

STAPP, GERTRUDE.

INTERVIEW.

1258

23

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

STAPP, GERTRUDE M. (MRS) INTERVIEW. 1258.

Field Worker's name Zaidee B. Bland.

This report made on (date) April 21, 1937. 1937

1. Name Mrs. Gertrude M. Stapp.

2. Post Office Address Altus, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 601 East Cypress Street.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month May Day 7 Year 1871.

5. Place of birth Rover, Arkansas.

6. Name of Father John Albright. Place of birth Georgia.

Other information about father Cherokee Indian.

7. Name of Mother Meekey Blair. Place of birth _____

Other information about mother _____

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 _____

STAPP, GERTRUDE M. (MRS.) INTERVIEW. 1258

Zaidee B. Bland
Interviewer
April 21, 1937

Interview with Mrs. Gertrude M. Stapp,
Altus, Oklahoma.

EXPERIENCE OF PIONEERS
IN INDIAN TERRITORY
1890 to 1904

My maiden name was Albright and I was born May 7, 1871, in Rover, Arkansas. I was married the first time to Wesley C. Pugh on May 10, 1889, and moved to Duckhorn, Indian Territory, ten miles from Davis, in 1891.

My husband, three babies and I made the trip from our home in Arkansas to Duckhorn Lake in a wagon pulled by four oxen. We brought with us two horses hitched behind our wagon. We came out because my husband planned to trade some with the Indians.

The Indians in this locality had already settled on the land allotted to their tribe by the United States

Government and drew their payments for land east of the Mississippi River. You could lease all the land you wanted from the Indians for a small amount of cash or a share of your crops. One had to put his own improvements on the land which he had leased.

STAPP, GERTRUDE M. (MRS)

INTERVIEW.

1258

-2-

Buckhorn Lake was a large fresh water lake. The first work my husband engaged in after our arrival was to help out mill races to run the machinery of the cotton gins and the grain mills. This lake was on the plantation of Cyrus C. Harris and Cyrus C. Harris, Jr., was the English interpreter. There were very few white people in the settlement. Most of them were men who had taken Indian wives. In fact, I remember only one other white woman besides myself. She was a Primitive Baptist preacher's wife. We leased from Felix Penner, a white man who had married one of Cyrus C. Harris' daughters. When we got settled in our log hut on the lease, my husband got astride his best horse one morning and started out to see what he could do in the way of trading or buying stock from the Indians. After he had gone about five miles from home he came upon a log house, larger than the usual log house with a great many pigs around it. He rode as near as he thought wise and called, "Hello! Hello!" An Indian came from the back of the house, stuck his head around the chimney and darted back. Another came and darted back. They acted as though they were afraid they

STAPP, GERTRUDE M. (MRS)

INTERVIEW.

1258.

-3-

would be fired upon. My husband took out a \$5.00 bill and began to wave it and pointed to the hogs. About the biggest and oldest Indian he had ever seen came out of the front of the house and nodded as though he understood. This Indian went back into the house, returning with a six year old boy (his grandson) for an interpreter. My husband got one sow and six pigs for the \$5.00 bill and the old Indian delivered them to our house.

HABITS OF THE INDIANS.

So far as their eating and dressing was concerned, the Indians patterned after the whites. I would not call them lazy but they had so much land which the whites were anxious to lease from them and this added to the cash which they drew from Uncle Sam caused them to feel no need of being industrious. The older Indians were adverse to speaking any language but their own and one could seldom get them to utter a word of English, although I am sure some of them could have had they been willing to. I surprised an old Indian woman into using the word "Squash" as I was dividing my garden seed (that I had brought from Arkansas),

STAFF, GERTRUDE M.(MRS)

INTERVIEW.

1258.

-4-

with her. It seemed to amuse the other women that were with her very much and I could never get her to say it again. We found the Indians in this locality very dependable and honest in their dealings when you had their word. Nothing pleased them more than to believe they had "skinned" you in a trade, especially in a horse trade. They were not at all clean about their persons, camps, or cooking. I never saw a blanketed Indian until I came west as far as Lawton. These Indians did not weave or dye cloth or use weapons other than the guns and knives that they bought from the white traders.

TRADING WITH THE INDIANS.

We first leased on the west side of the lake. We were rapidly outgrowing our log house. Two miles farther west on Mill Creek was the old Council House of the Chickasaws. It was situated on Tom Underwood's plantation and contained fourteen big rooms, eleven fireplaces, one long hall, and four long porches. The overland coach from Fort Arbuckle to Fort Smith, Arkansas, stopped and changed horses at this point. The first story of this.

STAPP, GERTRUDE. M. (MRS.)

INTERVIEW.

1258.

-5-

house was built of immense logs, ceiled on the inside and weatherboarded on the outside. The second story was entirely of pine. We leased this house and a hundred acres of land from Mr. Lawson, a son-in-law of Tom Underwood. We now had six babies, and moved into the giant house lock, stock, and barrel. I think we had everything that one could fancy buying in a wilderness. We carried saddles, bridles, wagons, buggies, tin and iron cooking vessels, pins, needles, garden seed, calico, jeans and duck (a kind of cloth). When Indians came to buy we would let them touch the things they wanted and we would then show them how much money it would take to buy them. We seldom engaged in conversation during a transaction.

Very few of the Indians really knew how much land they owned. Most of them prided themselves on being very civilized. Tom Underwood was one of the wealthiest of the Indians. He sent his children away to college. He was afraid of the roving bands of Indians. Everyone knew this and he was often taken advantage of. A wild bunch would ride up to his house and old Uncle Tom would hide

STAPP; GERTRUDE M. (MRS)

INTERVIEW.

1258.

-6-

his women folks and young ones. He would then go out to meet them and offer them presents. Sometimes they would take five or six beeves, any number of pigs, a pony or two, or various other things before they would leave.

The only Indian funeral I remember to have attended was the one of Tom Underwood's son. The missionary held the funeral so it was conducted like any white persons' funeral would have been conducted. The Indians were very reserved and showed very little emotion or sorrow. The body was placed in a plain pine coffin. On reaching the burying ground the coffin was placed in the cavity dug for it, a small amount of dirt thrown in. The dead man's dog and several other pets were slain and, together with his other possessions, such as his clothes, a gun and numerous other articles were placed in the grave; also food. They finished filling the grave with dirt while not a great ways away, at least in plain sight other friends were busy burying the horse. Just exactly three days after this funeral we all awakened one night and on looking out we found there was the biggest blizzard of

STAPP, GERTRUDE M. (MRS)

INTERVIEW.

1258.

-7-

the season raging. The wind was blowing a gale and snow and sleet were coming down in torrents. We heard the sound of a galloping horse. On making inquiry next morning we found that Uncle Tom Underwood on awaking and finding it snowing had saddled his fastest horse and, taking a new wagon sheet, he had hastened to the burial grounds. Brushing the snow and sleet that had already fallen off of the new mound he very carefully covered the mound with the sheet, pegging it down so that the wind could not blow it off again. He returned home as hurriedly as he had gone. From time to time ^{during} a great many months food was placed on the mound.

Law and order were maintained by United States Marshals. The Indians did a good deal of fighting and killing among themselves but would never call in the law or report any killing to the proper authorities. There was not much stealing going on and what was, was usually traceable to white people or mixed bloods, Indian and negro or Indian and white.

One day we heard running horses and on going to the door we saw two Indians running their horses at top speed.

STAPP, GERTRUDE M. (MRS)

INTERVIEW.

1258.

-8-

The one in front lying down on his horse was Jerome Brown. Will Tyson was following with a Winchester in his hand shooting at Jerome as fast as he could. He never hit him a single time but not a half mile beyond our store Jerome's horse stumbled, throwing Jerome over his head. Will Tyson was on him in a minute and beat him up good and proper. A crowd gathered and the Indians were soon separated. The next morning on opening the store we found Jerome's dead body on our front porch. Whether he had been killed and placed there or crawled up there and died we never knew. His relatives claimed his body. There was no report ever made of it or any investigation made of it at all. The quarrel had occurred over some whiskey at a still about three miles from the old Council House. The first lumber house ever built was in that neighborhood on Mill Creek by our first white doctor, Ben R. Looney.