

HARDIN, NELLIE

INTERVIEW

#12503

297

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

298

HARDIN, NELLIE.

INTERVIEW.

#12503.

Field Worker's name James Russell Gray.

This report made on (date) December 22, 1937

1. Name Mrs. Nellie Hardin.

2. Post Office Address Hartshorne, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) Across railroad (north) on 9th Street.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month October Day _____ Year 1890.

5. Place of birth Tracy City, Tennessee.

6. Name of Father Matt Parsons Place of birth Tracy City, Tennessee.

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Margaret Moon Place of birth Tracy City, 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 Nine.

HARDIN, NELLIE.

INTERVIEW.

12503.

James Russell Gray,
Investigator.
December 22, 1937.

Interview with Mrs. Nellie Hardin,
Hartshorne, Oklahoma.

Although I am only forty-seven I consider myself an old-timer. My parents brought me to the Indian Territory in 1895 and I have lived in the Territory and later in Oklahoma ever since. I was old enough, even when we first came, to remember things, and I consider those twelve years before statehood the most colorful of my whole life.

My maiden name was Parsons. Father was Matt Parsons; he was a Tennessee man, born there in Tracy City in 1870. Mother's name is Margaret Moon and she was born in Tracy City also. Father is buried in the Elmwood Cemetery here at Hartshorne.

I was born in Tracy City, Tennessee, in October, 1890. We lived there until I was five years old.

We came to Hartshorne in 1895 on the old Choctaw, Oklahoma & Gulf Railroad; there weren't enough passengers in those days to run passenger trains and we rode into town on a freight train in the caboose.

HARDIN, NELLIE.

INTERVIEW.

12503.

2

The "depot" was just a platform at the side of the tracks. A man named Karns met the train and took us to the hotel in his surrey; he was the "taxi" man. The streets were so muddy they were almost impassable.

The year of Hartshorne's beginning was about the time of the first run into old Oklahoma. It started with the discovery of coal at Mine Number One. The first mining developments were under the direction of the McAlester Coal Company, which had the coal fields leased from the Choctaw government. This was Gaines County in the Choctaw Nation then.

By 1890 there were only five business houses in town; The Grady Trading Company (company store); Jeff Merrill's Meat Market; Dr. Bond's Drug Store; J. D. Chastain's General Store; Phillip's General Store. There was a doctor here named O. C. Savage. And, of course, there was Mine Number One, and a few miners.

HARDIN, NELLIE.

INTERVIEW.

12503.

3

When we came here in 1895 most of the buildings were built of wood. The hundred-foot-square Grady Trading Company's store was built of stone, and so was Finnell's wholesale grocery; there was a cotton gin; the old stone building is there yet, just across the railroad tracks going north on Ninth Street.

There were about twenty-five wooden "company" houses around town where the miners and their families lived. We lived in a company house the first year just south of the highway where the concrete bridge is about halfway between Hartshorne and Haileyville. A "strip pit" mine was operating in the little valley there within a stone's throw of our door.

There were only two houses where Haileyville stands now: a section house and a small log building.

The post office was across the street from the Grady Trading Company, where Seventh Street crosses Pennsylvania. About half a block west, on the south side of the street, was an undertaking shop run by a man named Fletcher. And

HARDIN, NELLIE.

INTERVIEW.

12503.

4

west of that, where the street car track turns north on Sixth, was Angelo Duca's grocery store.

The Savage Drug Company was established about the latter part of 1890 and it was one of the first in the Choctaw Nation east of McAlester.

J. D. Chastain was married to a Choctaw woman and was an important man in Indian affairs. He had a general store here as early as 1890 and when the First National Bank was organized in 1903 he was president.

Will Anderson leased the McMurtry Ranch about 1898. He was an important rancher around here for six or seven years. In 1904 he owned a livery barn in partnership with Jim Berry. He's the one who was sheriff of Pittsburg County right after the World War.

Jim Berry was a real old-timer; he worked on ranches in the Choctaw Nation as early as 1877. He was in charge of the Jack McCurtain ranch by 1887. At one time, a few years later, he was a Deputy United States Marshal .

HARDIN, NELLIE.

INTERVIEW.

412503.

5

We had a big wooden "opera house" when I came to Hartshorne. It stood on the corner of Tenth and Pennsylvania streets and we had our school plays there and sometimes there was a traveling show. About the only one of the traveling shows I can remember was "Peck's Bad Boy".

In 1896 Mine Number One had a strike and the miners walked out. The company officials tried to break the strike by hiring non-union workers and the union men were put out of the company houses.

My father held out as long as he could. Some of the union men moved away rather than work open shop. I remember that we sold nearly all our furniture, a piece at a time, in order to pay rent and buy groceries. We sold a fine organ. We liked the town and the Choctaw Nation, and we didn't want to move away. Father belonged to the Knights of Pythias Lodge, and when Millard Daugherty got hurt in the mine the lodge gave Father the job of nursing him. That money helped us some, too.

HARDIN, NELLIE.

INTERVIEW.

12503.

6

By 1904 Hartshorne was a growing, prosperous town. G. P. Abbott was superintendent of the school system. At first the schools had been maintained by charging tuition but by 1904 there was a tax that kept them going.

William J. Hulsey was mayor, and W. J. Layne was marshal. R. W. Higgins was city treasurer.

Finnell and White were running a grocery. John Robinson, called "Blind John", was running a second-hand store. Thomas Hyde had the "Palace Meat Market". Mr. Hyde was also a big rancher. He is still in town, operating a horse-drawn dray and he is a very old man. There was the Grady Hardware Company.

Jim Brazell was an important, wealthy man here then, with influence all over this part of the Choctaw Nation. He owned most, if not all, of the lumber company and he had an interest in the First National Bank. He owned buildings and property all over town. He was a Choctaw by adoption and had been a Deputy United States Marshal for years.

HARDIN, NELLIE.

INTERVIEW.

12503.

7

There was the C. P. Anderson Drug Company. Mr. Anderson also owned the newspaper "The Hartshorne Sun" from 1902 until 1904 or '05.

Mitchell and McAuley had a general store in a new brick building; the post office was moved into the other half of the same building.

J. C. Wilcox was proprietor of the "City Meat Market". He was said to have moved to Tuskahoma, the Choctaw capital, about 1890. He came to Hartshorne about 1900, and Millard Stroupe, now dead, worked for him as meat cutter.

The Grand Leader, a dry goods store, was here when we first came to town. It was under a tent then, and displayed its goods on the sidewalk. Later H. J. Serwinsky and Mike Goldberg, the proprietors, moved the store to a wooden building where the Miller Drug Store is now half a block east of the City Hall. About 1901 a fire burned them out. A brick building was built on the same location and they had their store there for years.

HARDIN, NELLIE.

INTERVIEW.

#12503.

8

J. P. Grady was at one time marshal for the central judicial district of the Choctaw Nation.

There weren't many Indians in the towns and around the mines; they liked the open country best. There were plenty of them back in the Jack Fork bottoms about twenty-five miles south of Hartshorne.

Every once in a while they would come to town to buy supplies and see the sights, just as farmers do now. Most of them were good, peaceable people, but once in a while you would run across a mean Indian.

Some of the older Indians, like Bill Ervin and Jonas Durant, were resentful of any sort of law. Not that they were exactly outlaws but they liked to get drunk and cut up. They rode good horses and always carried guns and lots of nights I have heard them whooping and shooting as they thundered into town to shoot out a few windows.

Bill Ervin killed lots of men, I have heard, in shooting affairs. Anyway, people around here were

HARDIN, NELLIE.

INTERVIEW.

12503.

9

afraid of him and let him pretty much alone. He would ride his horse into the stores when he got drunk.

The Indians and the white people were learning to live together and on the whole they were doing all right. By a treaty with the Choctaws the United States Government established a school for Indians about six miles northeast of Hartsborne. It was called Jones Academy and it is still in existence, teaching the Indian boys how to live in a white man's world. By 1904 there were over a hundred boys in the school, and the Government had a post office there called Dwight.

Mining was the main industry around here then but ranching was pretty important, too. There are some ranches in this section yet, one that I know of south of town in Ti Valley, but there were lots of them then. By 1900 there were quite a few farmers on farms leased from the Indians.