FOLSOM, JORDAN D. INTERVIEW 12967

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An Interview with Mr. Jordan D. Folsom,
109 West Bissell Street, Hugo, Okla.

I was born one mile west of Doaksville, Indian Territory, in 1877. My father, Jordan Folsom, and my mother, Pamelia Radford, were born near Doaksville and are both buried in the negro section of the Doaksville Cemetery.

My father's mother was named Sylvia. She was a young woman with one child living in Alabama when she, with a bunch of slaves, was put upon the auction block and sold to a slave dealer. Sylvia, with Abe Radford and his young wife, Elizabeth, were all sold to the same dealer, who was bringing slaves to the Indian Territory and selling them to wealthy Indians. Sylvia's mother was there and was crying but it did no good, they were just chattels and were sold, regardless of what any of the relatives said or did. Whether that relative was a husband, wife, mother or child, it did not matter to the dealers, if they didn't happen to want them all they didn't mind separating families. Sylvia was permitted to keep her little boy, but that was the last she saw of her mother,

because very few, if any, of the slaves knew how to write letters, and they just didn't. A few of them might have known how to write, but they wouldn't have known what to do with a letter after they would write it, even if they had been permitted to do so. It simply was not done by slaves in those days.

The dealers tied the slaves together and drove them along the road just like cattle. The dealer who bought Sylvia, Abe and Elizabeth, rode in what the "niggers" called a "Chariot". I guess it was just a fine carriage. He had a fine team and it was driven by a negro slave. Then he had white drivers to drive the slaves. They rode alongside the walking slaves with whips, and flicked any who lagged along. Sylvia said they were cruel to them. It was cold weather and they were just about half clothed, but they did give them brogan shoes to wear, on the march, after it got cold. They didn't feed them well either, until they were near the end of the journey, then they fed them so they would pick up and look better and they could sell them for a better price. It took them a long time to walk that distance. Being uneducated, they had no way of knowing just exactly how

long, but Sylvia thought it took several months.

After they got a long way from home and the slave drivers thought there was no danger of any of them escaping, they untied them and let them just be driven along in a bunch like cattle. As they came to streams they waded them unless the streams were too deep, but they were used to it and didn't mind it. They would take off their shoes and wade, then put them back on. They were used to going half-clad, too. If the streams were very deep they were put across on boats if a ferry were there but they hardly ever found a ferry except on big rivers.

Sometimes they would wait for days for a stream to run down so they could cross it. I don't know whether Sylvia had a husband or not, but she said that a lot of the time, their dealers would not let them marry until they had sold them and got them settled. She brought her child along but it died soon after she was sold to Dr. Henry Folsom.

He bought the Radfords, too, and they were settled in the slave quarters on the plantation of Dr. Henry Folsom just about a mile from Doaksville. The east fence of his

plantation was just across the road from the Doaksville Cemetery, and his place extended one mile west, and one mile south. The big double-log house in which his overseer lived was just about a mile west of Doaksville on the north side of the plantation and the slave quarters were out back of the big house. Dr. Folsom didn't live out there himself. He had another big log house in Doaksville where he lived, and practiced medicine and surgery. He was just about a quarter-blood Choctaw, and well educated. He was a graduate physician and surgeon. He never charged the children of his Freedman for his services as a physician. I have seen him in my father's home many a time to see some of us who were sick. He lived, died and was buried at Doaksville.

Where his plantation house was became the home and ranch of Mr. Willie Wilson long years after Dr. Folsom's death. Dr. Folsom raised lots of things to eat, and some cotton- enough to spin into thread and make clothes. My grandmother said that the slaves picked the cotton, and picked the lint from the cotton seed. Then they carded it, spun it into thread and

wove it into cloth on a loom that was on the plantation. They had a loom house.

Dr. Henry Folsom's house is standing today, it is in the sharp bend of the "old Ultimathule road" and on the south side of the road. Colonel Sim Folsom died in that house, too, just about in 1900. But Dr. Henry Folsom died when I was a boy.

All of the roads through Doaksville were of sticky yellow clay- all of the top soil had washed off of it. When I was a boy the road or street leading north from the Military or Ultimathule road showed signs of having been paved with cobblestones and cobblestone sidewalks along. Down the hill north toward what was called Tanyard branch was a big old two-story frame house; I was born in that house and lived there until I was six months old, then we moved out about three miles east of Doaksville. Father improved his place out there, but he still walked to town every day to his work. I don't know who built that house where I was born or what it was called. Tanyard branch flowed southeasterly and there were old tanning vats along on the east side of it where there had been an old tanyard.

I guess the vats are there yet; they were the last time I was there.

My father was Jordan Folsom and he was the son of Sylvia, a slave of Dr. Henry Folsom. She only had two children, my father and the little boy who died soon after she was brought to the Indian Territory. Sylvia lived to be very old, some said she was a hundred years old when she died in 1900.

Grandmother Sylvia was buried in Doaksville Cemetery. She was a grown woman when she was brought to the Indian Territory but her son, my father, was twenty-three years old when the slaves were freed.

My father learned blacksmithing under his Marster's overseer, and kept at that work all of his life, until he died about 1906.

My mother, Pamelia, was a daughter of Elizabeth and Abe Radford. She was born in the slave quarters on the plantation of Dr. Henry Folsom. She and her mother are buried in Doaksville Cemetery, but Abe Radford was drowned in Red River and his body was never found. That was about two years before the slaves were freed.

Sim Fólsom was just about a full blood Choctaw Indian, and he had a nice home at the mouth of Kiamichi River. Across the Red River in Texas, just across from the mouth of Kiamichi, was a place where whiskey was sold. Because the Indians and negroes could not buy it in the Indian Territory, they would go over the river and get it and get drunk. I mention negroes and Indians only, because there were only a few white people here then. Well, Sim Folsom, Abe Radford, and perhaps others had rowed across the river in a skiff and had gotten drunk and were on the return journey, Abe was real drunk, his chin on his chest, when the skiff struck a snag or something and overturned. They were thrown out in the water and he was drowned. Sim Folsom who was later to become a Colonel in the Civil War Army drifted down Red River about fifteen miles to about Hooks' Ferry and lodged in a drift and stayed there about twelve hours, whooping and yelling occasionally for help. Finally, somebody heard him and took a boat out there and picked him off the drift and just as soon as he got in the boat the

drift broke loose and floated down stream. He had long hair loose and swirling around him. It is a wonder he did not drown, too. Maybe it was because he was drunk that he didn't die of exposure. He lived until about 1900 and died suddenly, in the night. Elizabeth Radford never remarried after her husband drowned.

Speaking of long hair reminds me that lots of old timers wore long hair, even some of the white men. Mr. Blake Hooks, a white man who lived in Texas on a big plantation that he owned at his ferry on Red River, did. He wore his hair coiled up under his big hat.

Oak Hill Academy, a school for negro boys and girls, was located about nine miles east of Doaksville on the Ultimathule road. It was partly supported by the Presbyterian Missionary board but it is now known as Elliot Hall. I was about eighteen years old when I went to school at Oak Hill Academy the first time. A white man from Pennsylvania, E. G. Haymaker, was Superintendent, and his wife was matron for the boys. They were both Missionaries. Mrs. McBride, widow of a former

Superintendent, was matron for the girls and her son, Howard, was teaching there. Her youngest daughter, Ruth, attended school there, the balance of the children were away at boarding school. The teachers were Miss Priscilla Haymaker, Miss Irella Fields, Miss Anna F. Hunter and Miss Mattie Hunter; white people from up North.

The dormitory for the boys had not been built when I started to school there: we stayed in one of the big old double log buildings which was one of the original ones of the Academy, the other one being used for a laundry and store room. A Mrs. Hartford was the first Missionary woman teacher that was ever there.

They had a music teabher there and two organs, and would teach music to anyone who wanted it. If we didn't get it, it was our own fault.

They furnished us with better clothes than we had ever had before, for rich people up north sent boxes of fine clothes, hats, shoes and bed clothing, table linen and dishes.

Each student was expected to pay $8.00 for the nine months term of school. I worked my way through, by working

there in the summer before I started to school. They paid me $5.00 per month and my board and clothes the first summer, and after that they paid $8.00 and my board and clothes. I sent my mother part of my money and saved the balance for my tuition. I went there three sessions, and finished the Fifth grade and quit. The Eighth grade was the limit there. When one finished that they were supposed to go somewhare else to school.

They kept hogs, cattle and chickens, and raised corn, peas, potatoes, a garden, and some fruit but they never had milk for the students, even when they milked fifteen and eighteen cows. They gave us about one good square meal a week when I was there. That was on Sundays. They would either have stewed beef or chicken and dumplings. On holidays we had cakes and pies. We had biscuits once a month, then it took a fifty pound sack of flour to make biscuits for that bunch. They made lots of light bread, and corn bread. We would shell and take to the water mill at Clear Creek, four and five bushels of corn each Saturday; we would take a wagon load almost, and we would eat it all

up by the next Saturday. We had corn bread for breakfast the most of the time, with sorghum molasses, and oat meal. We also had corn bread for dinner, and for supper we would have thin slices of light bread with jelly or preserves in between. They would give us a nourishing meal for dinner, but always a light supper. O! how we wished for mush and milk for supper, but we never got it, only when we went home. They said it was cheaper to make light bread than biscuits. We had lots of corn; it would sell for 15¢ to 20¢ a bushel, when we could sell any at all. I have seen cotton seeds sell for 5¢ per bushel and I have seen farmers strew them over the fields for fertilizer.

They taught the Bible morning, noon and night. Every Sunday afternoon we had to learn a whole chapter by heart or do without our supper, and we got so we could learn a chapter and repeat it like saying the A. B. C's., and just as easy, because we got used to it. They would let us go hunting and fishing sometimes; they were good to us.

I remember there was an old family cemetery right there at the porch of the girl's dormitory; a LeFlore family

graveyard. I don't know how old it was; there were tombstones there, but I just don't remember any of the dates on them but they were old then.