

### **Notice of Copyright**

Published and unpublished materials may be protected by Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S. Code). Any copies of published and unpublished materials provided by the Western History Collections are for research, scholarship, and study purposes only.

Use of certain published materials and manuscripts is restricted by law, by reason of their origin, or by donor agreement. For the protection of its holdings, the Western History Collections also reserves the right to restrict the use of unprocessed materials, or books and documents of exceptional value and fragility. Use of any material is subject to the approval of the Curator.

### **Citing Resources from the Western History Collections**

For citations in published or unpublished papers, this repository should be listed as the Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

An example of a proper citation:

Oklahoma Federation of Labor Collection, M452, Box 5, Folder 2. Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

ARMSTRONG, JAMES K.

INTERVIEW

9498

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

93

ARMSTRONG, JAMES K.

INTERVIEW.

9498.

Field Worker's name Anelia F. Harris.

This report made on (date) December 22, 1937. 193  

1. Name James K. Armstrong.

2. Post Office Address Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 5th floor of Hale's Building.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month January Day 26 Year 1876.

5. Place of birth Scottsboro, Alabama.

6. Name of Father William H. Armstrong. Place of birth Alabama.

Other information about father \_\_\_\_\_

7. Name of Mother Mary Armstrong. Place of birth East Tennessee.

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 6.

Amelia F. Harris  
Journalist  
December 22, 1937

An Interview with James K. Armstrong,  
Fifth Floor of Hale's Bldg.,  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

My parents moved from Kentucky to Arkansas where we lived for about twelve years and where I went to school at the Ouachita Baptist College in Arkadelphia, Arkansas, finished there and then spent four years at the Baptist University at Jackson, Tennessee, receiving my L.L. B. degree from this university.

I was admitted to the Tennessee bar in 1900 and to the Arkansas bar in 1901. I then moved to Boswell, Indian Territory, in 1901 and here I established a law office.

I laid off the first precinct and cast the first ballot in Boswell. That was before the railroads were built into Boswell. The depot at that time was five miles out and a hack brought people into town.

Mrs. Janie King, a half-blood Choctaw, managed the frame hotel.

ARMSTRONG, JAMES K.

INTERVIEW.

9498.

-2-

After establishing my law office and getting myself located I inquired about the newspaper and found that there was one in Boswell run by a Republican. I was a hot-headed Democrat so I proceeded to buy the newspaper and convert it into a Democratic paper. It was called the "Boswell News" and has not changed its name or policy up to the present time.

In 1903, I organized the Boswell National Bank and as soon as restrictions were removed from Indian lands, I bought all the land for sale after statehood. I owned twenty thousand acres of land with four thousand acres in cultivation and employed a hundred people on my farms and ranches.

In 1906, I owned eight hundred head of cattle, two hundred head of horses and mules, twenty thousand acres of land, two stores and a bank. I am a born farmer and as I look back to-day I know that we had the finest crops in Oklahoma of any place in the world with never a crop failure. There were no weevils to destroy our crops and the land was rich and productive.

The town of Mayhew, a Choctaw settlement, was about five miles from Boswell and those Choctaws borrowed money on their lands as fast as loans could be made. Some of them improved

-3-

their farms well, others bought livestock while others spent the borrowed money on liquor and stayed drunk until the money was all spent. When I first opened my bank I loaned money to those Choctaw Indians on plain notes but later when they "got on to" the white man's methods of "city slicking" I took mortgages on their stock. However, I never lost a dollar on any money I loaned.

A funny incident happened in the early days before I learned to speak fairly good Choctaw; a full-blood Choctaw Indian named Lake Oshter came to the bank to borrow some money. I couldn't understand Lake's grunting and hand signs and he seemed to be either disgusted or mad so he wheeled around and started out of the bank walking fast. Very soon he returned with an old negro named Mose who could talk Choctaw well.

Mose told me that Lake wanted to borrow \$35.00 for ninety days and wanted to put up some horses as security. Lake would talk to Mose then Mose would interpret in English and we finally got the transaction about completed. I had a calendar hanging over my desk and I took it down and showed

ARMSTRONG, JAMES K.

INTERVIEW.

9498.

-4-

Mose just when the note would be due and told him I wanted Lake to come in and pay back the loan at that time or bring the horses, Mose took the calendar and showed Lake when the note was due and also told him what I said about taking the horses. Lake nodded his head as much as to say that that was all right and I filed the note away and forgot it entirely.

One day Lake came into the bank and began motioning out of the window. I looked out and there stood a drove of horses. He would motion from them to me but still it never dawned on me that the day had come for him to pay the note. All I could do was to look at him and very soon he left in a hurry and when he returned he had old negro Mose with him.

Mose told me that Lake said he couldn't pay the note off so he brought the horses to me.

I told Mose that I didn't want the horses and told him to tell Lake to take them home and to tell Lake that he could pay some other time but this only made matters worse.

Lake insisted on my taking the horses and finally I told Mose to tell Lake that I would buy two of them. Lake still didn't understand but we went out and I bought two horses for \$60.00 then we went into the bank and I got the note and Mose

ARMSTRONG, JAMES K.

INTERVIEW.

9498.

-5-

explained to Lake that he could pay off the note and take it and the balance of the money and the horses home with him. After Lake understood he was well pleased and was always a good friend of mine.

Later, I learned to talk Choctaw and we had many good laughs over the horse deal.

During those days the Indians were very superstitious and believed in signs and in witches.

There was an old Choctaw who lived out from Mayhew whom the Indians said was a witch and a conjurer and the other Indians were afraid for him to come near them.

An Indian named Shoemaker had some hogs and they died and Shoemaker declared that this Indian witch had cast a spell on them and this spell had killed his hogs so one night Shoemaker killed the Indian witch.

Shoemaker was arrested, tried and sentenced to be hung when he made this remark; "I jump off hell and bust my neck fo' I hang". He appealed the case and got a penitentiary sentence.

When I first went there if the Indians got a sentence to be whipped, hung, or shot they were released on their honor



ARMSTRONG, JAMES K.

INTERVIEW.

9498.

-6-

and never failed to be there to be whipped or executed on the day appointed but it wasn't long until some white folks told the Indians that they could run off down into Texas and the law couldn't get them as Oklahoma had no jurisdiction over them in Texas. And thus went the Indians' honor, (when it came to being punished) with the coming of the white man.

The Choctaws were always honorable in all of their dealings with us at the bank.

I defended them in their lawsuits and they always paid me.

In 1907 I was elected a justice of the Court of Appeals and held that office for ten years and in 1902 I established another law office in Hugo.

I live at Boswell and call it my home and go there to vote and besides my law practice and land holdings, I am interested in the oil producing business, operating in the mid-continent and Gulf Coast districts.

I am a Baptist and a thirty-second degree Mason.