

FOLSOM, MARY ELIZABETH.

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Hazel B. Greene
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Interview with Mary Elizabeth Folsom
Widow of a Missionary to the Indians,
Antlers, Oklahoma.

I was born in 1846, in Tishomingo County, Mississippi.
My husband, Willis Francis Folsom, was born in Mississippi.

I am a white woman and was twenty years old when I
married a white man named Flaxico. We had four children
when we came to the Indian Territory. We came on the cars
to Little Rock, Arkansas, from Mississippi. From Little
Rock, to Fort Smith we had to travel by stage, because there
were no railroads into Fort Smith then. We settled on a
place close to Cameron and hired a wagon to take our little
belongings and us out to the place. We didn't have much
but our clothes. When we got out there we lived in a little
log cabin that my husband put up and we had homemade furni-
ture. We had been there about eight years when my husband
died, and in about two years I married Brother Folsom. Brother
Folsom had some children when we married, but they are all dead
now. He and I never had any and mine are all dead now but one,

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the one I am living with, Mrs. Blannie Attaway.

Brother Folsom was nearly a full blood Choctaw Indian and a wonderful man to be an Indian. He said he was eleven years old when he came with his family over the Trail of Tears. He said they had ox-wagons in which to haul their plunder and that they all walked, including the driver of the ox-wagon. It took them a long time to make the trip from Mississippi to the 'Nation'. He was educated for a Missionary to the Indians, and was one too. He preached here, there and everywhere, even among the Chickasaws and the Missionaries sent him back to the States to preach, Mississippi, Alabama and other States which I can't remember. But I know he went to Baltimore and preached there. He preached among the Indians for nearly nothing. Just anything they had a mind to give him was what he got. Potatoes, corn or meat, very seldom did he get any money. He preached funerals all over the country, far and near. When an Indian died they just buried him, usually out in the yard among the flowers. Where we lived the Indians were great hands for flowers. Then for nine consecutive evenings the family would go out to the grave and kneel and pray. After that they would

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set a date for the funeral to be preached. They sent out word to all their friends and to the preacher. On that day they would prepare a big dinner. I remember one that I attended. They had lots of cow-meat cooked and were cooking biscuits in skillets with lids. They served a coffee substitute. I don't know what it was made of; some said that they roasted okra seed and ground them for a beverage. At that 'funeral cry' there were no pies or cakes, nothing but bread and cow-meat. I imagine the financial status of the family governed the variety of food at those dinners. I noticed as they cooked the biscuits, they put them in a crock and down in a hollow tree. I guess that was to keep the dogs from getting any of them. When they were ready for us to eat they put the large crock of biscuits on the long plank table. They were still warm, so I imagine the tree kept them warm. The table was made of planks placed upon poles which were nailed from tree to tree. When the meal was ready to be eaten, a man came and touched us on the arm with a stick and grunted, never said a word, but we knew to follow him. My husband preached the funeral before the meal,

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and then he preached again after the meal. When he preached the women folks would all go to the grave and kneel down, the women with handkerchiefs or shawls over their heads and they made the 'funniest racket'. They went 'Woo-oo-oo-oo' in a high tone of voice for a long, long time.

My husband said that once he was holding a meeting and was preaching away when a man started down the aisle and was shot down from the outside. Husband said he just kept preaching while they carried the dead man out of the church. He said those things were too common an occurrence to let them interrupt his sermon. That was in the Choctaw Nation somewhere. Another time he said he was preaching in a little log cabin to just a few when someone called and ordered all in there to come out. He said he thought they were desperadoes and expected to be shot down as he came out, but he just tucked his Bible under his arm and walked out. They were officers looking for some criminals. Those were rough times, but good as to what they had been before. People were becoming more enlightened.

I was not with my husband that time, but I did sometimes go with him when he held meetings. He bought me a side saddle in Fort Smith, and I surely did feel grand when I got on it.

My husband said he had read the Bible through many times, and had read it through six times on his knees. He had corns on his knees that were a sight to look at and they were there when he died. He was a Methodist preacher. We lived close to Cameron and he wanted me to stay on there after he died and I did as long as I could, but it was coal land and I could not homestead it, so had to get off. I took my 160 acres there close, and my surplus close to Wilburton. My husband is buried near Skullyville, out in the country in Pacola Cemetery. He has been dead many years.

We lived in a little log cabin with our home-made furniture, then we had another little cabin off from the house a little ways. That was our kitchen and dining room. I cooked on the fireplace for years, then Brother Folsom went to Fort Smith and bought me a step-stove. I was prouder of that than I was of my looking glass.

We were about ten miles from Fort Smith and it was our trading place. We went there about twice a year to buy sugar,

flour and coffee and a few clothes. We sometimes got 300 pounds of flour at the time, a sack of green coffee, which I'd roast and grind in a little old mill that was nailed on the wall. I roasted it in my skillet with the lid on it before I got my stove. We bought sugar by the hundred pounds. I had a loom, a spinning wheel and cards and made some cloth sometimes. I wish I had kept my spinning wheel and the trundle bed which my children slept on. They would be curiosities now.

Our lights were pine torches and candles. I made our candles of cow-tallow poured in molds with a string along the center. Sometimes we ran short of candles then I'd twist a cotton cloth string or a wisp of cotton right tight and put it in a pan of grease of some sort and light it and set it on the table to see how to eat. I had an ash-hopper and "run" my own lye, and made my own soap, a years supply at the time. When we'd kill hogs we had plenty of scraps and "cracklins" from lard making with which to make the soap, but we were careful to wait until the dark of the moon to make the soap. It could be made quicker, easier and was better soap. However, I didn't use all of my "cracklins"

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for soap grease. I saved a good supply to make "cracklin" bread of. I made hominy by skinning the corn with ashes, and then boiling again and again and pouring off the water after each boiling, until the corn was tender. Another thing that we were sure to do 'in the dark of the moon' was the planting of Irish potatoes. We always tried to get them planted on February 14th. Also corn, lettuce, mustard and onions. We planted beans on Good Friday, always. I used to dry green beans, then when I would be ready to cook them I'd soak them over night. Then we'd let lots of beans and peas dry and mature and shell them for winter use. We cut pumpkins in rings and hung the rings on poles in the smoke house for winter use. We'd dry the pumpkins in the sunshine first. I dried grapes and other fruits for winter use. The only Indian dish that I learned to make was sour bread. Just take corn meal and make it up with water and salt and put in a warm place over night and let it rise and sour, and then bake. It is delicious.

Schools were just short summer terms of subscription schools. I sent my girls to those until they were old enough

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to go away from home and then I sent them to Muskogee to school.

I own ^{my} home here in Antlers. I have been here about 28 years. I am already ninety-two years old, and am nearly blind but I can get around pretty well, and have fair health. I bobbed my hair once, but it was too much trouble to care for. I was about 88 when I bobbed my hair. I think that when the Spring opens up good I can get out again.