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Choctaw Nation

Hartshorne

Wild Game

Living Conditions

ISELL, MARY A.

INTERVIEW.

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Charline M. Culbertson,  
Interviewer.  
September 28, 1937.

Interview with Mrs. Mary A. Isbell  
Blanco, Oklahoma.  
Born 1872.  
Father-Willis Watson.  
Mother-Tobitha Watson.

I was born in Blount county, Alabama, in 1872. My parents were Willis and Tobitha Watson. Both are buried at Sulphur Spring, near Bartshorne.

I came to the Indian Territory in 1888 with my husband, Mr. Mark Isbell. We were on our way to Texas and had not planned to stop in the Territory but our funds were running so low that it was necessary for us to camp up the valley from what we call Natural Arch, about a mile and a half east of Blanco. My husband got a job with Isom Pickens, a full blood Choctaw Indian, to clear some land. While my husband cut and hewed logs to build a house we camped in an Indian hut. It was a double log house with a hall between the rooms and with a thirty foot porch.

I had a nephew back in Alabama who sent me a big yellow man's handkerchief for Christmas, which was a

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short time after we stopped here. An Indian boy by the name of Alfred Warsister saw this handkerchief and asked "You sold it, that?" and I said "Yes, what will you give me?" and he told me, "I give you soon wa nepe" which means pig, and then I told him "All right." He was gone two or three hours and came back with a sand spotted pig. I then put the pig in a chink and daub smokehouse. I was standing by this smokehouse one day after that and saw the high grass waving and soon discovered it was a little blue pig so I ran it down and put it in the smokehouse too. It was not more than two or three years until I had the woods full of hogs. Isom Pickens also paid my husband with hogs. I gave them only a little milk and there were lots of acorns in the woods. We marked all our hogs so we could tell them from hogs belonging to anyone else. It wasn't long before my husband began shipping hogs. He took these hogs to McAlester in wagons and from there they were shipped to Oklahoma City. Hogs were very cheap to trade.

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With all the hogs I had, I was obliged to have milk so I penned some old wild Indian cows. I had some small elm trees in the cow lot so I tied the heads and legs of these wild cows to these trees and milked them until I was able to make them gentle. I then got so much milk and butter that I would take my cutter to Hartshorne and sell it for twenty five cents a pound. I would ride horse back fifteen miles to do this.

My husband then went out on the Kiowa prairie and put up hay. I would stay home and do all the work there.

On one occasion while I was staying alone I heard loud screams like those of a woman and without giving it much thought I answered, but soon found that I got no reply and then I knew it must have been a panther close by. There were also lots of wolves. One evening when I was milking the cows a pack of wolves got after my dog and came up to the door of my house.

There were lots of wild turkey. One evening twenty-seven or thirty went to roost on my lot fence.

The cows wore bells so we could locate them in the woods. I always rode after the cows on a little striped

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buckskin horse. The first time I saw this horse I wanted him but I could not trade with the Indian who owned him. But it was not more than a month or two after I saw him that he came back to my place. I took him to town and "strayed" him or what we could call nowadays "advertised" him to find the owner but no one called for him so I kept him. He was then eight or nine years old and I rode him about ten years. I was riding after the cows one evening and ran close by three Choctaw Indian men some distance away and when they saw me they raised their guns and put their fingers on the triggers of their guns, but I rode right on down the trail and would not look their way and so managed to get by. I think these Indians were just a little wild and were afraid of me. When I came back h me I came a different way. This happened about one half mile from Brushy.

I got acquainted with some half breed Choctaw Indian girls by the name of Lewis. They were my very best friends.

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By this time, the country had begun to settle up and we found the necessity of having a school so we began to give pie suppers and box suppers to raise the money. We then went into the Jackfork Mountains and got the lumber and had the school house built. The neighbors then wanted me to teach the school, but I had only gone as far as the third grade in school, I called on Miss Lewis, my girl friend, and asked her to teach the school. I boarded her and her horse for five dollars a month. Her salary was twenty dollars a month. None of the Indian children attended the school. They could have attended but their parents did not send them. Emma Lewis still lives in Pi Valley and is known today as Mrs. Jack Smith. The school house was one and a fourth mile from Natural Arch. We also had church at the school. We had fine Baptist meetings. It was here that I joined the church.

We lived at Natural Arch for fifteen years and my husband cleared all of Isom Pickens' land, Mr. Pickens paying him seven dollars an acre or with hogs.

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We then moved to Plainview where we built a church and school in the same way as we did at Natural Arch. This building still stands today.

It was here that I got acquainted with a Presbyterian minister who liked to hunt. He saw how I could shoot a gun so he gave me a nice double barrel shot gun and <sup>I</sup> am in possession of it today.

It was here at Plainview that I started raising turkeys. I sold them to Bill Young of Kiowa. At one time he wrote me a check for one hundred dollars for some turkeys which I sold him.

The Indian women found out I could bake good cakes so they would always have me bake for the big Indian "cries." At these cries the Indian women would gather at the grave with big handkerchiefs over their heads and make <sup>a</sup> sort of singing cry.

An Indian woman by the name of Mrs. Kink saw a dress I had when I came to the Territory and she wanted it. It had colored beads placed on the dress in the form of a butterfly. We called it passementerie. This Choctaw Indian woman asked <sup>me</sup> "You sell"? The government had just

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given the Indian women sewing machines. She said she would trade her "shene" for my dress and my "shene". I loaded my sewing machine in the wagon and gave her the dress and went to her place after the new machine. The next time I saw her she had all the beads from the dress strung and around her neck.

The Indians milked their cows, put the milk in buckets and hung the buckets up in trees. When they got ready to use the milk they went to the tree and used it without even straining it.