

GRAYSON, JOE M.

INTERVIEW

#12430

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

GRAYSON, JOE M.

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Field Worker's name Grace Kelley

This report made on (date) December 17 1937

1. Name Joe Grayson (white)

2. Post Office Address Henryetta, Route #1

3. Residence address (or location) Southeast of Wilson School

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month _____ Day _____ Year 1873

5. Place of birth Arkansas

6. Name of Father Tom Grayson Place of birth Tennessee

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Margaret Grayson Place of birth Arkansas

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 _____

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Grace Kelley,
Investigator.
December 17, 1937.

Interview with Joe M. Grayson,
Henryetta, Oklahoma
Route #1

Trip to the Indian Territory

I came to the Indian Territory when I was fourteen years old with my parents. We had two wagons with ox teams. We entered the Territory on the Goodlands in the Kiamichi Mountains. We crossed several rivers, forded the Mountain Fork, crossed the Kiamichi River on a ferry. We passed through Talihina, Stringtown, Atoka and went on to Allen.

Allen in 1887

There was just one store in Allen at that time. It was made of black jack poles and daubed with red mud. Siah Caneberry was the one who owned it and it wasn't a general merchandise store as we think of one, but was just a little country store.

Making a Farm

At first this was just raw country. You found a place that looked as if it would make good crops. Then

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you built a house and barns and fences to suit your requirements. If you decided to move you could sell the improvements and the crops if you could find someone who was out looking for a location. Nobody could sell the land though. If there was nobody to buy you out, you just moved on leaving the improvements.

Later you had to lease the land from the Indians. Sometimes they took money and sometimes the rent was paid by a portion of the crops. The improvements were owned as before unless they were included in the rent, then they belonged to the Indians.

Years later they charged ten cents an acre for grass and you could graze as many cattle as you wanted.

Going to Market

We lived on what was called the Dunnagee Farm which was about eight hundred acres. There were ten or twelve families farming that land. In the Fall they picked their cotton and they all took their cotton to the gins at Purcell, which was seventy-five miles away. There would be at least ten or twelve wagons belonging to the different farmers making the trip together. If

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a farmer had more than one wagon it just made a larger total of wagons making the trip. They had horses and mules on these trips.

We forded the South Canadian at, or between, Lexington and Purcell. I remember coming back one time with a load of a thousand pounds of flour and right in the middle of the river we got on some quicksand and had to unload. We had to get down and carry the flour to the bank before we could get the wagon out. We were used to it and never thought anything about it. I guess now it would be considered hardships but at that time it was just a part of the trip and to be expected.

Purcell

Purcell was a pretty good sized town as it had about a dozen stores, gin, flour mill, livery stable, blacksmith shop, hotel and everything that a town of that size needed.

Marketing

Just the men folk went to town, the women gave them a list of what they needed and the men bought it.

They bought what they needed and brought the

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rest of the money home. There were no banks so there was no credit. If nothing happened to take more money than usual, we always had some money to last from one Fall to the next but if a neighbor got up against it, that is went broke, the other neighbors loaned to him until he could pay them back.

Not Bothered by Robbers

We were never bothered by robbers, neither on the trips nor at home, except horse and cattle thieves. There were robbers who would go out of the Territory and do their mischief and then come into this country to hide from the officers but they didn't bother us nor associate with us in any way.

Officers on the Lookout for Whiskey

There was one thing that we always expected to happen on our trips and I never made but one or two that it didn't happen. The Federal officers or as we called them, "the searchers" would raid us, unload the wagons and look into everything. If a sack of flour had been opened they looked into that as it would be a good place to hide the whiskey. The horse collars

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were looked over for some had a habit of hiding the whiskey in them, especially in the ones that had a tin roll around them as the whiskey could be hidden in that tin part. There wasn't much whiskey brought into the Indian country by these freight trains though. The most was brought at night by horseback.

Law Officers

George McCall was a deputy; Joe McCall, his brother, Bob Nester and Lem Mitchel were possemen.

All prisoners were taken to Paris, Texas, or Fort Smith, Arkansas, but they never made a trip with just one prisoner.

They had wagons and would go out "hunting" and would be gone for two or three weeks. Sometimes they would come up against a bad or desperate fellow and it would be either him or them and there would be shooting. When they got one or more prisoners they were kept at Joe McCall's house until they got a load, then they would take them to court. They were handcuffed and sometimes chained so one man could guard them there at the house easily. I've seen them make arrests and bring them in

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when they had been on a trip but I don't remember any names of the arrested ones.

Schools

At first there were no schools at all. Then we built some and hired our own teachers. We didn't call them subscription schools as the men went in and built the houses, then all chipped in to pay the teacher regardless of how many children were in the family. Still later the Government furnished the teachers.

Cattle Grazing

Governor Brown had the whole Seminole Nation in a four wire fence. He claimed the cattle but really they belonged to Texas men. At that time the Texas men couldn't bring their cattle into the Territory to graze but they would get an influential Indian to "claim" them and they would carry the Indian's brand. About July or August when they were fat they were shipped and the Indian was paid four or five dollars a head for claiming them.

Seminole Head Rights

Governor John Brown had a store and he sold on credit to the Indians, groceries and dry goods; then when the money came he got it all. He was a very smart Indian.

Lighthorse Captains Guarded the Money

The Seminoles got their head rights every three months and it was hauled out in a covered wagon. There were two men in the wagon, one riding in front, two on each side and two behind. All were heavily armed. Nobody ever had the courage to attack them, so they were never robbed.

Governor Brown's Store Robbed

Governor Brown had two sons. One day while he was gone to lunch three men came in and took their watches, three saddles, tobacco and what money they could find. They waited until Governor Brown came from lunch and relieved him of his watch. An orphan boy with the Governor started to run back to the house. One of the robbers told him that if he valued the boy's life he had better tell him to stop. He called to the boy in

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Creek and he stopped and nobody was hurt. They took the Governor two miles and then turned him loose with the instructions not to look back. He stayed all night with us later and told us that he didn't look back until he was in his door.

Lehigh Mines Payroll

The money for the Coalgate and Lehigh coal mine payrolls came in on the train. Great piles of silver in sacks were thrown out as if it had been nails. Of course there were ten or twelve guards but people didn't think of stealing it. But they would have stolen a pony if the chance came. We never paid any attention to the payroll coming in as it was none of our business. It was hauled out to the mines in a wagon and the men lined up like at the general delivery window at the post office and would receive their share of the money in "pay envelopes."

Trail from Allen to Eufaula

This route was pretty straight but there were no towns to pass through. We crossed the South Canadian on Colbert Grayson's crossing. It was seventy-five miles

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and I've ridden it horseback and I would never see a white person on the way. I had folk living at Eufaula and went to visit them.

Bringing Cattle From Arkansas

I worked on the ranches some but never made the long trails, as we shipped from Eufaula. I did go to Arkansas for a herd of from three to four hundred head though. The Arkansas cattle were cheaper than the Texas cattle but were not as good as those from Texas. Both had the ticks and there were no Line Riders at that time.

This trip was made before 1893 because I moved to Eufaula in that year. We went to Washita County which is close to Pine Bluffs and took the same route that we had moved in on through the Goodlands in the Kiamichi Mountains, crossed Mountain Fork and the Kiamichi River. We made the cattle swim across if the water was too high to wade for it would have cost too much to take the ferry on the Kiamichi River; the other was a ford. The route came past Talihina, Atoka and to Allen. There were four of us and one of us would drive the chuck wagon and follow the herd, the other three taking care of the driving

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of the cattle. When we camped we all did our share of the cooking as we didn't have a regular cook along.

Toll Gates

There were two toll gates between McAlester and Eufaula, and Green McCurtain had one.

They didn't have to build a bridge or go to any expense and the good road was already there so the only work he had to do was to build a lane with a swinging gate or pole across it. You had to pay ten cents a head to take your cattle through the gate. They paid the Indians for a charter or permission to have the toll gate.

We always tried to keep from paying this toll if possible. One time we had three hundred head - that would have been thirty dollars for toll and it seemed just like robbery to us as we received no benefit and the man was out nothing to earn the money. The fellow had no change for a twenty dollar bill and we couldn't pay him until it was changed so we told him that we would bring the money back to him from the next town. We didn't have any intentions of doing that but just

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said that to get through. At another toll gate there was a good road that went around right below the toll gate which was on a straight and shorter part of the road. It was a lot easier for us to go around the lower road than to pay for taking the other one.

Gins at Eufaula

When I was about twenty years old I worked part of the time at one of the gins. Eufaula had the railroad, the Katy, and people came from seventy-five to a hundred miles around with their cotton to be ginned. G. H. Tulley owned one, Turner, the merchant, owned one and J. D. Burdett had the other cotton gin. Burdett was later shot and killed. Cotton came from Wetumka, Holdenville, Hanna and every direction.

Twelve men would work as we ran day and night. That was a very busy time of the year for us. The gins were larger than they are now for there was more cotton raised then, and there are more gins now as every town has a gin. At that time there were very few gins to take care of the business so they were rushed.

Stockyards at Eufaula

Another thing of interest about Eufaula was the

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cattle business. It was the main shipping point for the ranchers and there were stockyards there at the railroad that would hold from fifteen hundred to two thousand head of stock.

Hotels and Camping Out

After telling about so many farmers bringing their cotton from such a distance to be ginned and the ranchers bringing their cattle to be shipped from so far a person would think that there would be a lot of hotels to accommodate them. People didn't go to a hotel for the night as most of us do now. They hardly knew what they were for. There was one hotel owned by Mrs. Harrod, a one story frame building. We either stayed at the wagon yard or if we had our families with us or there were several of us who came together we camped out.

Indian Ways

One time I was riding through the woods and came to an Indian who was lying under a tree, apparently sleeping. His horse was standing beside him. When I rode up he sat up and we got to talking. After a

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little while he stretched himself and said, "Well, me must be going - be shot tomorrow." I didn't go to his execution but it did take place the next day. They didn't know that there was such a thing as running away from their home. They had been born and reared with the idea that if they did something against the law they must be punished in a certain way and there was no getting around it. If they grieved about having to pay the price with their life they never showed it.

When an Indian was whipped he wouldn't "grunt" nor groan if it killed him. (There was usually one on the side lines that "grunted" for him.) You could hear a negro who got the same amount of punishment screaming for four miles - or at least for a long way.

The condemned one picked the one to shoot him when he was to be killed. It was always a good friend and if he had a "best" friend, the best friend was the one who shot him. An enemy was never allowed to shoot a person, they were always particular about that. He also picked the one to grunt for him if he was to be whipped instead of being killed.

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A black spot was put over his heart, he was blindfolded, put on or set on a stump and shot. They were whipped two times for stealing anything but if he was caught stealing the third time he got the death penalty.

Courthouse near Eufaula

The court that I know about was seven miles west of Eufaula on the Colbert place. They had a session of court every six months. They had Indian attorneys, judge and jury. When a man was accused he was given a trial the same as now and had to be proven guilty. If he got the sentence to be shot, the attorney who took the case would have the sentence suspended and get another trial. If he proved his innocence, or that he shot a person in self defence the accused was turned loose. If the gun would snap when fired at a condemned person that person was turned loose.

Green Peach War and Indian Payments

The Isparhechar War was over one of the Indian payments. Checote got thirty-four dollars a head for the Creek Indians. He paid them four dollars and kept

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the thirty dollars. Isparhechar wouldn't let the full bloods draw that four dollars and he was a chief over them for a while. They had a very hard time as it was cold winter and they didn't have any too much to eat. Checote had lots of cattle and they barbecued some of them. There was a battle west of Okmulgee up the Deep Fork River. Some of the half-breeds came to Okmulgee and joined Checote but I don't believe he had a full blood on his side.

Allotment

The Government sent experienced men in to survey the land for the allotment but they hired anyone they wanted to help them. Al Grayson, a cousin and a white man, was the only helper that I knew. It took them about two years to finish this work. They set corner stones and put the section numbers on them.

A person picked out the number he wanted and went to Muskogee and filed on it. The first to file got the place. Lots of the fullbloods wouldn't file so the Government gave them what was left and it was rough and no good. Some of it had oil under it, however, and later some of the ones who got the worst land were the richest

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ones of the tribe. When you filed for yourself you could pick out twenty acres - leave out the next twenty if it was no-good land - and take the next twenty or forty acres. If you were eligible and filed yourself, they were very lenient with you and gave you what you wanted.

Discovery of Oil

The first oil was discovered about thirty years ago. Elec Preston and John Long came and built a rig two and a half miles north of our place and went to drilling. The first well in Tiger Flats was on Charley Wilson's place. He was a white man who lived at Okmulgee before he committed suicide a few years ago.

He had bought some land from the Indians, in fact he owned quite a bit of land. He couldn't get a title to the land but nobody brought a case against him. The allottee died and the heirs didn't know nor care about getting the land back so he just kept it until Statehood and started paying taxes on it.

People just went wild when the first oil came in. Oil people started drifting in and buying leases. Every-

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one who had land near the well wanted one drilled on their place so that they would have lots of money too.

Okmulgee During Oil Discovery

I've been in Okmulgee when you couldn't get a room to sleep in and you couldn't get a cot even in their halls because they were overflowing instead of full. There were plenty of hotels, too, as that was after the Parkinson was built. One night fifteen of us had to sit up all night at the City Hall because we had come with the intention of staying at the hotel and they were all full before we got there.

When the oil companies came they brought some men with them but the majority of workers were hired from the community where the well was to be drilled. I went to work as a roustabout and then got to pumping. I have worked ever since the oil was found here.

Okmulgee in the Early Days

I've been to Okmulgee when the Council House was practically all that was there. Negroes had log cabins on Main Street. They almost owned the town at one time, and even had a negro postmaster - that

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was before allotment but I don't just remember the year. Cap Severs was there and was supposed to be an Indian but he looked more like a white man.

Al Grounds was the first white man to live in Tiger Flats but he is dead now.

Indians from Texas - 1892

About forty-five years ago two old Indians came to Eufaula on horseback. They were sent to Charlie Gibson's store and talked to him a lot. After two or three days and nights they went back to Texas to tell the other Indians there what the conditions were here. About thirty days later they came back with the others. I guess there were forty of them, not less than that anyway. Lots of wagons, ponies and beads of every color. Every woman was loaded down with beads especially red ones, I never saw so many in my life.

New and Old Eufaula

When the railroad came through, Eufaula was two miles down the river but it moved to the railroad and the new town was called Eufaula and the other was called Old Town.