took the contract to clear the right-of-way through the river bottoms north of Wynnewood, and another young man, who was also working for Mr. Lael, and I were given the job of cutting the trees off of the right-of-way through the river bottom. We had to saw the trees within six inches of the ground, and sometimes we would have to lay on our stomach to use the saw. We used oxen to drag the trees off with.

-My father built the first hotel at Wynnewood.

It was an old two story building made out of lumber hauled from Stringtown, and the foundation was made out of oak logs.

When the railroad company started laying the steel there were about one hundred and fifty Irishmen working on the job. My father had the contract to feed them. After my mother died, my father married again and I have seen my step-mother boil a ten gallon wash pot full of eggs at one meal for the railroad men.

The U. S. Marshals would come through here taking prisoners to Fort Smith, Arkansas. They would haul them

in wagons and if they had too many to haul they would drive some of them, handcuffed to a long chain. They would line the prisoners up in two's and run a chain between them. I remember one time after I had been working for Mr. Lael, two U. S. Marshal's, Heck Thomas, and Mr Mashon, camped at Governor Harris' place one night and I happened to be there at the time. They were taking three men to Fort Smith to face murder charges. I was acquainted with all three men, their names were, Mr. Lamb, Albert Odell, and a negro called "Bullet". The next morning before they left, Odell gave me his spurs, and said, "I won't need them where I am going". These three men were hung at Fort Smith, Arkansas.

Two men and I helped Mr. Lorance drive three hundred head of steers from Saint Joe, Texas, to Wynne-wood. That was my first cattle drive, and at that time I hoped it would be my last drive. Some people may think it is easy to sit on a horse and keep a herd of steers moving and keep them in line. It is hard work,

unless you are riding a cow horse that knows just what to do.

When I first went to work for Mr. Lael I had to haul the cotton to Mill Creek, that being the nearest gin at that time. Later Zack Gardner built a gin east of Pauls Valley on the Washita River. The only land that was fenced then was cultivated land and it was fenced with rail fences. I helped Mr. Lael put up the first wire fence around Wynnewood. We fenced a small pasture for his milk cows and work stock.

I made the Run in 1889. There were five of us made the Run together, and we were looking for some bottom land. I didn't want this prairie land and that was why I did not stake a claim.

I remember the time we were all riding horses and they were fast horses. We camped that evening on Cottonwood Creek east of Guthrie and the next morning we saddled our horses and were headed for home. We had ridden a few miles from where we had camped that evening before and we rode up on a man breaking ground with an ox team. I said to him, "You sure did do some fast traveling". He

laughed and said; "I have a fast team".

At one time I had the lease on several hundred acres of farming land. I never did much farming myself. I always had good tenants on these farms, and they have raised lots of corn and cotton, and I dealt in cattle and hogs for several years, but now I live at Wynnewood where I have been nearly all my life. I am now drawing the old age pension check.

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