

FALCONER, HENRY I. INTERVIEW

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

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Field Worker's name Gomer GowerThis report made on (date) July 15th 19371. Name Henry I and Ida L. Falconer2. Post Office Address Spire, Oklahoma.3. Residence address (or location) Outskirts of Spiro
Henry I.--Nov. 18th, 18704. DATE OF BIRTH: Month Ida L.→September Day 30th. Year 18745. Place of birth Henry I Falconer near the present town of Cedars,Oklahoma. Ida L. Born on Ring Prairie, Skullyville County, near
Fort Smith Arkansas.6. Name of Father John Taylor Place of birth Skullyville Co.Other information about father Julia V. Hawkins. Skullyville County7. Name of Mother Lucretia Taylor Place of birth Ring Prairie

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 9.

Gomer Gewer
Investigator
July 15th, 1937

Life and Reminiscences of
Henry I and his wife, Ida L. Falconer
Spiro, Oklahoma.

Henry I. Falconer was born November 18th, 1870, in what was then the eastern part of Skullyville County, now the northeastern one third part of LeFlore County. His father was William C. Falconer, who was born in about 1845, near Fort Smith, Arkansas. The Falconers later were closely identified with the political, social and civic life of Fort Smith. His mother, Julia V. Hawkins, was the daughter of Sarah A. Hawkins. Sarah A. Hawkins, with other immigrants, landed at Fort Coffee, and after the death of Mr. Hawkins married William Harlan. Ida L. Falconer was born September 30th, 1874, on Ring Prairie at what had been the ranch house of John G. Ring, who in addition to the ranch, conducted a plantation and stage-station at a point about two miles northeast of the ranch, at which point emigrants to California would buy the necessary supplies for the overland journey which they undertook in quest of gold in the "days of forty-nine".

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sometimes called the gold rush. Her mother, Lucretia Taylor, was the daughter of Lucretia Gary who, before her marriage to John Gary, was the widow of John Ring. Ida L. Falconer's father, John Taylor, distinguished himself by serving as County Judge, first in Sans Bois County and afterward in Skullyville County. He also served as County Clerk of Skullyville County. It was during his incumbency of the office of County Judge of Skullyville County that the last tribal execution- that of Levi James - occurred. She attended school when a child at Skullyville, later at New Hope Female Seminary, then at Baird College at Clinton, Missouri, and last at Jones College at Paris, Texas.

Thus it is shown that both Mr. and Mrs. Falconer trace their pedigrees, at least on one side, back to members of the Choctaw Tribe who entered the Indian Territory in compliance with the provisions of the treaty made at the Dancing Rabbit Creek Council Grounds on September 27th, 1830, and the racial strain of each, of which they feel justly proud, is shown on the "Tribal Rolls of the Five Civilized Tribes". As already stated, both Mr. and Mrs. Falconer were born and reared in Skullyville County. Skullyville County, due to its embracing

the northeastern portion of the Choctaw Nation and also because it contained a favorable landing point at Fort Coffee on the Arkansas River and because of its nearness to the shipping facilities at Van Buren, Arkansas, was for a number of years the trade centre for all that vast territory lying south of the Arkansas River and extending to its confluence with the Canadian River; this territory extended north of what is now McCurtain County and westward without end and consequently was the scene of much activity because of the disembarking of the Choctaw immigrants in Skullyville and their sustenance after arrival. For these reasons, those Choctaws whose families were part of the unusual activities, such as the families of the subjects of this sketch were, have inherited a wealth of knowledge concerning the early experiences of the Choctaws in the entire Choctaw Nation, as for a number of years Skullyville County shared with Fort Towson County which is located in the southeastern corner of the Indian Territory, the position of being one of the eastern gateways of all the commercial and social activities in the early life of the Choctaw Nation.

Mr. and Mrs. Falconer learned from their forebears that Skullyville County, or at least the northern half of it, was ideally situated for slave-operated plantations. The rich bottom lands along the south bank of the Arkansas River which formed the northern boundary of the county and the equally fertile land lying along the Poteau River, which traversed the eastern half of the county, provided a large area of tillable land, so necessary for the practical use of slave owners, a condition which did not exist in areas farther distant from the rivers. As a result of this condition, the northern half of the county was settled and occupied by slave owners, who were, in the main, inter-married whites and mixed breed Indians, while the southern half of the county was given over to those who were not so plentifully supplied with wealth and who could, with a minimum of time and effort, erect their log cabins and place in cultivation small patches of ground. The southern half of the county was, in the main, a vast prairie upon which belts of timber appeared at intervals providing means for the erection of houses and fences, and which at the same time provided ideal grazing grounds for their small herds

of cattle and horses.

An era of prosperity was enjoyed in Skullyville County until the outbreak of the War between the States, when practically all activities relating to social advancement came to an end. Fully realizing the effect of whatever action the Choctaw Nation took as between the interests of the contending forces, much thought and time was given over to evolving a solution which would serve the best interests of the Choctaw people. Propagandists from both sides were busy wielding influences among the Choctaws favorable to the cause they represented. However with the Choctaws, it was not so much a matter of States Rights or the freeing of the slaves, as it was a matter of insuring to them the carrying out of existing treaties, which they feared would not be done by the Federals in the event the Confederate forces were victorious in the conflict and although their existing treaties were with the Federal Government, the Confederates had promised more liberal agreements to take the place of these treaties in the event of the success of the Secessionists. It was these promises, no doubt, that actuated most of, though not all, the Choctaw people to cast their lot with the cause of the South, and

thereby, however unjustly, opening up the way by which all existing treaties were abrogated and a very severe penalty applied when new treaties were made with the Federal Government in 1866.

None but those who actually lived through that humiliating experience of the Reconstruction period can realize the extreme hardships suffered by the Choctaws of that period. Their herds had been preyed upon to a point approaching extinction; their homes burned; their fertile fields again overgrown with brush and their fences of split rails destroyed. With no money and nothing but their own labor with which to undertake the task of rehabilitation, it was, indeed, a time to try the souls of men.

After the rehabilitation of the plantations and the small homes, another era of prosperity was experienced. It was in this era that outlaws from the States intruded into the otherwise peaceful lives of the Choctaw tribe and other tribes of the Indian Territory. As a result of this intrusion, much lawlessness existed and regardless of the efforts of the courts to maintain a semblance of order, the rule came to be that each man took the responsibility of administering punishment upon those who had afflicted an injustice, whether real

or fancied, upon himself or those near to him. This state of affairs led to many killings, among which was one that occurred under the personal observation of William C. Falconer, father of Henry I. Falconer, who conducted a store near Skullyville and had arranged to open up another store at Beggy Depot. Mr. W. C. Falconer employed a man named McClain and a young negro to take two wagon loads of merchandise to Beggy Depot and he himself, was to follow a day or two later. When the laden ox-drawn wagons reached a point near the home of Wade Hampton, southwest of what was known as Mountain Station, James McClain and the negro boy camped for the night. They discovered that another man, Levi McCurtain, a Creek Indian, and in no way related to the Choctaw McCurtain, was also camped not far distant from the spot selected by McClain. McCurtain was also accompanied by a negro boy. This camp site was in view of the home of Wade Hampton, who on the following day saw that one of the campers, with two wagons, had departed and that the remaining two wagons appeared to be unattended. He immediately repaired to the camp-ground to investigate and while he was thus engaged, the young negro

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who accompanied McCurtain appeared upon the scene and told Hampton that McCurtain had sent him back to get some oxen belonging to McClain and the negro boy, or more properly to Mr. Falconer, as McCurtain had stalled with his load. Upon questioning the negro boy more closely he was told that McCurtain had murdered James McClain and the other negro boy with an ax, while they lay asleep; had robbed McClain of \$80.00; had loaded some of the goods from McClain's wagons onto his own wagons, dragged the bodies of the murdered men to a canyon not far distant from the camp site and had driven away, intending to return and get the oxen and wagons of his victims. Wade Hampton lost no time in notifying Mr. Falconer and later assisted in bringing the culprit to justice, which, owing to the fact that McCurtain was a Creek Indian, and therefore not amenable to the Choctaw Courts, could only be done before the Federal Court at Van Buren, Arkansas, as the Federal courts were given jurisdiction in all inter-tribal matters. It was before this court that McClain was tried, convicted and hanged prior to the removal of the Federal court to Fort Smith, Arkansas, which occurred soon thereafter.

Henry I. Falconer served as United States Deputy Marshal for the Western District of Arkansas during the '90's and in the same position in what was known as the "Sandy Land" court, under Chief Marshal J. J. McAlester. He also served as Deputy Sheriff of Skullyville County under William G. Kayser and also under Lewis Lucas in Sans Bois County at different periods and, consequently, has had much to do with the law-enforcement agencies which acquitted themselves so signally during the period of the transition from Territorial to Statehood status. Since the advent of statehood he has made and lost fortunes in the real estate business. His wife, Ida L. Falconer, is the daughter of Judge John Taylor, Judge of the Skullyville County Court, was given the best of educational advantages procurable at that time.