

ISHAM, CISHAM

INTERVIEW

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

Field Worker's name ZAIDEE B. BLAND

Report made on (date) JUNE 15, 1938

Name MR. AND MRS. GISHAM ISHAM

Post Office Address BLAIR, OKLA

Residence address (or location) EAST PART OF BLAIR

DATE OF BIRTH: Month NOVEMBER Days 8 Year 1868

Place of birth MRS. ISHAM BORN JAN. 28, 1859 in TEXAS

MR. ISHAM BORN in GEORGIA.

Name of Father \_\_\_\_\_ Place of birth \_\_\_\_\_

Other information about father \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Mother \_\_\_\_\_ Place of birth \_\_\_\_\_

Other information about mother \_\_\_\_\_

Give a 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 eight

Mr. Isham said he did not remember his father or mother.

Zaidée B. Bland, Field Worker,  
Indian Pioneer History, S-149.  
June 15, 1937.

THE EXPERIENCE OF A PIONEER OF OKLAHOMA,  
Cisham Isham and Louise Ann (Picket) Isham,  
Duke, Oklahoma.

In the summer of 1896 I came up into Greer County, Texas, to prospect for land which I might file and convert into a homestead. I located three miles east and one mile south of the present town of Blair. I dug a half dug-out and a well. I went over to the river and got logs to fix up my wall on the top of the ground, and a few posts. We went to Mangum and got the correct numbers of my section, filed legally and started back to Texas for my wife and six children. I had five girls and one boy and my wife was not very well, and we hoped by coming to this open clean country she would get well. We started back the day after Christmas and it only took us two days to make the trip. I brought two wagons with me the first trip, wife driving one wagon to which I had hitched a span of mules. We brought with us loose stock, ten cows and twenty Texas horses. My wife brought six hens and one rooster and the food and clothing to do us as near as we could guess two years, in case we did not make a crop and could not buy. We came through without any trouble. Wife brought a big square five-gallon can full of buttermilk to drink on the way so we would not get thirsty and have to stop for extra water. After I got her settled, I took the wagon and mules and went back to Young County for my seed and farming tools. All went well until I had all my things and got back as far as the

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Pease River coming home to Greer County. The river was up and we waited a day for it to run down.

There were two other men with loaded wagons waiting when I drove up. A herd of cattle went across ahead of us and I figured that they had settled the quicksand and that it was safe but the other men would not try it. I became impatient and wanted to get on home as it was getting colder every minute, and I was wondering if my family would have fuel enough to do them. At last the men said if I would drive in first and get stuck they could come in and pull me out for they knew if I made it across they could, for they had larger teams than I did. I drove in but I never knew the water would be to my mules' flanks and that we would have to break ice all the way across, it was freezing so fast. A horse will break ice and walk right on if the load is not too heavy but a mule won't. A mule is like a hog--he doesn't like water nohow and simply will not break his way through the ice. I was "stuck" good and proper. The man with the biggest team of horses rode his horses out to help me. I always drove with a horse tied to my mules' bridle when crossing these western streams so in case I did get stuck I could ride out and not have to wade. I walked out on my wagon tongue to hitch the double tree of the new team to my tongue, got my hands and feet wet and thought I would surely freeze before I could get

them hooked up. We got them hooked up and straightened out slightly downstream, then with the lines and urging <sup>of</sup> our voices we swung the horses out straight across the stream and out we came without any trouble. We knew then that the stronger teams could make it without help. I got out and made a fire for us all to warm by and waited until both men were across and warmed, then we went on about three miles further and camped all night at a schoolhouse. Next day I came on in home without any trouble but found everything frozen up.

My wife had left the empty buttermilk can setting out and it had filled with water and frozen solid and burst wide open. Everything under the ground was snug but the cattle were suffering. I had not prepared enough shelter for them. We never lost any cattle from freezing but they got awful cold. We raised enough hogs in two years to sell at  $3\frac{1}{2}$  cents a pound to build us a two room house and a good barn, besides having our own meat. We had no protection for our chickens at all. As fast as I could, I hauled wood from the Indian Territory and cut into stove-wood length so when spring ~~did come~~ I would not have to stop work in my crop and haul wood. My son felt so sorry about his mother's chickens that he dug them little dugouts as much like courses he could and lined them with this stove wood. The hens seemed to appreciate it for my wife raised 100 chickens that first year with only the six hens and one rooster for stock.

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The children were as interested in improving the place as we were and tried to see how many trees they could get started. All you had to do in that sand was to break off a cottonwood limb and stick it into the ground and it would go to growing. I had 40 acres planted to cotton. I did not know then that you could plant cotton later than May and have it mature. After the cotton was up I let the children go into the middle and plant watermelons between the stalks of cotton. On the 12th of June came the worst-st hail I ever saw, and ruined my cotton.

It left the field to the watermelons. I never raised so many melons on 40 acres in my life, and more of them weighed 80 pounds and above than under 80 pounds. The neighbors came and hauled them off by the wagon loads for their own use. If they wanted to haul them somewhere and sell them, they could have as many as a double team hitched to a wagon could pull out of my field for \$1.00. One young fellow got to coming for them and hauling them to Vernon to sell and had bought several loads when one evening he overloaded his wagon and his horses could not draw it out. When his team stalled, he looked so sheepish for he thought I perhaps would think he had been greedy. I was only amused. He could have had twice as many for the dollar, if his team could have pulled them, for all I would have cared. I hauled several loads to Quanah and got about \$6.00 for the load and it took me three days to make the trip. I would load and go to this side of Eldorado and

camp. Next day I got into Quannah to sell my melons and get my groceries, come back to Eldorado and camp<sup>d</sup> and came in home the next day. I thought I was getting rich, and I was. I have made a lot of money in this country. I have raised so many sweet potatoes that I had to rick them up in the field like hay. They were what we used to call "NIGGER CHOKERS." I have raised them so large that they looked like stumps in the field. I took them to town and traded them for groceries at ~~25¢~~<sup>25¢</sup> a bushel. The neighbors could have all they wanted to haul away. We fed them to the cows, horses, pigs, and ate them ourselves. In those days, if I had "tater" slips and my neighbor didn't, he helped himself. We were neighbors, all of us, and always divided. I hauled my wheat to Quannah and took 35¢ a bushel for it, 3½¢ for cotton; while 40 bushels of wheat to the acre was good, and we got 300 bushels of potatoes to the acre.

One of my neighbors lost his horses with blind staggers and I loaned him horses to make his crop and haul his wood.

#### BUILDINGS

I planned my barn and house and everytime I went to Vernon or Quannah I brought back with me a few planks until I had enough to build just what I wanted and no one had a handier barn than I. I could stand in my barn and feed my horses or cows. I had a good walk fixed for horses and cows around the barn, and a place to keep

all my tools and harness and seed for the next year.

I hauled all my wood and posts from the Indian Reservation and never had any trouble with the Indians. I always carried some money and if I saw an Indian I would give him a quarter or a fifty-cent piece and they would always say. "Heep him up big load--nice fire for squaw." Some of my neighbors did not think they ought to be paid and sometimes the Indians would make them unload their wood. Sometimes run their horses off. We had one preacher who wouldn't pay. The Indians would say when they saw him, "White man, him heep presch Jesus on Sunday and steal Indian wood on Monday." It seemed to me like 50 good mesquite posts ought to be worth 50¢ of anybody's money, and fifty were about what we hauled at a load.

There was not any help to be hired much; everybody was busy with his own improvements. One fall over by Martha a man lost his wife and had to take his children back south to his folks and could not gather his crop. Old man Doughty sent for me and asked me to gather his cotton. We had our new house and wanted a lot of things and I asked the girls what about it? He offered to pay me 75¢ per hundred for picking. Wife and son were both puny and could not help. The girls said, "All right. Dad, we are with you."

I got those little tow-heads up every morning before daybreak, loaded them into the wagon and had them in the field picking by good day-light and we would pick until we could just see to make



our weighing at sundown. The girls would eat their supper as soon as they got into the wagon and we were started home; then they would lie down on a quilt and sleep until we got home. I would carry the little ones to bed and the bigger ones would wake up and walk in. Their mummy would always have us a lot of cakes and pies and meat for our lunches. These girls picked until their hands bled, they got so sore. And I made those horses get up and travel that nine miles at such a clip they got stone lame in their hind feet and I had to have them shod on their hind feet. As we were about to get through an old man who wanted someone to gather his cotton would keep coming over to ask us when we were through wouldn't we gather for him. He always rode an old white mule. The evening we were having our last weighing, we saw him coming; my oldest girl said, "What about it, Daddy, are we going to gather that old man's cotton?" "No, my dear," I said. "We have got enough to winter on and some to spare so we are going home to your mummy right now" and we did. He picked a bale every two days.

## WEATHER

The second spring we were out here was a wet spring. It rained one day and poured down two. Wet weather springs were everywhere. I had to dig little places out in the floor of the dugout and get up two or three times every night and dip the water to keep our dugout from being flooded.

When the children would be hoeing along and get thirsty they would dig out a little place in the sand and when they would hoe back that way, there would be a nice clear little pool of water from which they could drink. I dug a hole and bedded up 100 bushels of potatoes and the water rose right over them and I had to take them out. The water rose in the well until we could dip it out with the dipper and I had to build a curb all around to keep it from running over.

I always had a few yearlings to sell in the fall. I could get \$8.00 for a nice fat yearling.

We planted a big orchard and had lots of fruit and berries, and wife sure know how to cook good things to eat. We have sold peaches at ten cents a bushel at the orchard. We always had plenty to eat and did not need to eat prairie chickens or quail but we liked to have them sometimes.

That wet spring every water-hole on the prairie was filled with fish.

This has always been a healthy country for our family. Lots to eat, and enough to wear to keep warm in winter and decently clad in summer. My wife, children and I have done our part to develop this great state.

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