

ROSS, WILLIAM M.

INTERVIEW

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

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Field Worker's name Wylie Thornton.

This report made on (date) April 6, 1938. 193

1. Name William W. Ross.

2. Post Office Address Proctor, Oklahoma. Route #2.

3. Residence address (or location) Six miles northwest.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month May Day 29 Year 1871.

5. Place of birth Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

One mile south and one mile west.

6. Name of Father Robert B. Ross. Place of birth Tahlequah

Other information about father Died May 12, 1930.

7. Name of Mother Fannie Thornton. Place of birth Two miles

west of Dutch Mills, Arkansas.

Other information about mother She died at Arlington, Texas, on

December 31, 1928.

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 _____.

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Wylie Thornton,
Investigator,
April 6, 1938.

An Interview With William W. Ross,
Route #2, Proctor, Oklahoma.

I live in Pumpkin Hollow about fifteen miles due east of Tahlequah. My father was a son of Allen Ross, who was a son of Chief John Ross; Father's mother was Jennie Fields. My grandfather, Allen Ross, bought the house where we were all born and reared a half mile south and two miles and a half west of Tahlequah, from an old Settler Cherokee of the name of Copeland. Allen Ross gave this house to his son, Robert B. Ross, who reared his family there, and his youngest son, Robert B. Ross, filed on the place and then he sold it to my brother, Rufus D. Ross, who still owns it and lives on it.

My father was a Union soldier in the Civil War, and served in the Third Indian Home-Guard and was a first Sergeant in the battle of Pea Ridge, Arkansas, and also in the battle of Cabin-Creek.

My father was present with his grandfather, Chief John Ross, when he died in Washington on August 1, 1866,

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and after this Father returned to Tahlequah and married December 25, 1867. He reared nine children of his own and gave homes to twenty or more children.

Father held pretty nearly every office in the Cherokee Nation during his life time, except chief; when he ran for this office he was defeated by S.H. Hayes. Father was appointed postmaster in August, 1898, and remained in this office until 1905. Mother and Father lived together for sixty-three years.

Father was invited and accepted an invitation to come to Rosville, Georgia, on March 21, 1930, to unveil a marker erected by the D.A.R. at the Foss Landing, marking the place where John S. Little Ross operated the first Indian store in 1815. He returned from Georgia and came to the home of a sister, Mrs. W. E. Luncum, here at Park Hill on Saturday, May 10, 1930, and on the evening of May 12, 1930, passed away without a struggle at the age of eighty-five years.

I am William W. Ross, Jr., the second son of Robert B. Ross and Fannie Thornton Ross, and I was born May 29, 1871, educated at the Cherokee National Male Seminary in

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Tahlequah, and graduated on December 19, 1890, in the class with Albert Silder Wily, and John Caleb Starr.

I was appointed teacher for the Cherokee Orphan Asylum in 1893, appointed a deputy sheriff of Tahlequah District in 1902, served six years under Sheriff E. P. Parris, Charles Proctor, and Leonard Williams. I was elected clerk of the Cherokee Council in November, 1898. Elected member of the Cherokee Council 1902 and was appointed assistant postmaster 1905 and was married to Mary H. Moore of Same and April 30, 1905, elected Grand Chancellor of Knights of Pythias Grand Lodge 1906-07, was acting grand chancellor at the consolidation of the Grand Lodges of Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory at Shawnee in May, 1907.

My wife and I have reared five children, three daughters and two sons, all living. One daughter is in hospital training in Arizona, one in the Government Indian School service at Santa-Fe, New Mexico, the third girl is married and living in Middle-town, New York; she is Mrs. Douglas E. Meyer. Our two sons at home attending school at the Northeastern State Teachers College. If

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I could I would like to live again as I did when a boy for our land was new and the country new and opportunities were many. The land produced bountiful crops and the law enforcement was much better. We had no Governor to pardon cold-blooded murderers, we never worried about taxes, although we supported our Government with our tribal funds. We Indians certainly made a serious mistake when we allotted our lands, and did away with our own laws.

Father was a member of the Cherokee Council and Senate, Sheriff of the Tahlequah District in 1875, Superintendent of the Cherokee Male Seminary in 1880, a delegate to Washington in 1886, Cherokee Treasurer for two terms. He is buried in the Ross cemetery in Park Hill.

One more incident I want to mention; about the year of 1896 or '97 my father was living in Park Hill, Indian Territory, and he was in full possession of the beads that represented the National Indian Code. This national code was a language written only by these beads. The

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arrangement of the e beads was this. They were bone beads strung on buckskin or flax threads and resembled a large and wide belt. These code belts range in length from about three feet to six feet and are about four inches to about fourteen inches wide. The name of these National Indian Code Bead Belts is Wampum. These beads slide up and down on these threads and have many different colors. The colors are very beautiful. If a sign or a sound is to be written, beads of a certain color are pulled or grouped together, so as to make a certain sign or shape, and of course may mean a whole sentence, when interpreted.

About the year of 1896-97 a certain messenger named Anderson Gritts rode up to my father's yard; this messenger was sent by Redbird Smith. He was invited to get off his pony and come in, and did so, and after eating supper with the family he revealed his mission, which was this: The chiefs of other tribes had communicated with Redbird Smith or with Anderson Gritts in regard to the Wampum and such communications had resulted in the agreement of all to meet at one Grand Fire Council on top of the

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Sugar Loaf Mountain and he has further agreed to smoke
 once again the great national Peace Pipe in token of
 this agreement to always settle tribal disputes by a
 Peace Council. This meeting was also for the purpose
 of showing their minds on how to write these national
 code letters, and it was this study of the code that
 made it necessary to have the Wampum bead belt present
 at that meeting; so therefore Anderson Gritts had been
 sent to borrow these several Wampum bead belts from
 my father, Robert S. Ross, with a solemn promise to
 return them very safe y.

In this loan of the code belt or Wampum belts, the
 following men agreed by letter to see them returned very
 safely: Sam Smith, Anderson Gritts, Ned Blackfox, John
 Smith, Dave McGuira, Dave Muskrat and Wolf Coon, and so
 these Wampum belts were carried away never to be re-
 turned which later caused some trouble between us
 Indians, but my father stopped it before it became too
 serious.

The peace pipe which they carried away is made of
 a block of Georgia pipestone, having a stem about twenty-

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four inches long made of birchbark and the bowl of this Peace Pipe holds about a pint of tobacco. The pipe had a four foot stand with a hole in the top so that the sharp shaped bottom of this large pipe fits down into this hole so that the Indian chiefs could stand in a circle around this stand and after one had taken a certain number of puffs then all he did was just to push the stem of the pipe to the next man but the bowl remained in the same place in the stand.