

THOMAS, HATTIE C.

INTERVIEW

#12680

59

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INTERVIEW.

12680

Holland, W. T.  
Investigator,  
January 14, 1938.

Interview with Mrs. Hattie C. Thomas  
711 West 23rd Street,  
Tulsa, Oklahoma.

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I have lived in this country for sixty years, coming here with my parents in 1878. I was born October 19, 1869, in Barton County, Missouri. My father, Charles L. Mundell, was French descent. My mother was Holland (Wagner) Mundell. She was of Dutch descent on her father's side, while her mother was a full blood Choctaw. My mother was half and I am a quarter Choctaw of the "Mississippi Choctaws."

We came into Arkansas from Missouri in 1877, but did not stay there long, before coming on over into the Territory. We came here in a covered ox wagon, from Arkansas, locating at Walnut Flat in the Red River valley north of Sherman, Texas, on the Indian Territory side. We lived first in a tent until Father got some rough lumber with which to build a house. Then he built a "Rawhide" house. Houses made of the rough green lumber were known in those days as "Rawhide" houses.

2

My father was a combination man, in that he was a carpenter, blacksmith and millwright. He set up and operated a sawmill at Walnut Flat, as well as a blacksmith shop. White people in 1878 and later, lived in colonies for the sake of each others company and, too, as protection from the Indians. There were lots of wild Indians then among the Tiohas, Comanches and Snakes. The Snake Indians were the last to be civilized.

In 1882 my father was employed to build a flour and grist mill at Rush Springs, the first one there and the largest anywhere about. He was foreman of a gang of a hundred and five men in all employed to build the mill and put it in operation. This mill had a bolting machine for the flour and my father built this himself.

He purchased the silk for the sieves and Mother and I did the necessary sewing. He made two grades of flour at that mill. He was employed to operate it so we moved to Rush Springs in the latter part of 1882, as this was fifty miles from Walnut Flat.

People came from down in Texas to mill their wheat at Rush Springs, and were amazed to find that it took more sacks to carry back their flour, shorts and bran

THOMAS, HATTIE C.

INTERVIEW.

12680

62

3

than it did for the wheat. Grinding was done for toll. They had a toll box which was used in taking the toll for each bushel, so the patron got all the rest.

I had the worst scare of my life at Rush Springs. As I said the Indians were restless and resented the presence of the whites, so all the white colony kept their guns ready at all times to repel an attack. The Government kept a force of soldiers at Fort Sill to protect the whites but they failed to get there in time.

The day the Kiowas and Comanches came to Rush Springs I had gone to the village store, owned and operated by Mr. Willyard, and had taken my sister's baby with me when the alarm was sounded that the Indians had come. There were two or three hundred of them and they had surrounded the village. A crowd of the Indians came into the store and began to loot it, taking everything in sight. They espied me, came over, took the baby from me and called it "Pretty Papoose" and called me the same name patting me on the back. About then the men opened fire outside but had fired only a few rounds when a company of the United States Cavalry rode up.

THOMAS, HATTIE C.

INTERVIEW.

12680

4

They took charge forced the Indians to replace everything taken from the store, give up the baby and disperse.

The Rush Springs raid was in May and a short time before this, in February, 1885, these same Indians or some of the same tribes raided a white colony west of Rush Springs, and scalped and killed nine families of whites. The soldiers chased this bunch and killed all of them, two or three hundred.

I have seen "Red Cloud", Choctaw Chief, at Idabel and I also knew Big Tree, Chickasha Chief, of Tishomingo.

Father had a shop at Tishomingo in the early days before going to Rush Springs; here we knew Bill Murray, and used to see him often, in fact he danced many a set at our country dances.

My father built buggies, wagons, surreys and made plows and did everything in wood, iron and steel work. Governor Murray's father hired him to build a surrey for him. This was the first one owned by Mr. Murray, and the first one in the community. Father made everything in this vehicle except the hubs. He had hand saws and lathes so could make almost anything.

THOMAS, HATTIE C.

INTERVIEW.

12680

5

## Game

Life was easy and pleasant most of the time. Nature provided most everything we needed. The prairie chickens used to awaken us every morning, and Father killed a number of deer in our yard. They would come up to lick salt at the smoke house. I have seen as many as a hundred deer in one herd. This was on Table Mountain. My sister lived on this mountain.

There was lots of wild honey. I remember one day we went out in the timber and got twenty-seven gallons of honey. We had to cut ten trees to get it.

There were many wild hogs and every fall Father would go out and kill as many as we needed and salt them down.

I had my own gun, could mold my own bullets, and was not a bad shot.

All our travel was either afoot or on horseback, and in single file, as there were no roads, only trails, so we could not ride two abreast easily.

In 1887, Father went to Sorghum Flats and lived there four years. My father put up a sawmill there

THOMAS, HATTIE C.

INTERVIEW.

12680

6

and sawed lumber and cut shingles with which to build the first houses in this town which was later known as Cheyenne, so Cheyenne's first name was Sorghum Flats. After leaving there we moved to Willis which is now in Marshall County, just north of Red River and north of Gainesville, Texas.

#### Schooling

I have attended school only a few months in my whole life. There were no schools near us at Walnut Flat, so my father sent me to Gainesville, Texas, to school. I boarded or stayed with a sister there. That was the most of the schooling I received.

#### Indian Dances

I did not participate in them but used to attend the various Indian dances. I recall the Tom Fuller dance and the Ribbon or Green Corn dances. The Tom Fuller dance took its name from a food, similar to grits or hominy, which was cooked and eaten by all. The Green Corn dance, which lasted usually ten days was held at the time of the ripening of the corn.

THOMAS, HATTIE C.

INTERVIEW.

12680

7

## Burials

I have attended the burials of Indians. They always buried bread and milk with their children, and put extra clothes and trinkets at their feet. These and the food were put there for the journey before them to the happy hunting ground. The men had their guns buried with them.

Little grief was shown on the day of the burial, but the friends and relatives of the dead person returned the third day, and this was the day that they gave vent to their emotions.

I was first married at the age of fourteen. No questions were asked as to age, and the parent's consent was not asked. A preacher performed the ceremony in the presence of witnesses and wrote out a certificate and presented it to the couple married. We called it a bill of sale.

At the time of statehood all people who had been married less than five years were required to be re-married. I was present at more than one wedding of people whose previous wedding I had attended. Prior



THOMAS, HATTIE C.

INTERVIEW.

12680

8

to 1907, all whites in Indian Territory were married under the law of Arkansas called the "Certificate Law". It was required that these marriages should be performed by ordained ministers, and while no license was required still the minister was supposed to give the couple whom he married a certificate, usually a written instrument showing the names of the persons whom he had married, date of their marriage and the names of the witnesses to the marriage. I have seen couples re-married with their children standing about witnessing the ceremony.

The minister presented the couple with a certificate or was supposed to, and he in turn was obligated to report the marriage to the proper authority at Fort Smith, where a record of marriages was kept. All married couples who could not show marriage certificates were required by law to be re-married after statehood.

The preachers failed in lots of instances to report weddings which were actually performed, so these couples had to be re-married in order to clear up the records.

It was those couples who had been married five years

THOMAS, HATTIE C.

INTERVIEW.

12680

or less and whose marriage had not been recorded or who had lost or misplaced their certificates, who were required to be re-married.

My first and second husbands are dead and I am now married to Mr. Thomas and have lived in Tulsa since 1924.

I have lived in Purcell, Cheyenne, Lexington, Willis, Pauls Valley and Tishomingo. I was at Pauls Valley when Sam Paul was killed by his own son and, too, I lived there when the Lee brothers, outlaws, were slain.