

HARRIS, WILLIAM L.

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Interview with Captain William L. Harris  
Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Field Worker-----Mary Jane Stockton  
May 21, 1937.

Captain Harris says the title was merely honorary not military, as he has never been a soldier, but he is a real, honest-to-goodness pioneer of Eastern Oklahoma, having arrived at Wagoner when it was merely a station, a junction of the M. K. & T. and St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Railways, the latter having but recently been completed from Ft. Smith to Wagoner. This was in 1889.

Soon after his arrival the bachelor from Mississippi was married to Mrs. Amelia Percival, of Cherokee descent, surviving widow of a pioneer merchant of Fort Gibson. They erected a hotel near the junction of the two railroads, which they called the Valley House, for several years the leading hotel of Wagoner and popular stopping place for commercial travelers as well as ranchmen and prospectors.

They finally sold their hotel and bought a farm of several hundred acres in the valley of the Verdigris,

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five miles west of Inola and near the present bridge on highway 36 on the road from Arkansas, through Locust Grove, Choteau, and Inola, to Tulsa. This farm consisted of about 100 acres of fertile farming land in the bottoms and several hundred acres of pasture and meadow lands on the rolling prairie adjacent.

The present Gregory Schoolhouse is located on a part of the holdings, much of which had to be surrendered when Cherokee lands were allotted in 1902-3-4.

On the death of Mrs. Harris (nee Percival) he disposed of his interests and engaged in the mercantile business at Inola, also buying hay and grain; and was very successful; and when oil and gas were developed nearby he acquired considerable money and property, retiring for a few years to St. Louis, Missouri. But he longed for the wild, free and active life of Oklahoma and returned to Tulsa several years ago where he has since resided.

Captain Harris states when he first visited Tulsa,

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now the oil capital of the world and a modern city in every respect, it was a mere village, having only two or three small stores and but few residences.

He says he has seen thousands of head of long-horn cattle on the ranges of Rogers and Wagoner counties and used to have a wonderful lot of fun chasing wolves on broad prairies. He was a personal friend of James Roane Gregory and William Woodson Hubbard.