

HENDERSON, WILLIE THEO ORLAND. INTERVIEW.

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HENDERSON, WILLIE THEO ORMAND. INTERVIEW.
 BIOGRAPHY FORM
 WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
 Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name Ethel B. Tackitt.
 This report made on (date) February 10, 1938. 1938

1. Name Willie Theo Ormand Henderson.
 2. Post Office Address Mrs. S. E. Henderson.
 3. Residence address (or location) Lone Wolf, Oklahoma.
 4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month October Day 2 Year 1892.
 5. Place of birth Texas.

6. Name of Father Walter Scott Ormand Place of birth Texas.
 Other information about father Typical farmer & pioneer.
 7. Name of Mother Martha Matilda Manning Place of birth Texas.
Ormand.
 Other information about mother Typical Texas
Pioneer family.

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 10.

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Ethel B. Tackitt,
Investigator,
Feb. 10, 1938.

An Interview With Willie Theo
Ormand Henderson, Lone Wolf, Okla.

I was born in Texas, October 2, 1892. My father, Walter Scott Ormand, was a native of Texas and when only a boy began working with cattle and, until the time of his marriage to my mother, was a cowboy. He told many stories of his experiences in driving cattle from Texas across the Indian Territory to be shipped in Kansas to the northern markets; among these were tales of the Chisholm Trail to Wichita, Kansas. My mother, Martha Matilda Manning Ormand, was also a native of Texas and a member of a pioneer family of that state. Having thus become well acquainted with the lands which were being opened for settlement, Father and a brother-in-law, Wm. Edward Ferrell, decided that they would move to the new country and get themselves homes in Greer County, so loading their families into covered wagons equipped with bedding and camping outfits they started from Bell County, Texas, driving several milk cows and calves and altogether

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about fifteen head of cattle. This was done at my mother's rather urgent request, as Father and Uncle Will thought they could buy cows in Greer County and that would be better than to try to drive them, but Mother said they could not get good milk cows off the range and they found that she was correct, as a range cow would hardly do more than feed her calf, the quality of her milk was so poor.

Father, remembering the high grass and the prairie fires which he had witnessed in his cowboy experiences in the country through which he expected to camp, tied a breaking plow to the side of our wagon and each night when the tents were stretched, he would plow a fire-guard, that is, several furrows around the camp, so in case of a prairie fire, it could burn off the grass around the tents before the raging flames could reach the camp; this was called "back-firing" and this precaution was practiced by many of the pioneer people. I remember quite clearly that a wagon belonging to some people in Washita County, who failed thus to protect themselves, was burned and numbers of people have lost their

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lives because of prairie fires sweeping down upon their camps at night.

When we reached Greer, most of the desirable claims had been taken, so we went on across the North Fork of Red River into the Cheyenne and Arapaho country and stopped at a little store built of native rock.

In Texas my parents had been very good friends and neighbors to a family of the name of Crawford and John Crawford had been especially fond of my baby sister and wanted her named for him, so as Mother thought that "Johannie" was not a very good name for a girl she told them that we would call the baby "Crawford" for the family; this was said in fun but the name stuck and we all called the baby "Crawford". This Crawford family had some relatives of the name of Rhodes living somewhere in Oklahoma Territory and when the Crawfords learned that our family was moving to Greer County, they wrote this Rhodes family about us.

When our wagons drew up in front of this little rock store everybody around came to the wagons to meet the newcomers for this was the custom and they were truly glad

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to have people come into the country. While they were all talking and Father and Uncle were asking about land that could be filed upon, Baby Sister, then three months old, began to cry and mother in quieting her said, "There there, Crawford, don't cry", and one of the men grabbed Father by the hand and said, "Why, you are the folks we are looking for", and proceeded to tell him about his own kinspeople in Texas writing to them about us. So nothing would do this Rhodes family but that we should camp in their yard for they already had a small house there, and should remain there while Father and Uncle Bill located the land. There was much conversation that night for they had to be told all about the home-folks in Texas and our people had to learn about the new country; the Rhodes had a little girl about my age and I enjoyed her immensely.

Later, Father and Uncle found one hundred and sixty acres of fine farming land and an eighty acre tract adjoining which was not very good and the other eighty acres was marked "Taken"; they had agreed to file together so that the two families could be company for one

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another which was a custom of the pioneer people; they went to Cloud Chief to make their filing and while at the land office Father remarked that his eighty acres was not very good land and the clerk asked why Father did not file on the adjoining eighty acres as he was entitled to one hundred and sixty acres. Father told him that this land was marked "Taken". The clerk said that had been done by some one to keep the people off and that it was vacant land, so Father filed on his hundred and sixty acres while we yet camped in the yard of the Rhodes' home while a dugout was being built on Uncle Will's claim; the filing fee was \$15.00.

Father would take our tent and we would stay all night every so often, on our land to hold it, as the law provided. When the dugout was finished, both our families moved into it and we lived together all winter, continuing to stay on our land from time to time. It was no small amount of work to fix a place to live in as there was so little material with which to work and when at last our own dugout was completed and we moved into it, we were yet

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near Uncle's dugout. Mother wanted to get some chickens and here again it was proved that she was quite right as she had been in insisting that the milk cows be driven along with us on our move. Father and Uncle had brought some saddle horses as well as work teams, but regretted that they had not brought fowls also, for they found there were none to be bought. Few persons had brought any fowls with them and those who had done so found that the wolves, bobcats and skunks caught them so often, that it was impossible to raise a flock. Mother at last succeeded in securing four hens and I remember how delighted we were at the prospect of raising little chickens.

We lived near a creek and there were the greatest number of long-legged birds of the crane family which seemed to be attracted by us, as I suppose we were as uncommon sight to them as they were to us. Any way they came so close and in such numbers that Mother was constantly telling us children that these birds with their long necks and beaks might peck out our eyes. There was also a great eagle that watched us all the time and Mother cautioned

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us to take care as it might attack us and such was its size that a child would have little chance to protect itself.

My first school, I remember quite well, was taught by an very old lady who was homesteading (holding down her claim). Her house was a very small one room soddy with some kind of a tiny kitchen in a lean-to. There were fifteen children in the community and Ann Divin, I do not remember whether she was Miss or Mrs., agreed to teach us at her home. There were no seats and some of our parents cut down a big cottonwood tree and sawed off blocks at the proper height and we used those to sit upon. I walked two miles with other children to her house. Ann Divin was crippled and walked with a crutch; I do not think our parents paid her much for her teaching and I have in later years thought that perhaps she was glad to have our company, as I am sure she was not a professional teacher from the fact that when we came to some word which we could not pronounce in our lessons, she would say, "Just skip it", and she did not seem to mind. Later, Father was very anxious that we should have a school so he put in much time and money, for those days, as money was scarce

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and he also donated land on which a school house was built. We had a very good school and there was only one house in sight at that time, for everybody lived in a dugout.

We had a very fine garden that year and meat was no object as there were prairie chickens and quail in droves everywhere. The crops of the settlers grew wonderfully well, but the range cattle destroyed field after field and their owners did not take any pains to keep them off, as the big cowmen who had used the Cheyenne and Arapaho country for grazing as they liked for so many years, were anxious that the settlers should become discouraged and leave the country, which not a few did.

In our community as well as in many others, for this was a fine farming district, the men formed themselves in to groups and stood guard over their crops day and night, each man taking his turn; this was hard as they had few tools and plowing and planting was mostly done by walking and by hand and then to have to sit up nights and keep the cattle away added to their difficulties.

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It was six miles from our place to the post office and when Father was away Mother would go out and catch a horse, saddle it and ride the twelve miles, leaving us children alone and we were afraid. Father and Mother went to Vernon, Texas, twice each year, where the six months supply of groceries and dry-goods were purchased. Father and Uncle went to Texas to work in the harvest for a number of years. This gave them money on which to live and their own crops did not amount to much as there was no market. I have told you about the little native rock store, and that is where the town of Rocky took its name. The present town of Sentinel was nine miles from our home and then called Barton. The present town of Retrop was founded by a man of the name of Porter who wanted the post-office named for himself but the Post-Office Department informed him that there was already a post office of that name or something like it in Oklahoma Territory, therefore Porter was spelled backwards and the post office was named Retrop. My parents are buried in the Retrop Cemetery not far from the place where they settled a claim

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forty years ago and I and my family are yet living in
Oklahoma and are glad to be known as Oklahoma pioneers.