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Form A-(S-149)

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

Field Worker's name Wylie ThorntonThis report made on (date) July 20, 1937Name William Henry HensonPost Office Address Tahlequah, Oklahoma, Loop RouteResidence address (or location) About four miles northDATE OF BIRTH: Month March Day 1 Year 1886Place of birth Yellville, ArkansasName of Father William Henry Henson Place of birth Middle, Tennessee.Other information about father Fought in the Civil War.Name of Mother Margaret Aplin Henson Place of birth Near Yellville, ArkansasOther information about mother Died October, 1879, in CrawfordCounty, Arkansas.

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         .

Wylie Thornton,  
Research Field Worker,  
Tahlequah, Oklahoma,  
July, 1937.

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The Experiences of William Henry Henson  
In the Indian Territory

I came here from Van Buren, Arkansas, on the 3rd day of March, in 1903, landing out here near Gideon, Oklahoma, where I rented a place for that year. I stayed there just that year. I made a fine crop but I decided I wanted to move to some other place, so I started out hunting a new location. I stopped at Melvin, Indian Territory, for about three months, then moved to Okmulgee for four months, then on down to Briartown where I stayed three months. Then right back here close to Hulbert or near the Shady Grove neighborhood where I found a community I surely liked and where I lived for thirteen years until 1917.

There in that location I really got acquainted with a lot of Indians and there is where I met the best Indian friend I ever knew. His name was Aaron Cary, a full blood Cherokee. That Indian would do anything in the world for me. I could get anything he had if I needed it. He surely loved me as a dear brother, and if he just had the least idea my family was in need, he was right there to see about them. You see I was ordained a Baptist Minister in

1906 and I was away a great deal and needed a good friend.

I had charge of some of the early churches and I had about as many Indian members as I did whites. I found them to be the most sincere supporters I had in all of my church work, even until now.

Some of the churches I worked for were Shady Grove Church for two years and the Woodard Church on the top of Greenleaf Mountain for five years. This latter place is about three miles west of Qualls, which is about twenty-five miles south of Tahlequah. Here I had practically no members except Cherokees, and they had the best behavior of any place I ever preached. The next place was down where the Carter school house is now. The name of that church was the Carter Baptist Church, and I preached for those people for four years. That's just nine miles south of Tahlequah toward the Cookson Hills. I believe the other church was the Swimmer Church down near Hulbert, about four miles northeast of Hulbert. I preached there several years, I just don't remember how long. The next church I remember was the Mount Zion Baptist Church just six miles west of Tahlequah and then since that time I have been preaching here and there holding Revivals - just any place I am pleased to go.

I did all this preaching in those early days going from place to place horse back and living on what those good old faithful Christian Indians donated as a free will offering.

What is the biggest noticeable social change in the people of those days to those of today? I would think the greatest and most noticeable change in social customs since the early days is the loss of respect for parents by the children, which I think is brought on by poor training that this younger generation is getting from their parents. This lack of home government means less respect for authority. Children who know no respect for home authority will respect outside authority, even less. No respect for authority means dishonesty.

I have known a few mean Indians. One was Tom Shade. There was an old time shooting match down there on the creek and this Tom Shade and Madison Cary, the brother of a good friend of mine, had a hard fist fight over the shooting match, and Madison Cary beat Tom Shade up with his bare fists; so just three days after that, Tom Shade went to Tahlequah and sold out a lot of stuff, such as cattle, etc., and bought two six shooters and a Winchester and a whole gallon of mean whiskey, a horse

and a saddle. He than started back toward Madison Cary's place near Hulbert, and on his way back he kidnapped Winn Cochran and took him along and told him, "Now, Winn, I am going to kill four men today. I intend to make you go along and see me kill three men, then I intend to kill you, making the four men to be killed by me today. I aim to kill Madison Cary first and salt him down so I can have Cary meat any time I want it." So he took Winn up to Price Cochran's place where Madison was helping gather corn. There with his prisoner he went right into the house, took a chair, and set it right in the middle of the front room, and began hollowing, "Oh-----Madison, come here." Madison was out at the barn throwing corn out of the wagon, and when he heard that drunken Tom Shade calling, he slipped into a back room and got his 45 colt's pistol, went back to the barn and hid a few minutes. He told me he had as hard a chill as he ever had in his life out there at the barn, but when the chill left him he said he decided to come and swap out with Tom Shade; so he slipped into the back door and came on into the door of the front room where Shade was sitting, and just held his gun in his hand and spoke to Shade, "What do you want, Tom?" Shade started to raise his

Winchester and Madison shot him in the neck and broke it, and Tom Shade slumped in his chair, dead. Anyhow, the kidnapped intended death victim escaped as well as Madison Cary and two other intended victims.

I heard a lot of objections to Indian Territory becoming a state and the reason seemed to be, the Indians felt it would mean a loss of self-government. The better advised Indians seemed to think that their people would likely sell their land as fast <sup>as</sup> they could and sell it too cheap, and likely be without homes within a short time. Also, they knew it would be a loss of game and fish privileges. The white cattlemen were already using up all the open range they enjoyed for their own stock.

We old timers made a living a lot easier back there in those days than we can now. I, for myself, can't blame the Indians for objecting to allotment.

The most devout Cherokee Indian who belonged to my church was Wilson Rider, a full blood Cherokee, converted in my church at the Big Greenleaf Baptist Church. I never will forget how wild that Indian was when I first began to try to see him about coming to my meetings. I would go to that Indian's home out there in the woods and when I rode up in

front of his house I would just get down and go right in, not even hollowing before getting down; and as I went into the house Wilson Rider would go out of the back door. But his wife wouldn't run like he did but would try to talk to me. I would preach to her all she could understand and finally this old seventy year old Indian, Wilson Rider, got tame and I succeeded after years of endeavor to convert him to believe on the Lord. And when he did that was the best Indian and the most influential for the Lord of any man in the Cookson mountains during all the rest of his life, and his whole family was converted to the Lord and his daughter is a minister for the Lord today. All the Cherokees that knew him during the rest of his life respected him and the good he did among other Indians from then on will never die.

The roads through the mountains back there were not roads. I rode horseback around the hills and when the road got too rough I would walk. Of course they had some wagon roads around the mountains but I don't see how they ever got over them. Of course they couldn't haul any loads to amount to anything.

The strangest thing I ever ran into among the Indians



was one time when I lived at Briartown. I was peddling medicine around in an old hack of a thing and I got about twelve miles northeast of home and I found a full blood family by the name of Wilson Girdie. The children had a lot of chips piled up in little piles in the front yard of the Girdie home and had set them on fire so the smoke would chase the gnats and mosquitoes away, and when I drove up all those Indian children ran off and hid in the woods back of the house. I kept hollowing, "Hello" and finally an Indian man came out and said, "Well, can't you come in?" and I said, "Well, don't let your dog bite me," and he said, "Well, he won't bite." After we had talked a little I told him I wanted to stay all night and he said I could. Then I asked for my horses to be fed and he replied that his boy would feed them, and he went around to the back of the house and began to ring a large bell. It was big enough for a church bell and I said, "What's that for?" and he answered, "Boy come." After a bit I heard a boy whoop away out in the woods and pretty soon the children came in and he talked Indian to them and they put my horses away and fed them something. We ate supper that night at ten o'clock. Next morning the Indian mother asked me through

her husband to turn my coffee cup down so she could tell my fortune. So I did and she told me three different things that came true that week. One was, I would hear of the death of a baby who was a close relative to my family. Sure enough, my wife received a letter that her baby niece had died in Western Oklahoma. The second was, somebody had been wanting to see me badly for some time, and the next Saturday when I went to town, an old friend who lived away down in Younger Bend came up and said, "Hey, there, I have been wanting to see you so bad for a long time." I asked, "What for?" and he said, "I want you to help me hunt some buried money in an old field down there near home." The third thing was, "Heap big money in a big field." I thought maybe someone would try to sell me a farm, but it was this fellow from Younger Bend wanting me to help him hunt money in a field.

This Wilson Girdie and I grew to be real friends. In fact, he attempted and really wanted to give me his homestead free of charge but he was unable to do so, and he wrote W. W. Hastings, Congressman at that time, about this matter. His wife wanted to give me all of her furniture and they wanted to move to some other place.

There were very few whites in the hills of the Indian Country at that time. I lost practically nothing trading and trusting the Indians, but I have lost about four thousand dollars trusting other people. For myself, I would like to call those good old days back again. It seems to me that God blessed the people of that age and I would enjoy seeing those days again.