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INTERVIEW.

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Hazel B. Greene,
Field Worker,
June 26, 1937.

An Interview With Robert Alison,
Hugo, Oklahoma.

Robert Alison was born May 6, 1860, at Manchester, Coffee County, Tennessee, and came to Texas in 1881, then to the Indian Territory in perhaps 1882.

I knew one thing. It seemed like a happy country those days. There were very few white people here then, but some of these mixed and full blood Choctaw Indians were as fine people as the Lord ever let live.

I first came by Paris, Texas, for a few days, but stopped at Honey Grove with some mighty good people of the name of White. I was just the hired man. They brought me over here on a hunting and fishing trip. I went back to Honey Grove with them, but I liked it so well over here that I returned. I walked. I went to the home of Captain Joe Everidge. He was a United States Marshal, and was away from home a great deal, and wanted me to stay there with his wife for protection and to do the chores while he would be away. He was the one who would get the bad men who came

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in here for refuge from the states and harbor - bad men from away back in the Eastern states.

I made myself generally useful to the Oakes and the Everidges. I did their chores, I built their houses, I planted their crops, I freighted for them from anywhere, any time, and any thing they wanted. The most of the freighting was from Paris, Texas. In return they all made me welcome in their homes whenever I wanted to go there. I recall that A. J. Walker was boarding at Lem W. Oakes' home and teaching school at Spring's Chapel. I was about twenty-two years old and still eager to learn, I wanted to go to school. Mr. Oakes told me that I could stay there and attend school and my board would cost me nothing if I would milk and do the chores. I was only too happy to do that.

I had had so little education, I was eager to learn. When I was growing up, it was just after the Civil War, when schools were scarce, besides we had to work, and reconstruct what had been torn down. Then I got an itching foot and came out to Texas.

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In this Choctaw Nation we had an awful time getting our girls to school at Skulleyville at New Hope Seminary for young ladies. By "our girls" I mean daughters of the Everidges and Oakes, and any of the young ladies of the country. Among them was Miss Fannie Oakes, daughter of the late Charles Oakes, oldest of the Oakes boys. She became Mrs. Al Nelson of Grant.

It was a long trip to Skulleyville up near Fort Smith. We would load up the girls and their trunks in wagons, and maybe take two or three wagons at a time, and start out. We would take our axes and camping outfit. We had to cut our road a lot of the way, the road was just an old line cattle trail from Texas to Fort Smith, but it was so seldom traveled that we had to make our roads as we would go. Maybe trees would have fallen across the trail previously cut. No bridges either; we would have to hunt crossings on streams and get across the best way we could. Some times we would miscalculate the depth and be in swimming water the first thing we would know. And we camped just wherever night overtook us. We would usually try to find a stream or spring. And believe me! those girls

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never came home for Christmas holidays either. They stayed once they were there. It would take us usually six days to go up to Fort Smith, but we could return quicker because we would have our way cut and mapped out and our loads would be lighter. The boys all went to Spencer Academy and to the States to colleges.

The lady who became my wife was Miss Elizabeth Rood, and was sent here by the Presbyterian Board of Missions to the Choctaw Nation as a teacher at Goodland Mission school. There was only one family of white people sending their children to school at Goodland when she first came there. Altogether, she taught school there twenty years. She was from Missouri. I was about thirty-five and she about thirty-seven when we married, but we courted three or four years first.

I was Parson J. P. Gibbons' hired man. I helped him to build this house. An Irishman named Jack Steadington and I quarried the sandstone rocks and hewed them into squares and I carried them up a ladder on my shoulder and we built that chimney there. We also dug this well and worked that large round rock on top into a circle to top

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that well with. We hauled it on a coupling pole run through it. being afraid of breaking it if it was lain flat in the wagon. That was in 1896, the date is on the well. That was when we did the work. I don't remember the date when we married, but it was there in that south room. This was Parson Gibbon's home, and he read the marriage lines. We had all of those dates set down in a big five dollar Bible, but it burned when the house did, and I can't remember things like I could before my head began hurting all of the time. It feels so queer. My wife was already gone and I was living with our adopted son who bears my name. We called him Frank Alison. It was his house which burned. He lost everything he had and then he had no place for me, they had only one bed. That was almost four years ago, that I came here. Little did I ever think when I was helping poor dear old Parson Gibbons to improve this place that some day it would be the County Farm and that I would be an inmate here. But I guess it must be the Lord's will anyway I am here. I have prayed to not live to be so old, useless and dependent. But I am. I have applied for the old age pension, but the lady said I could not get it

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as long as I stayed here and I can get no place else to stay till I have some money. So there, it seems to be an eternal "round". Judge Hunter says they are planning to abolish the County Home. Then I guess we will get a pension.

There are six of us here. Some mighty fine men have died here. One old fellow who was once worth \$40,000.00 left here a couple of days before he died. He had been here two weeks. Dad Wilkerson of Hugo. Another was a former County Judge. I've forgotten his name. Another was as fine a preacher as I ever heard talk.

This was a very fine house in its day. Frame, weatherboarded and painted. Parson Gibbons bought the land of Solomon Hotema of Cold Springs, just like I bought my place of him, too. Hotema gave us quit claim deeds, then he got into the "pen" at Atlanta, Georgia, and died there, or he would have given us good deeds and titles to the places. After Solomon Hotema was gone his wife and the grafters ordered us to move out. We each had good houses on our places, but we could do nothing else. Then the Presbyterian Board of Missionaries built a small house

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for Parson Gibbons over close to the school. His wife lives there yet.

I then bought a place from Mr. Wilbanks, a nice house, painted and papered, and the place well improved. Then my wife got sick and we had to have doctors, nurses and expensive medicines for her. All in vain-she died in 1912. I had to sell the place to clean up the debts. Everything went. Then I went to live with our boy. You know the balance of that part of the story. Here I am,

My wife visited her old home in Missouri or relatives in Dallas, Texas, every year. I would always stay at home and take care of the stock and the home. She would stay as long as she liked, then write me to meet her at the train at Grant. I had a fine team and two seated phaeton, the kind with the fringed top. When she got sick the last time her folks wanted her to go to Missouri or Dallas. She told them she felt she had lived longer for having married me and because she had been happy with 'her Robert' she would not leave me at this late date. I cooked for her every delicacy that I thought she would like, and took care of her the best I could and when she passed on, we

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laid her to rest in Goodland Academy cemetery, the place where she had taught and loved for twenty years.

All the years we were married she continued to teach. I farmed and kept the home. Sometimes we kept a cook, but usually we preferred to do our own cooking. Many a time have I stepped out in the yard at home and killed a mess of squirrels before breakfast, game was so plentiful. People marveled that I married such a fine woman. Before I married I clerked for Dr. W. D. Kendrick in his Drug store at Goodland, also for Joel Spring in his big store.

We bought our land of Solomon Hotema and built our house and lived there about 17 years. That was called Cold Spring then. It is called Gay now. We were living there when Hotema killed poor dear old Mrs. Coleman. In sight, we could have seen it had we been looking that way. Just happened not to be looking in that direction. We heard voices and some words spoken in Choctaw, but paid no attention. We could not understand it anyway, and there were a number of people within 'hollering distance' too. We were brought sharply to attention when we heard a shot.

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We ran up there, and there the poor thing lay, shot to death. It developed later that Hotema had called her out in the yard and told her that she must die because she was a witch. She protested, but to no avail. A crowd of Choctaws gathered as fast as possible and they laid her out and buried her that evening at the Cold Springs burial ground. She was killed at about 8:30 that morning.

Hotema didn't tarry after killing her, he went right on about a mile and a half and killed another woman and a man, all full blood Choctaw Indians.

We had noticed mysterious midnight meetings being held at Hotema's home and wondered what they meant. We were not to be kept in doubt or suspense for long. Old Sam Tinitubbi was the Indian Doctor. There were an unusual number of cases of pernicious malaria in that community that Spring and a good number had died. Hotema held a meeting and did not get the response to his exhortations that he desired, and inasmuch as Tinitubbi was the "doctor in-general", he consulted him about it. Old Tinitubbi told him that the power of the witches was stronger than

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his medicine, and that these people were the witches. These mysterious meetings were held to determine who the witches were and who was to kill the witches. Hotema expressed a willingness to do so, and pay for it with his life, and be a martyr for his people.

After those people were killed there was no coroner's inquest nor anything of the kind. They just buried them. Hotema was arrested next day and put in jail at Paris, Texas. He said he did it to save his people and was glad to give his life for them. He was allowed to go to and from the court house and jail alone when his trial was being held. The sheriff at Paris said he honestly believed that had they turned Hotema loose all the time, he would have come up to trial each and every time that he was called upon. He was a fine man, well educated and honest and conscientious. A splendid preacher. Hotema said in court that he could prove by the Bible that God said, "Ye shall not suffer a witch to live", and that the Bible was all that he desired to live by.

In my opinion, the reason for so many deaths that spring was because when the patients would have the fever

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for a while and it didn't respond to the usual potions of teas, brewed from herbs and plants, the witch doctor would have a hole dug, and heat it with fire or put a kettle of boiling water in it and lay the patient over that hole, on a sort of a frame work, and just sweat them till they would die of exhaustion. That is my opinion. Some years malaria seemed worse than usual, and that was one of the times. I told them there were no witches. I never did believe in them.

Wife and I were witnesses against Hotema when he was tried. We hated to do so, but right was right, and we had seen that poor woman just as he had killed her and we had to testify. Her little children were my wife's pupils here of course. We loved those Indians like they belonged to us, having lived here among them so long. We used to have camp meetings when Goodland church was just a one-room log cabin. We would build an arbor and have our preaching under it. At night candles stuck around on posts sufficed for lights. Sometimes those camp meetings would last for weeks. Every old-timer knows what

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good times we had at those meetings. Choctaws and also whites had their meetings together at Goodland and Cold Springs, too. Old brother Hotema was one of the most earnest preachers I ever heard. He would preach in Choctaw, then interpret it into English.

About twelve years ago I got to wondering about how things were in Tennessee, so I went back and took my son with me. Nearly all my friends and acquaintances were dead and gone, but I had a good time. Yet I didn't want to stay out there. I have been here so long that I feel more at home here. I have spent the most of my life here and helped to build the country up.

I helped to build Lem Oakes' log house that was just a few miles east of Hugo. I also helped to build that Frisco railroad that runs through here. God Bless you, I dug out stumps, laid iron, set scrapers, and just any part of the work that happened to need a husky young fellow. I look back and wonder how I carried those big rocks on my shoulder to the top of that chimney there, but I did. Now I am old and broken, badly ruptured, my head hurts all the time, but the Lord must be keeping me for some reason. I read my Bible daily.

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Al Nelson at Grant predicted that wife and I would die paupers one day when we were in his store buying an outfit of clothes for a little orphan Indian. My wife thought nothing of spending five or ten dollars on an orphan child. She said that that was what the Lord gave it to us for, to divide with the less fortunate. I have paid Choctaw County a thousand dollars in taxes, and now Choctaw County is caring for me.

Note: The Choctaw County Farm Home is a very comfortable pleasant looking farm home. Small houses are built out in the yard for the county charges to live in and the Superintendent lives in the large white house, and keeps a cook who cooks a splendid meal, which I have no doubt are better than those old fellows will get when they go away and try to live on an old age pension. They have every care there.- Hazel Greene, Field Worker.