

GRIGGS, WILLIE M.

INTERVIEW

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Hazel B. Greene,
Journalist
11-10-37.

An Interview With Willie M. Griggs,
One-fourth Choctaw. Soper, Oklahoma.

My mother was a daughter of Ben Smallwood, one time governor of the Choctaw Nation. I think she was born in the Choctaw Nation, anyway she was raised near Nelson, which is a few miles north of Soper. Her father was a Chickasaw Indian and her mother was a Choctaw and a sister to Governor Wilson N. Jones. I think they were raised over in about Lukfata, I think I have been told that Wilson Jones came from over about Lukfata, and settled near Caddo, but still in the Choctaw Nation, and became one of the governors of the Choctaw Nation. He also became very wealthy. The Jones family was very poor when they lived over in the eastern part of the Nation. I have heard my father say that he disliked to visit them, because they were too poor to buy salt to put in their bread and he hated to eat their food while on a visit.

Grandfather Ben Smallwood died at his home about six or eight miles west of Coalgate and was buried there. Grandfather and Grandmother Griggs, my father and mother, and a good many members of our family are buried in the

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family cemetery, the Griggs family cemetery, at the original Griggs home about six or seven miles northwest of Soper. There is the old log house in which I was born and in which my oldest son Joel was born; and it is just about a mile from where Father built the two-story house where he lived until he moved to Soper about five years before he died in 1921, at the age of seventy-two.

My father said he knew very little about his father's and people, except they they were mostly professional men that Grandfather did not like that kind of a life. He preferred the outdoors, so he left his home in Georgia and went to Mississippi and married my Grandmother, a full blood Choctaw Indian and came to the Indian Territory over the Trail of Tears with the Choctaws although he was a white man.

My father, Thomas L. Griggs, got to attend school only one day, yet he rose to prominence in his Nation and with his people. He learned to read and write and figure. He learned to write his name first. He just kept on studying, and learning. He was representative of the Choctaw Council for a number of years; then he was Senator when the Tribal Government ceased to function. He loved all sorts of fowls,

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chickens, ducks, geese and peafowls. I know once he had a hundred and twenty-five peafowls strutting around the place. He shipped them to all parts of the United States at \$5.00 per pair. He never advertised them. People would find out that he had these beautiful fowls and would order them.

Father raised lots of turkeys, too and he always had a lot of stock around him. He made lots of money raising stock. The home that he lived in just before he moved to Soper was a nice one. Father brought the first reaper, the first binder, the first thresher, the first Winchester rifle and the first barbed wire to his community. He got many a "cussing" too about that barbed wire.

I never heard Grandfather Griggs tell anything about their trip over the Trail of Tears. He just would not talk about it to me; perhaps he did to some of the others as he grew older. I was my father's oldest child; as such he depended upon me more than he did upon the other children. I never got to go to school much on that account. I attended Spencer Academy a part of two terms, and Wapanucka Academy a part of two terms. It looked like I would just get started good ^{when} father would get sick or something and need me at

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home, and I would have to quit school and go home. I attended to the most of Father's correspondence for him. He could write, read and figure but he depended a lot on me. He could figure what a carload of cattle would come to at so much per head, in his mind, quicker than anyone else could do it on paper. The same with hogs, at so much per pound. He could figure exactly what a load of hogs would come to. But he did like for me to write his business letters for him.

The reason I could go to the Academy at Wapanucka, was because of my Chickasaw blood. My sister, Mrs. Lizzie Nash at Antlers, is enrolled as a Chickasaw. She and Peter Hudson, at Tuskahoma are writing a history of the Griggs family, as far back as they can trace it. Grandfather Griggs first settled the place where I was born and where my oldest son, Joel Griggs was born too. Father moved from there to another double log house, which is still standing about two hundred yards from the two-story frame house that he built but I believe they have covered that log house with lumber till none of the logs show. It would be much better, in my mind, if it had been left as it was originally built. My mother died when

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I was a baby and Father married Dora McCauley, who was one-half Chickasaw Indian. After my father died, she married a Mr. Wade, and he died. Then she moved away. She may be still living.

Joel Griggs is at present Principal of Goodland Academy and his wife, a white woman, is one of the teachers at this school.