

THE DOCTOR'S WIFE

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Field Worker, Nannie Lee Burns,
August 3, 1937.

Interview with Mrs. Alice A. James
Fairland, Okla.

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My father was Ramey Chastain of French and Cherokee descent and was born in Georgia.

My mother, Juda Watts, of Cherokee and German parentage, was also born in Georgia. They were married in Georgia where the first two children of the family were born.

I, Alice A. James nee Chastain, am the youngest of the twelve children and the only one living; was born ten miles south of Bentonville, Arkansas, November 16, 1868.

My parents were claimants, but were never allowed claims.

The Move.

A colony consisting of several families, including my grandfather, John Chastain, and my father, left Georgia in covered wagons, traveling as a wagon train, and came first to Texas and settled in Texas on a stream near San Antonio. Here the first year they had the fever and, plagued by the mosquito, they came north to Arkansas.

Traveling in covered wagons through a country without roads and no fords or bridges across the streams, it was slow going. At night they would build a fire and place their

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wagons in a circle around the fire for protection, especially from the wolves and other animals. Inside of this circle the people and the stock spent the night. When they crossed the Mississippi River and streams they would double teams and they had to keep moving because of the treacherous quicksand.

The New Home.

Looking the country over as they came and from the fact that some of their old neighbors and friends had settled in this locality, my grandfather and father decided to locate south of Bentonville. Here they stopped their wagons and began the preparations for the home that was to be. They had everything to do and lived in the wagons and covered sheds till they could cut and dress the logs for a house. Then, too, they had to split the boards for a roof. There were no windows but a wooden door with a latch string. Next came a shelter for the stock, also of logs or poles and covered with brush and grass.

Then the land was to clear and prepare for the spring planting. In fact, the first few years were hard, busy ones. Everything nearly was the outcome of a busy, inventive brain.

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Wild game and berries, on which they depended the first year, were plentiful. Meat had to be killed and prepared for winter use, berries and fruits to be gathered and dried, and clothes to be planned for the fast increasing family. Soon a homemade loom, and spinning wheel took a place in the home, and a few sheep were added to the family stock.

The Civil War.

Father enlisted and served through the War. He was taken prisoner in Arkansas and taken to Springfield, Missouri. He was accused of killing a man, a crime which he did not commit.

Mother, driving two big mules to a wagon and taking two girls with her who knew that father did not kill the man, but who knew who did the killing, drove across the country to Springfield and secured, with the aid of the girls' testimony, father's release on parole. On the way there, mother got out on the tongue to let down the reins for the mules to drink and she fell to the ground between the mules. The girls scared, began to scream and I have heard mother say that she said to them, "For God's sake, keep still and let me get out."

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By this time they had a double log house, smokehouse, stables of logs, and sheds of boxing. This house was burned and the family had to move into a box shed, which they fixed up, and in it made the children a bed of straw. Father being in the war, mother and the children were looked after by a darkey named Alph who hunted, fished, and in many ways supplied the family with food. She also had a woman named Ann who would not accept her freedom and on these mother had to depend for support and protection during the war.

Grandfather Chastain was killed at Pea Ridge. They were then living near Cherokee and the night before the battle he slipped home to see his family and that night he told his wife that he would be killed the next day, and sure enough he was.

As children we were taught to keep still when others were talking. The only time I ever remember my father punishing me was one day when he and a friend were talking of the old war days and he told the following story in which I, being interested, had edged in and asked him to repeat it and he slapped me lightly.

Father's aunt was going through the woods carrying a baby and accompanied by a small child when she discovered

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that she was to meet a party of men. Being afraid and seeing no means of escape, as she saw a hollow log, she pushed the baby in ahead of her and with the other child crawled into the log. Lying there, afraid to breathe, they were terrified when a small Indian dog belonging to the party came to the log and jumped upon it. She was sure that she was discovered but the little dog soon jumped off the log and trotted on and she and her little children were not discovered.

At times they did not have much to eat. Out of salt, they have dug up the dirt where the meat had dripped in the smoke house and boiled it for the salt. At times they were glad to gather greens or any kind of edible grass for food and so glad to have the wild game that was killed by Alph.

In Georgia, they protected their families by building stockades, but in this country the women and children had no protection.

Life After the War.

When father returned, he began to rebuild, and at first, they had only one room, but later he added another and repaired the other buildings and began to farm again.

When I was two years old, he sold out here and bought a place on the Osage and later known as the "Chastain Farm." Here we had a one room, log house with a room upstairs at first to which father added as we needed more room for the family, and storage for the goods he had for the store. Here father had a mill run by a big wheel in the water. Here he ground wheat and corn and he also sawed lumber with the same mill. He had a store in connection with the mill and freighted his goods by wagon from San Antonio. He would buy up mule teams and wagons and load them with flour, meal and possibly apples. They were loaded from our back porch and I as a little girl was always interested in watching them load. One mule team I remember was balky and when the wagon was loaded would not start if the cover was put on the wagon as they seemed to know if the cover was put over it meant a long trip. They would not put the cover on this wagon when they started. The trip would take weeks and at the other end, father would sell the teams and wagons that he did not want to bring back. Those that he brought back were loaded with barrels of sugar, sacks of green coffee, and all the goods for the store.

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In our closet we kept a barrel of granulated sugar and one we called the crawly sugar.

In addition to the mill and store he also had a blacksmith shop. Later after he sold this place it was known as the Yegger Mill.

Our school days were limited and we did not attend school as the children do now days. We had subscription schools and father paid for us by the month, but I as the youngest did get to go to school more than my older brothers and sisters. I did not have to spin and weave as they did, though I can twist the thread on the spindle, and I helped, but the older sisters did most of the work. They made us bam-a-rel skirts, wove the cloth for our dresses, and the cloth used in my brother's clothes, besides making the bedding and household linens.

Move to Indian Territory.

In 1877, we moved and located close to Grove, near the August Sager place. We had come in covered wagons and lived at first in a one-room house, but later father rented the Bob Dobkins place and here we had a double log house. We still used candles and grease lights and it was

after we come here that I saw my first coal oil light. We built fires with the spark from the flint rock, by letting the spark drop on the cotton gusset under it.

Our first matches were kept in a small round box like a pill box and had a lid. Mother cared for them and kept them put away and they were not used every time we wanted a fire. When I was thirteen I started to school at Hickory Grove, and Mrs. Jim Blythe was my teacher. Her husband carried the mail from Vinita to Southwest City. He went horseback and carried the mail in saddle pockets.

Then father bought a place just north and on the east side of the road from Carey's Gap and here when I was fourteen, my mother died. During her illness, father called Dr. Eli Lyle James, a young physician living at Prairie City, now Ogeechae, to attend her and here for the first time I met the man I was afterwards to marry and to share with him the pioneer days of this state.

After mother's death, I went to live with a married sister, Mrs. Cynthia Braught, who lived on Baptist Branch now the Elmer Long place four miles southwest of Fairland.

My Husband.

Eli Lyle James was born in Smithfield, Fulton County, Illinois, February 3, 1850. He saw no service in the war

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because his father was sick and they hired a substitute for him so he could stay at home and care for his father. He graduated from the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Keokuk, Iowa, and came to the Indian Territory in 1877. He practiced for fifty-eight years in this, and the surrounding counties.

I met him in 1882. After we were married he used to tease me and tell me that he had always watched me and waited for me. We were married September 16, 1888 at Mud Springs by the Rev. Baker and began housekeeping in a little log house near by.

His practice extended as far as he could go and I never knew when he was coming or how long he was to be at home. Dr. James is recalled by all the older settlers of this country as one of the familiar figures as he went about on his calls. At first he rode horseback and carried saddlebags and was always followed by two or more dogs. Later when he began driving, the dogs still accompanied him, and sometimes if one was small, it rode in the buggy with him. He always wore a Prince Albert coat and the older settlers tell me that he wore a long heavy beard the first time that they saw him. The writer

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remembers him in the later years as a little man with white hair and the long flowing white beard, still wearing the Prince Albert.

His wife continued, he mostly rode a little roan horse, named Bill, who would frequently throw him, followed by his hounds, two or three and sometimes four or five; and you remember he always wore a Prince Albert. "Did you ever see him without his beard?" "No," she replied, "He wore a beard the first time that I ever saw him and he told me later that he used to have throat trouble and they removed his adenoids. While they were healing, he let his beard grow and he had no throat trouble afterwards. Thinking this growth of hair helped him, he continued to wear it and never was afterwards without it. Even before he died he asked us that we not call an undertaker as they would cut his beard and my son's wife promised him to see that it was not cut, and it was not.

The Fairland Home.

After Fairland started, he built our present home and we moved here to this house which is located west of Main Street on Highway #60, at the place where the old Military

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Trail passed southward ~~out of~~ Fairland. Our house, a four-room, two-story, old fashioned, frame building faces the south and the Frisco right-of-way. Just across the railroad south of this house was the old spring where the travelers along the old Military Road used to camp and stay to rest. When the Frisco built through, the spring became filled up and later my husband had it cleaned out and it became a favorite camping site. Many of the city families used the water till the city water works were put in, then Mr. Page, the City Superintendent, had the spring filled up.

When we came to Fairland, my husband would say you can tell how fast the city is growing for you can count the population each day when they turn out to see the train go through. Here our children grew up. We had three and lost the girl. My sons, R. Q. of Miami, and Goldie Lyle of Coffeyville, Kansas, are living.

We lived together for forty-seven years and he practiced till just a few years before his death on July 2, 1935. Doctor never refused a call from those that he thought needed his services and many times have I seen

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him turn down calls from those who were able to pay him and go to see those whom he knew would never be able to pay him but he would say, "they need me and they can't afford a doctor"; my part of the work being to carry on at home and always have something for him to eat and a comfortable place for him to rest when he had the opportunity. He went at all hours of the day and night and I never knew when he would have to go.