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Field Worker: Hazel B. Greene.
June 12, 1937.

Interview with Mrs. Effie Oakes Fleming,
Hugo, Oklahoma.

Born 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles northeast of Hugo.

Parents Joel E. Oakes, father, born
near Old Goodwater. Choctaw
Nation, on Red River, about
15 miles S.E. Hugo.
Josephine Cronk, mother, born
Grand Rapids Michigan.

Mrs. Effie Oakes Fleming, forty-nine years old, one-sixteenth Choctaw Indian, daughter of Joel E. and Josephine Cronk Oakes, was born at the present home of her father, 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles northeast of Hugo, Oklahoma. I guess it was then Kiamichi County. She was raised there and got all of her schooling just a mile from home, at Rock Hill school. Started at the age of seven and finished U. S. History, Geography, Arithmetic, Spelling, Rhetoric, Algebra and elocution. The last year they had her study Texas history to keep her busy. Hers would probably equal the present day highschool education. The schools weren't graded then. She finished school at fifteen years of age.

Among her first teachers were Miss Ore Grant, now Mrs. S. L. Oakes, Frogville, Oklahoma; Miss Ida Steers, of Antlers, who became Mrs. Julius Haas, prominent dealer in hides, furs, snake root, etc., in the Indian territory days; and Miss Ida Wallace, who married W. O. Surbaugh, postmaster at Goodland, Indian Territory.

After these teachers for two terms she went to school to her two sisters. First to Virgie, who married Howard McBride who was kicked to death by a mule. She is now Mrs. G. A. Lovett, living three miles northeast of Hugo in Choctaw County. Second, to Lizzie who was the first Mrs. Ed Grant, and who now lives two miles north of Hugo. Then there was Miss Effie Dawson.

There were seven of Joel E. (Dock) Oakes children. Four of them are now living; Mrs. Lovett, Mrs. Lizzie Grant, Mrs. Fleming, and Mrs. Cora House of near Hugo. Bert was married; he died of tuberculosis and was buried at Plainview, Texas. He left two daughters, Mrs. Lois Harris, and Naomi Oakes.

"hen I was growing up, there was more prairie here than there is now. Lots of places where we could see for miles and miles, is timber now. Prairie chickens were so numerous that Papa would load us kids in the wagon and go out across the prairie and kill "a whole raft of them." Some of us would drive and some sit in the back with him. He'd have his gun, and shoot from the back of the wagon. The horses were trained not to be afraid. If one walked out on the prairie, the prairie chickens would be up and gone, but one could ride all among them on a horse or in a wagon.

And deer were so plentiful, they'd come up and lie down with the calves in the lot, and were so gentle that sometimes they would not run when we would go out to milk. Many a morning Papa would get up and make a fire in the stove for Mama, then go down on the creek just back of the garden, and kill a deer and he and the hired hands would have it skinned before she would have breakfast ready.

The wolves were bad too. I've seen them jump the fence and come over in the lot and kill the calves and pigs. They'd get an old sow to fighting them and

get them to jumping from side to side, then they'd jump in and grab the pig and carry it off and lay it down and come back and get another, and another till they had all they wanted. The cows would fight for their calves too. They'd sure fight to protect their calves, but the wolves were cunning. They could leap all around the cows and get the calves. The dogs were afraid of them, they would never fight them. They couldn't "stand a hand" against them. Papa used to sit on the lot fence with a hunter's torch on his cap and shoot wolves in the lots as they attacked calves and pigs.

I have my father's 32 deer rifle there on the wall, the one he hunted with in Indian Territory days. When his sight began to fail, he cut a dime in half and had it put on the 32 for a sight. In 1932 he had a spell of what Dr. John called neuritis, his left arm broke out in red spots all over and then was solid red all over like a piece of red flannel. He was in bed for weeks, then when he got up he had regained his sight. Now he doesn't need glasses to read with.

We used to make sausage, half venison and half pork. We got our sage out on old sage fields. There used to be lots of wild sage, and we gathered it and put it up for seasoning just like anything else that we needed. We raised our red peppers too. And about two miles down east of our place were the salt springs on salt creek, where Grandfather Oakes and old Robert Jones of Rose Hill used to make salt. There were several of those salt springs, I guess they are there yet. They had two big old pots, either one must have been nine feet across, they were low though not very deep, each held about 300 gallons and they are what they made salt in. Those pots are at Rose Hill now for any eye to see. I understand the WPA is making a park of Rose Hill.

Around those springs, it is boggy and many a cow has gotten in those bogs, licking the salty earth around there; then she could not get out, just bog down and die, unless found and helped out.

Indians don't use much salt, they don't even put it in bread, especially shuck bread. They used to save all the pretty white shucks to make shuck bread in. They'd wrap that bread up in the shucks and sometimes make o twists of it like big twists of tobacco.

Speaking of tobacco reminds me, Grandfather Oakes raised his own tobacco and cured it, just as he did in North Carolina. He used so much of it that I thought it must be pretty good stuff. So one day out on the porch I sneaked his tobacco and chewed it. He was blind and could not see what I was doing, but when I began getting sick I got quiet so he called mother out to see why I was so quiet. When mother told him what I had done, he tapped me on the head with his cane and I thought he was angry with me, but he was not, and mother thought I was punished enough by being so sick. I remember the reason I was out there with him. They kept lariat ropes stretched from tree to tree so he could get around and they always had some of the grand-children to stay out there with him to keep cats, dogs, chickens, ducks, etc., out of his way. He was comparatively young when he went blind, but I don't know exactly what age.

Another thing I remember about the old place down at Goodwater; out in the corner of the yard was a log cabin that grandfather had built for the old negro Mammy Sukey, who always took care of the children.

She and another negro woman never left the old folks, even after they were freed. Their husbands died and those two just lived out there in what we always called the "Sukey house,"

Another odd thing. In that Oakes family cemetery there are about two acres, and the southeast corner was reserved for the slaves, and each family had its plot for burial just like our family had, and at the head and foot of each one grandpa always put a dark round stone about the size of your head for the foot and one a little larger at the head. Always, at every grave.

The last one of Grandfather Oakes' slaves died last winter. Of course, he was just a child when they were freed, but he remained loyal as long as he lived and attended every funeral ever held there till he was carried there himself. His name was Hickman Prince.

Nearly all of the Oakes are buried there. But my mother preferred to be buried at St. Olivet in Hugo. It was January when she died and very cold, and papa was so old we would not take her clear down to Goodwater. That was in January, 1932.

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There were twelve of Thomas William and Harriet Overidge Cakes' children. And they all (who have children) have someone buried at the old home place, except Uncle Lem, and all seven of his children are living. My sister, Mrs. Lovett, says if we can't bury her, she will always haunt us. The Cakes have workings of that cemetery twice a year and they are always well attended and the plot cleaned up.

Charles, the oldest, is buried there. The next is buried in Cooper. C. I. (Kanz) is still in home ce every. George is living in Oklahoma City with his daughter, Mrs. Conly, he was. (he was a veterinarian). Mrs. Sarah Foster is living in North. ... is living in Hugo, Oklahoma. ... Elizabeth, who was ... married and ... she took up her residence at my father's ... in conclusion the balance of the ... her room and ... however much we would ask. ... the old home place at Goodwater. ... living at old home, ...

Munt Mary Oakes Hibbin die in 1823, and is buried at Oakes cemetery. Three other children died young and are buried there of course.

About ten or fifteen years ago George Oakes bought out the other heirs of the old place but stipulated that the cemetery should still belong to all of the Oakes family.

After grandpa died, grandmother came here home in the winter with the old Indians, at the home and she and grand mother settled. In summer she visited around, sometimes she would stay with us till late in the fall. I know she was here a lot after I would start to school in the fall, and when I was studying history, she would tell us of the history of the Indian territory, and of their coming to this "illness" over the "Indian" years." She was old and had not much strength to sit in the corner and live her life but she would sit there. She said that everybody who had a baby, had to walk, but if babies gave out or the parents could not carry them the drivers of the ox-wagon would take them and swing them against a tree and knock their brains out and leave them by the roadside like a dog or a cat and not bury them. Her baby brother, Joel (who later became supreme court judge of the Choctaw Nation), was four years old and

very fat. She was just eight years old, but she took her turn at carrying him because he could not walk much, and she said that she would get so tired she'd think she was going to die but she would hang on to him. She was so afraid they would kill him. She said she saw them kill babies who were too big to be carried and would live out walking. Nobody rode. Occasionally a woman was confined. She was permitted to ride for a few days.

There were ox wagons and they hauled necessities only; food, clothes, bedding, and garden seed. Those drivers were employed by the government just like grandpa was when he was sent out here.

Grandfather was a carpenter and was sent out here to build houses for the Indians and anything the government wanted built. He built the capitol at Tahlequah also helped to build the fort at Fort Towson; also the council house at Tuskehoma. Then he was sent to the mouth of the Kiamichi River, or near there, to build cabins for the emigrants who had been located there in a colony. They were grouped about at different places. The government was supposed to build their cabins and feed them one year, or till they had made a crop, also furnish

seed for the planting of this crop. Each colony had a supply house, called a depot, from which they issued supplies to the colonists. I don't know the name of this colony, but some of them had names; such as, Boggy Depot and Lukfata Depot, and they'd haul the supplies out in the "wilderness" by ox wagons. Supplies were brought up the river by boats and sometimes the boats would be delayed for some reason, high water or something, and maybe they would sometimes get out of provisions and when they did they would sometimes catch fish and boil them in salty water and eat them.

It was late spring when the Everidges got to the place they settled, maybe late in May or June, but they cleared little patches and planted the precious seed that they had brought with them and raised some little things to eat. Harriet Everidge Oakes said her folks had a wooden spade and graded up the gardens and tended them with a hoe. They tended the corn patches with hoes. In winter when the men cut wood, they carefully cut all off of a space so the women could plant it in corn just as early as possible. Every child knew to help care for every food producing vine or plant. They punched holes in bucket lids and grated the corn for their bread. (The landing near Frogville was Pine Bluff)

The cabins that the emigrants first put up were very crude, log of course, and at first they had no chimneys; boards were split out and shed-like affairs were made to cook under and the pots were hung from the ridgepole of these sheds. The cabins had no windows, sometimes shutters were made of boards split out of the timber, and these shutters made to slide into place. The doors were of split logs, split pretty thin so as to make kind of planks, but timber was so plentiful that the logs were split only once for benches and tables, and floors, if they had floors; but the most of them had dirt floors. The house was simply a shelter to sleep under.

The split log benches were all the style for churches and schools. Papa (Dock Oakes) remembers going to school and sitting on split log benches. Bunks on the walls and trundle beds were made of hewn logs. Sometimes one was just a little finer than another, that depended upon how much pride and ability a man had to make his household furniture.

When the Union soldiers came and camped close to Grandpa Oakes' home, papa said they, the Oakes, had about 50 head of geese. The soldiers killed and ate nearly

all of them, also their calves, and if they liked, went into the smokehouses and took the meat and lard. Just anything that they wanted, they took; and, not satisfied with taking the livelihood of these people, they took a wanton delight in destroying things, especially their means of livelihood. Grandma had her cotton and wool cards hidden in a big box, so when the soldiers were prowling about the house, papa and Elizabeth sat on that box and held the baby. The soldiers didn't think of looking in that box that the kids sat upon for anything valuable. They went into the vegetable house and took strings of pumpkin that were hung in there drying and all the dried beans. Grandmother had lots of roots and herbs drying for medicinal uses and the soldiers destroyed those.

Tea was made of sassafras roots for a beverage, but they made lots of other teas for remedies.

Papa said he could remember when the Indians carried their babies in baskets on their backs, even when working in the fields. And when they needed nourishment, just took them off and brought them around to the front.

Grandma said it would be about a year from the time one train of ox wagons with emigrants would get here till they would be back with another bunch. And just the younger and more able-bodied survived the trip. The older usually stayed in Mississippi anyway. A lot of them refused to leave their homes.

Grandpa Oakes settled a place right at old Goodwater, then another further over in the river bottom, and had slaves to work down there. So he built cabins down there for them and sent S. L. (Ranzy) down there to boss them. Later S. L. allotted that land, got a post office there and gave it the name of Frogville, because there were "so many frogs, you could not hear yourself think." The frogs were so big they actually caught the young ducks that went swimming in the frog ponds near the house.

Note by Field Worker:

This writer actually beat large frogs over the heads with sticks to force them to release young ducks which they held in their mouths.

After interviewing Mrs. Fleming, I talked to her unclé, Lem W. Oakes of Hugo. He said that his mother's folks did not come to this country in a train of wagons, that they had their own wagons and oxen and that they got here the best way that they could. Also that it took about a year to make the trip because they walked, all who were able. However, he said they had government escorts to pay their expenses but they drove their own teams. He also said that his mother NEVER talked to them about the trip, that she was too busy raising her twelve children to have any time to sit down and talk of the past. It was always the present that needed to be considered.

Now I do not doubt the veracity of Lem Oakes, his mother, his brother Joel E. (Dock) or Mrs. Fleming; neither do I doubt that Mrs. Oakes told them just what they said she did, because Lem Oakes was married young and away from home, while she was comparatively a young woman and very likely she was busy with the several children who were younger than he. And when she was living at Dock Oakes' she was very old and lived more or less in the past, and possibly drew on her imagination too as we are all prone to do. It is possible too,

or probable that the things that she witnessed were distorted in her childish mind at eight, or at eighty odd years either. But Dock Oakes verified what Mrs. Fleming said his mother told.

" I know not what the truth may be,

But I tell it to you, as it was told to me."