

GIVENS, JAMES ABRAHAM.

INTERVIEW

10187

190

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

Field Worker's name Ethel B. Tackitt

This report made on (date) March 9 1938

1. Name Mr. James Abraham Givens

2. Post Office Address Hobart, Kiowa County, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) Hobart

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month August Day 1 Year 1862

5. Place of birth Tennessee.

6. Name of Father Anderson Givens Place of birth Tennessee

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Harriette McLamore Givens. Place of birth Tennessee

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 5.

Ethel B. Tackitt
Investigator
March 9, 1938

Interview with James Abraham Givens
Hobart, Oklahoma.

Memories of Ryan Farm now the town of
Ryan in Jefferson County in 1889.

I was born in Tennessee August 1, 1862. My father, Anderson Givens, was also a native of Tennessee as was my mother, Harriett McLamore Givens.

In 1889 I moved to the Chickasaw Indian Territory and leased land on the Ryan Farm from Mr. Ryan, the man for whom the present town of Ryan was named. Ryan was a white man who had married an Indian woman and they were people of far above the usual intelligence of the Indians of that time, for the schools for both Indians and whites taught the pupils little more than to read and write.

There was a law observed by the Indians which provided that any one of them could own and control any amount of land which they would plow a furrow around, providing that this furrow did not come nearer to the land owned by some other Indian, than one quarter of a mile.

This man Ryan had under control an immense amount of land which was six or eight miles wide and I have no idea how long, as well as other places. This land was very

productive and he leased it out to white people free of expense for three years, if they would clear it and put it into a state of cultivation, and if they would build, as the building materials were growing on the land and had to be cut off and grubbed out before the land could be plowed. Most of the fences were stake and rider fences of rails or where the brush was thick and the hogs were needed to be kept out the patch was surrounded by a brush fence. This was done by leaving good sized trees at convenient distances apart and the intergrowing brush uncut between them. Into these bushes the brush cut from the clearing ground was dragged back and interwoven into the living brush and in this way a fence was made almost as animal proof as is the present woven wire.

The big trees were girded—that is cut through the bark all round and left to die if not needed at once for making house logs or boards, and those of the next size were used for rails and if large enough were split into two or four. Rail splitting was quite an art and the best rail splitter in the community was appreciated by his friends as much as the present day foot-ball champion.

This land produced well but hauling so far with teams and wagons, horses or oxen over unworked roads and with no bridges was a great disadvantage. There was no railroad near and we had to haul across Red River to Henryetta in Clay County, Texas, or Belcherville in Montague County, Texas. Sometimes we went to Ardmore in the Territory but the roads were very bad and the Territory market was not very dependable and for that reason we usually went to Texas to sell our produce and buy our supplies, trusting to luck in fording Red River.

During this time the Chickasaw Indians looked with much distrust upon the Comanche Indians who were kept on the Reservation at Fort Sill as there was very bad feeling between the two tribes and the Chickasaws simply would not permit a Comanche on their Territory. At last the trouble reached such a state that in case a Comanche Indian had to cross their ~~boundary~~ ^a he had to carry ^a permit signed by a United States Deputy Marshal, else the Chickasaws would simply kill him.

The Chickasaw Indians seemed to want the white people to lease their land and I was always well treated by them.

In 1890 the corn crop in this district was immense and as marketing was such a problem, there was soon no market to be found and the corn was hauled to the present site of Ryan and piled in ricks a hundred and fifty feet long and as high as a man could throw it from a wagon bed, and here the farmers left it with the hope that they might be able to get buyers. To my knowledge it remained there in the ricks for three years, then it was "guessed off" and sold to a stockman who brought in feeder cattle at 8¢ per bushel. He fattened these cattle and shipped them out but, at 8 cents per bushel, the farmers did not realize anything.

for their corn.

After the railroad came through that part of the country the change was rapid, but the land did not belong to the white people who had put so many years work on some of these places and when they were forced to move off they had nothing to show for their labor. This is the reason so many persons now old have no homes.

I have lived in Oklahoma forty-eight years from the time when there was free open range and the people could have all the land they could plow around to the time when we can not

5

even stop on the road one hour without having to give a reason for the stop. After the opening of the Kiowa Country in 1901, I came to Kiowa County where I have since made my home.