

JACKSON, ISAAC.

INTERVIEW

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

JACKSON, ISAAC, INTERVIEW.

12940

Field Worker's name James Russell Gray

This report made on (date) February 10, 1938 1938

1. Name Isaac Jackson

2. Post Office Address Hartshorne, Oklahoma, Route 1

3. Residence address (or location) About 4 1/2 miles north of Hartshorne

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month October Day 19 Year 1880

5. Place of birth Mississippi -- near the town of Jackson

6. Name of Father George Jackson Place of birth Mississippi

Other information about father A freed slave

7. Name of Mother Rebecca Adjer Place of birth Mississippi

Other information about mother Also freed slave

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 _____.

Investigator, James Russell Gray,
February 10, 1938.

Interview with Isaac Jackson,
Hartshorne, Oklahoma.

I struck the Territory in 1898, and it certainly was a fine place to live in then. Before I came I had heard tales told about how tough the Indian Territory was; how it was filled with wild Indians and bloodthirsty outlaws and all that. But my experience was just the opposite. I heard of very few killings after I came. And times were good. A man could always get something to do. Wages weren't high, but a man could get steady work and money seemed to go farther than it does now.

I was born in Mississippi, October 19, 1880. My father was George Jackson, a freed slave and also a Mississippi man. My mother was also a freed slave and a native of Mississippi. Her maiden name was Rebecca Adjer. I grew up there in Mississippi, helping father raise beans and potatoes, and small crops of corn and cotton. In the Fall I'd hire out to some other farmer, usually some white man, and make a few dollars picking cotton or gathering corn. As you can see, there wasn't any future in that.

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When I was eighteen I got the urge to do something better. You know how it is when a fellow is young; he wants to see new places and sort of see what he can do. I decided to go to the Indian Territory; from all I had heard it sounded like an interesting place. And rumors said that the Choctaw Nation was having a business boom, what with the coal industry and the cattle raising.

I came by rail from Fort Smith, Arkansas, to McAlester. The country certainly looked different from what it does now. I came on the Rock Island Railroad, though it wasn't the Rock Island then; it was called, I believe, the Choctaw, Oklahoma and Gulf. There were very few towns then along the right-of-way. You'd hardly call them towns; they were just settlements with a general store or two, a hotel, a blacksmith shop, a livery stable, and so on. I can't remember all the little settlements we passed, though I can name you some; Poteau, Red Oak, Wilburton, Hartshorne, Alderson, Krebs, and so to McAlester.

I didn't have any trouble getting a job; I went right to work on the streets. Then after a short time of that I quit the street work and got a job at the old Busby Hotel

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washing dishes. McAlester was a good town; the mines were working and there was plenty of money in circulation. I was just getting by, of course, but I was having a lot of fun. I kept looking for a better job.

I worked at the hotel some months; I forget exactly how long, and then I took to drifting around. After the strike of 1898 at Hartshorne a lot of negroes came there to work in the mines and I used to visit around there, though I never worked in the mines. I remember that we used to have big times there at their Fourth of July picnics. The big attraction at these picnics was the Indian ball games. They played right where the Hartshorne city park is now. Choctaws like Bill Ervin and Jonas Durant and Bud White used to play. Each player had two sticks with a crook on the ends. They tried to pick up the ball with these sticks. There was a goal at each end of the playing ground and each time a player hit that goal with the ball it counted a tally for his side. Those were the roughest games I ever saw; they fought like wildcats, sometimes hitting each other with their sticks instead of the ball. Lots of betting was done on these games, too.

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I went back to Mississippi for a time, but I came back in 1904 and went to work for J. J. McAlester on his cow ranch. This ranch was north of McAlester, about a mile east of the place they call Reams. I worked there for maybe three or four years, and I feel like that was the best job I ever had, and the most interesting. Mr. McAlester was a good man to work for. He had two sons, one named Berry and the other Bun. He had a big ranch house painted white and built of lumber; most of the houses in the Choctaw Nation then were made out of logs. He had lots of land and stock and was said to be well-to-do. The town of McAlester was named for him.

He had lots of cattle; at a rough guess I'd say at least three thousand. I did most of my work around the ranch house, feeding and watering the stock, cleaning out barns, and the like, so I didn't know as much about the cattle as the regular cowboys did. I do know, though, that Mr. McAlester was trying to improve his cattle. He had Durhams and Herefords, and he bought high priced males for breeding purposes.

His cowboys were mostly white men, but once in a while one would be an Indian or half-breed. They had roundups twice a year to check the stock over and brand any that needed

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it, but mostly they took care of such things along with the daily work, so the roundups were not very elaborate affairs and did not last long. Mr. McAlester was pretty businesslike; he demanded efficiency from his workers, and he kept records of his dealings.

We didn't dip the cattle then. Nobody did that then; it wasn't until much later that dipping came into practice. Naturally, the cattle had ticks, and some of them died every year, possibly because of the ticks.

McAlester's brand was a Six Bar Six, and he branded everything, even the dogs. He had a different brand, though, for his horses; he branded them with a figure thirty-three. He sold some of his cattle near home for beef to feed the miners, but the most of them were shipped out to northern states. There were loading pens and chutes on the M.K.&T. Railroad at Reams.

There were lots of cattle ranches in the Choctaw Nation then. I guess coal mining and cattle raising were the two biggest industries here. There were quite a few ranches around Hartshorne, too. Bill Anderson and a Mr. Turnbaugh had one, and Thomas Hyde, who ran a meat market,

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had one. There were ranches at TI Valley, at Higgins, and all around Wilburton. Grazing was better then than now; the soil was richer. And I guess the cattle market was better or there wouldn't have been so many ranches.

Yes sir, I don't care what you say about progress and the march of civilization, I had more fun and more money back before statehood. Everybody had work. Everybody had money. We didn't have hard times like we do now.