

MATTHEWS, L.

INTERVIEW

10359

177

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

178

MATTHEWS, L - INTERVIEW.

10359

Field Worker's name Robert W. Small

This report made on (date) March 11, 1938

1. Name L. Matthews (colored)

2. Post Office Address Newkirk, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) Same

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month _____ Day _____ Year 1870

5. Place of birth Georgia.

6. Name of Father Manuel Matthews Place of birth Georgia

7. Name of Mother Susan Matthews Place of birth Georgia

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 3.

MATTHEWS, L. - INTERVIEW.

10359

Small, Robert W. - Investigator.
Indian Pioneer History-S-149.
March 11, 1938.

Interview with L. Matthews. (Colored)
Newkirk, Oklahoma.

I was born in Georgia, sixty-seven years ago. My father went to sea when I was a small child and was never heard of again, and my mother moved to Arkansas City, Kansas, about five years before the Opening of the Cherokee Strip.

On the day of the Opening I went to the depot in Arkansas City to take the first train out to the townsite that is now Newkirk. I just had 15 cents in my pocket. I got to the train and it didn't look like anybody else could get on it, but I saw a place where I thought I could squeeze in and I climbed on and there were so many folks on that train that the conductor never did get around to me and I saved my 15 cents.

The train stopped at a switch called Kirk and everybody had to get off and walk on to the townsite, which was about a mile and a half on farther south. I walked on down to the new townsite and the people were all there; I never saw so many folks at one place. I didn't get any town lot, but I stayed with the new town. There weren't any houses

MATTHEWS, L. - INTERVIEW.

10359

-2-

much for people to live in but they were building them as fast as they could and many had tents to live in. I had no place to sleep and only 15 cents to get anything to eat. It was warm weather and I slept on the ground and I got little jobs here and there helping men do this and that. Work got better in a few days and I got several little jobs that kept me from starving.

After awhile I got to making a little more money and I laid up all I possibly could. I got me a lot and I just kept working and saving and I got enough money ahead to buy lumber to build me a little house. I got two men to build it in one day for which I paid them \$5.00. After I built my house I kept "bach" in it. Before that I had been living with some of the colored folks that had moved to Newkirk. My mother taught me how to wash and iron clothing, and I would take in laundry work or just any old kind of work that I could get to do. I lived on meat scraps from the markets and pigs' ears and the cheapest kinds of food that I could live on. I was very saving with what I made and after a while longer I bought another lot and then a little later I built another house on the lot, and I just kept on work-

MATTHEWS, L. - INTERVIEW.

10359

-3-

ing and saving my money and after a few years I got to lending money out and I got good interest on it and I saved all I could.

In 1897, I married and my wife was more on saving than I was and we just saved nearly all we made; We would take in laundry work and my wife would do patching and many times people would give us old clothes that my wife could fix up and we would wear them a long time, and in that way we didn't have to buy many clothes and we lived on the cheapest parts of meat and other foods and we just kept saving our money and working all the time.

The first house I built I laid my foundation flat on the ground and it wasn't long until the sills had rotted because the air couldn't get under them. I learned from that to put my next house up on a foundation.

Lots of colored folks came to Newkirk and we had restaurants, boarding houses, stores and such like in the colored part of town. In 1896 we started a colored school in a house we built. We also built a colored Methodist church house and later on the colored Baptists built them a church. I built one residence that cost \$700. which was the best colored residence in Newkirk.

MATTHEWS, L. - INTERVIEW.

10359

-4-

My wife and I raised no children, our expenses were kept down to the very bottom and we both saved and worked and while we did so we prospered. I went through some pretty tough times in the beginning and lived very hard but I don't regret the hardships I endured to get a start in the world. Colored folks have a hard time sometimes when they get into a new place and don't have any money to go on, but if a man will just save and save he can get ahead if he will work and try to do what is right.