

JAMES, WILLIAM.

INTERVIEW

7817

348

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

349

JAMES, WILLIAM - INTERVIEW.

7817

Field Worker's name Grace Kelley

This report made on (date) October 15, 1937

1. Name William James

2. Post Office Address Henryetta, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 17th and Moore St.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month _____ Day _____ Year _____

5. Place of birth Illinois

6. Name of Father Moses James Place of birth Tennessee

Other information about father Was reared by uncle as orphan.

7. Name of Mother Barbara White Place of birth Scotland

Other information about mother Both these parents died when

William was a very small boy.

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 13.

JAMES, WILLIAM - INTERVIEW.

7817

Kelley, Grace * Interviewer
 Indian Pioneer History
 October 15, 1937.

Interview with William James
 Henryetta, Oklahoma.

* * *

When I was almost ten years old I came to the Territory with my uncle, aunt and cousin as both my parents were dead. We stopped at Prairie City which had one or two stores. Like almost all other movers of that time we were in a covered wagon. My uncle was a farmer, doctor and Methodist preacher all at the same time. Most of our trading was done at Vinita but our mail was brought to Ecco or Tight Wad as we called it.

Ecco

An Irishman married a Cherokee girl. A lot of white men married the Indian girls to get a "leather permit". After that he didn't have to pay any permit to the Indians and was allowed the same privileges as an Indian but he usually made more money, for he was more capable of making money than an Indian. Some times they married because they cared for them but the girl was better off no matter which way it was for she had a better home and provider and did not have to work any harder. Nidever owned a store and had the post office in it. That way when any one went after

JAMES, WILLIAM - INTERVIEW.

7817

-2-

the mail they usually bought something.

Ferry and Lumber Mill

Garry's ferry was on the Grand river and Phelix Nidever and Hysaw owned a lumber mill just below the ferry. (Phelix was the son of the Nidever who owned the store at Ecco). Fifteen to eighteen men worked at the mill, some of them were loggers and others drivers. The logs were hauled with ox teams, from six to seven yoke to the load. That many oxen can pull an enormous load but you have to have good trained oxen hitched to the tongue, they are the wheelers, and good ones at the extreme end and they are the leaders. It doesn't matter much what kind of oxen are between, just so they are strong. I've hauled hay with that many oxen, too, as that was a good hay country and more hay could be hauled that way than any other. Lots of the lumber was sold at the mill to people who wanted it for improvement of their places but some of it was hauled to the railroad and sold or shipped.

How a Pioneer Boy Got His Education.

I didn't stay with my uncle very long for he wasn't good to me. I went to Chickasaw Smith, (a white man with an Indian wife), and worked one day and went to school the

JAMES, WILLIAM - INTERVIEW.

7817

-3-

next. My work was mostly chores and was to pay my board. It was an Indian school with a white teacher. I had to pay a dollar a month for tuition. The school wasn't a mission but a district school run by the Indians. It was usually for six months but when they didn't have enough money in the treasury to pay the teacher the school was just for three months. I went to the sixth grade but feel I have as good education as some of the tenth grade children now. I know I can figure any arithmetic problem they can. You see we studied and didn't have games to interfere with the studies and didn't have as many of them as the children do now.

Worked on the Chisholm Trail.

I never made any of the long trips from Texas to Kansas, but the cattle did. A big herd would be coming through and I would "hit the boss up for a job". They weren't suspicious of me for I was just a boy, fourteen years old, and couldn't have been very bad. They could tell a cowpony as far as they could watch it walk anyway. The first thing in the morning they picked out their worst horse and had you to ride it. I never was thrown as I was "born in a saddle". Youngsters always tried to see who could ride the worst

JAMES, WILLIAM - INTERVIEW.

7817

-4-

horse for pastime. The trip started in the spring and lasted until fall as they were fattening the steers as they went along, but I fell in, in the Territory, and usually worked with them about a month. There was no collection law in those days. If a man wanted to cheat you out of your wages and you weren't tough enough to make him pay you it was just too bad. I didn't have any trouble though and at first I was too young to be very tough. I just happened to get in with the right men. I believe the first man was named Hunt but I do know he was a Texas man.

The driver of the Chuck or grub wagon also was cook. We never bothered about the food; the wagon boss did the buying and I couldn't say where he did it. Sometimes we'd run short of grub and then we'd have deer or turkey. Sometimes there wasn't much variety but there was always plenty to eat, until we'd get to where they could buy more. We never had any trouble finding the Chuck wagon because it was on the prairie and we'd just look for the smoke or campfire then go to it. At night a fire would show up for quite a way and there were no other lights to get you mixed up.

The worst evil or trouble was the stampede which was caused by several different things. We usually had warn-

JAMES, WILLIAM - INTERVIEW.

7817

-5-

ing in a storm and could avert one. The lightning seemed to jump off of their horns; of course it didn't, but it sure looked that way. A cow would throw up its head, bawl and start running; every one of them would follow and they would scatter until it would take two weeks to gather them up and ^{we would} miss a lot of them. There would be about a thousand head in a herd, sometimes more, and six to eight men would go on with the main herd while the others hunted and found the scattered ones and followed with them.

The way we kept them from stampeding was to mill them. The cowboys would get a way off and circle the herd, going round and round. They would start following us and get to mixing or, as we called it, milling. If we got them milling we would slip out from among them and they would be all right. If they got away from us it was dangerous to the ones in front of them.

Sometimes the wolves, Indians or white men would stampede them, the wolves to eat them, the Indians so that they could gather the scattered ones but the white men were worse than the animals. One bunch of whites would steal from another for the extra money they would make. The bosses would pay four or five dollars to us to cut out a bunch

JAMES, WILLIAM - INTERVIEW.

7817

-6-

of the other hand and their bosses would do the same thing. We called it "easy money" but if anyone had been caught doing it they wouldn't have been hung, for each rider carried a forty-five Winchester on the saddle and a six-shooter buckled around him, and some of them didn't mind killing a bunch.

When they came to a stream it was forded; even if a ferry had been handy they couldn't have afforded to take that many cattle on it and there were no bridges whatever. It was hard to get them to cross a stream if the sun was to their faces but no trouble if it was to their backs. One or two of us would get ahead and they would follow us. If we'd get a few started the rest would follow the leaders. It was hardest if the stream was up for then they had to swim. It had to be like a flood to keep us back and not just high water. We went through by Oklahoma City but there was no town there, nor anywhere else. I couldn't tell you the points as it was just a wilderness and was sixty-three years ago, but it was north to Oklahoma City and then east.

The songs I remember best are: "Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie", and "Forget Me Not My Mother". I believe we sang them most.

JAMES, WILLIAM - INTERVIEW.

7817

-7-

Recreation

For Sunday recreation we had Bronc riding, riding steers, roping, singing; lonesome boys will do almost any thing for pastime. I was at a festival one time and I always made it a point to do as the ones I was with. We had had a big feast and I was playing a fiddle to dance by. Most of the crowd were Indians and they didn't waltz nor do any round dancing. Square dancing was more to their liking. Now remember this was just for fun and nobody meant one bit of harm. The boys had too much to drink and things were too dull for them so they started a new game. One of them would stand with his toes to a crack and all the others would see how close to his feet they could shoot without shooting one of them. When it came my time I'll admit that I was uneasy for if they had missed I would have been a cripple, but they never missed and not one was hurt. Everyone there was a good shot but shooting when sober and drunk is different.

Hunting and Trapping.

About the tenth of September I started hunting with a bird dog. I never shot much with a Winchester but was an expert Wing Shot with a shot gun. The dog would scare

JAMES, WILLIAM - INTERVIEW.

7817

-8-

the birds up and I'd shoot them as they flew. At that time of year the prairie chicken would be half grown and good. I'd get from seven to ten dollars a dozen by shipping them to Humbo and Aperson, Commissioners at Memphis, Tennessee. They paid me about a quarter each for ducks and I sent them snipes, squirrel, turkey and deer. Sometimes they came out to hunt with me, for pastime. The game prices went up and down; one shipment I would get a good price and the next time the price would be down but you could never count on it being either, when you sent the box. At first there was no law against hunting and trapping. I trapped for mink, skunk, racoon, opossum, otter and beaver. Otter and beaver were first to be protected. I never hunted for bear but have seen lots of tracks and two little cubs but I never saw a grown one. There were bear in the eastern part of the Cherokee country and in the Choctaw country. The buffalo were gone before 1870, because they were gone before my time here.

Buying Furs from Indians Started about 1878.

For several years I bought furs from the Indians. If I passed a hundred cabins next to the road, every one of them would have their door away from the road. I've always found the Indian as afraid of the white man as the whites

JAMES, WILLIAM - INTERVIEW.

7817

-9-

were afraid of them. The woman would be sent out to see what I wanted as the man didn't trust a white man enough to come out. Every one of them could count money so I would lay my fur down and put the amount of money on each fur that I would pay for one just like it. If my price pleased her, or was as much or more than they could get from anyone else, she would go and get their furs. If it didn't suit she would say: "Cluha- No? I would have to raise my price or leave without their furs. I gave five cents for one big or two little opossum hides, seventy-five for a racoon hide. Deer hides were eight to twelve cents a pound to them. I shipped to Taylor at St. Louis. I shipped furs to them for thirty-five years.

Permits and Leases.

When I first came to the Territory I was too small to have to pay for a permit but my uncle had to pay a dollar and a half a year to the Indians. Three years after I came they changed that law. A white person took a lease from some Indian for a place for five years. When the time was out the improvements went to the Indian. He couldn't sell a foot of ground as it belonged to the tribe but he could sell the improvements. The Indian who sold the lease paid

JAMES, WILLIAM - INTERVIEW.

7817

-10-

the permit but they didn't like that so they knocked the permits clear out. Then some gave twenty-five or thirty dollars for a lease to be drawn up to his name. When the lease was up the improvements went to him.

Some tried to prove that they were Indian and the Indians couldn't prove they were white, so they just held the place until allotment, then they lost out. I know some around Henryetta who have their allotments and Uncle Billie Sullivan, a Creek Judge, had them thrown out but they later were put back by the "pull" of an Indian. After allotment some poor Indians signed leases to their places and found they were warranty deeds.

Law and Arrests.

When I first came to the Territory there were no United States Marshals in here. If a marshal was after a man and he got in here the only way he could arrest him was for some Indian to manage to get him across the line. That was changed to allow the marshals to go anywhere after a white or non-citizen. They worked out of Arkansas and the prisoner was returned to Arkansas for trial.

Checotah - 1878.

The first time that I was in Checotah I had been buy-

JAMES, WILLIAM - INTERVIEW.

7817

-11-

ing furs from the Indians and get into Checotah on Saturday night. As I didn't think it was right to buy furs on Sunday I stayed there over the weekend. The M.K.&F. was there, three or four stores and a brush arbor was used for a livery stable. La Blanche owned a drug store.

Farmer in 1901.

In 1901 I went to farming on the Joe Tiger place southeast of Henryetta. I raised corn, cotton, and stock. Sometimes we hauled to Checotah, Wewoka, Shawnee, or Muskogee. I had two wagons and I drove one and my wife drove the other. That year we had two bales of cotton out by the middle of September. There was no snow that winter and we never had drouths like we have now. We went to Sonora to get our grinding done and one year Frank Likouski gave me a good pair of boots as a premium for having the first load of cotton.

Henryetta 1901.

When I first came to Henryetta there were three box houses, two stores, a drug store and the harness shop was in a tent. I helped put up the tent. The railroad was as far as Okmulgee. High Fockets (Wm.) Davis hauled lumber from Checotah and sold to people to build but he didn't have a lumber yard at that time.

JAMES, WILLIAM - INTERVIEW.

7817

-12-

Hugh Henry had been selling lots until it was recognised by the Government as a townsite then the Government gave him other land and sold the lots.

The K.O. & G. was first surveyed, on Wolf Creek but the town gave them some lots to build through it. It was a year or more before they started grading and two years before the trains went through. The first railroads that came through the Territory the Indians tore up the tracks as fast as they could lay them and the soldiers had to protect the workers from bodily harm. They had no trouble with Indians because of the 1866 treaty and some Indians worked making ties, etc.

Snake Uprising.

This first started in 1901 when Chitto Harjo had a camp or organization at the Hickory Ground Town. The soldiers took a few away and broke this camp up. The next uprising or camp was in 1907.

The Snake Indians wouldn't vote nor allot. The ones who voted were not Snakes and allotted. I was living on the Jackson Barnett allotment, at Bryant, and the Indians and negroes went past my place going to the Hickory Ground. I've been told that they shot into Bill King's place; anyway they scared people off and Bill Morey and Patty led a bunch from

JAMES, WILLIAM - INTERVIEW.

7817

-13-

Henryetta and whipped them out. The Indians hoisted a white flag and the ones who would were allowed to go home. Even his relatives didn't know what became of Chitto Harjo for I've talked with some of them about it. The ones who wouldn't go home were arrested. About seventy-five were going to join the organization and met the ones coming from there, they told me, and the ones that were whipped out that morning. They all camped at my house and carried water from our well. I had been reared among the Indians and wasn't afraid of them; they could have killed me if they had wanted to but I wouldn't have known enough to be afraid until I was dead, then it wouldn't have helped me. The fullblood is dangerous when drunk and if he doesn't like you, you had better let him alone for he will do you some harm, but if he likes you he will be good and will do you any favor possible.

Oil Wells

The first oil well I ever saw was at Muskogee when I was going into Old Oklahoma. Some of them were pumping and others flowed. Only a few wells flowed steadily; the others would, for some reason that I don't understand, start flowing at four o'clock and flow for about an hour and then at seven o'clock they flowed again. I was at the first one in this

JAMES, WILLIAM - INTERVIEW.

7817

-14-

part of the country. It was on Ada Summers Hudson's place west of Henryetta. Art Moffit and Jim Gathan drilled it. They came from Muskogee to drill it, and were from Kentucky to Muskogee. The well was in a good pasture and ruined quite a space but they didn't care for they were too proud of the well to care what it did.

Salt and Mineral Springs.

In the Cherokee country on Hood Mountain, about twenty miles from Ft. Smith and fifteen from Muldrow there are two springs about three feet apart. One is a salt spring where they made salt during the Civil War. The other was called Stinking Spring as it flowed a red stinking water, then something that looked like wet gunpowder. I camped there but had to have other water with me as neither spring was fit to drink.

Stage Line or Mail Route.

I don't remember all the stops but it came from Fort Smith to Childers Stand close to Sallisaw, to Webbers Falls, where it ferried the Arkansas river. It went around Greenleaf mountain and to Fort Gibson, then to Muskogee which was the real Headquarters. The coach was just like the pictures in the movies and they drove from four to six horses and they drove them hard until they came to one of the Stands where

JAMES, WILLIAM - INTERVIEW.

7817

-15-

they changed horses and stayed all night. It is said that Breedlove owned the route for a good while.

Military Route.

In time of the Civil War there was a military route from Fort Gibson to Fort Smith. It crossed Greenleaf Mountain and the marks are still there. I can't tell the route from there as I was too young to pay attention to it.

Osage Hill.

South of Henryetta and north of the Ben Furr farm there was a battle between the Creeks and the Osages who were through here stealing stock. The Creeks were whipped and were running for dear life, going toward Sonora or almost straight east. One looked back and saw a white horse so they went back and found an Osage who was promptly put out of his misery.

Cherokee Payment.

My father-in-law was almost a fullblood Cherokee and a lawyer came to him and said he would file him for twenty-five dollars. The old man would have nothing to do with him so I asked to pay the money as my wife would benefit by it. He said he would rather all his children would die and be buried than to be filed with the Indians.

JAMES, WILLIAM - INTERVIEW.

7817

-16-

I was at the payment, I believe it was in 1838, at Sequoyah Court House on Skin Bayou. The camp was laid out in streets like a town and they were there nearly a month paying off.