

HARGRAVES, WILLIAM DAVID

INTERVIEW

#8352

357

HARGRAVES, WILLIAM DAVID, INTERVIEW.

8352.

- 8 -

Form A-(S-149)

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

Field Worker's name Anna R. Barry.This report made on (date) August 19, 1937. 193 1. Name William David Hargraves.2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma.3. Residence address (or location) 117 South Grand Avenue.4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month March Day 9 Year 1865.5. Place of birth Jonesburg, Arkansas.6. Name of Father James Hargraves. Place of birth Mississippi.

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Nannie (Watkins) Hargraves. Place of birth Alabama.

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 7.

Anna R. Barry,
Field Worker.

A BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH.

From a personal interview with the Subject,
William David Hargraves, El Reno, Oklahoma.

I was born near Jonesburg, Arkansas, March 9, 1865.

My forebears were pioneer settlers of Arkansas.

My paternal grandfather was killed by the Indians in Mississippi, in 1834. My grandmother saw him scalped by the Indians. He was just leaving home on a horse, with a turn (or sack) of corn, to take to a mill some five miles distant to have it ground into meal. The Indians came riding up, took him off his horse and scalped him. Seeing this my grandmother quickly grabbed her children, opened a trap door in the kitchen floor that led into the cellar under the house. The Indians came in the house, took what food they wanted, got on their horses and rode off. I have often heard my grandmother tell this story and how afraid she felt, for fear one of her children would cry out and the Indians would find them. After this, she was afraid to live here any longer. She at once sold her holdings in Mississippi and moved to Arkansas.

-2-

My maternal grandparents' name was Watkins. There were twelve children in the family. In 1835, they moved from Alabama to Arkansas in oxen wagons. Upon their arrival, Grandfather filed on fifteen quarter sections of land, a section for each child, his wife, a negro servant, and a section for himself, located near what is now Jonesburg, near the Missouri line. Their nearest neighbor lived eight miles away.

Our home was forty-two miles from Newport, Arkansas, which was our nearest trading point. Once a year, my father would take our cotton, from one to four bales, to Newport, sell it, and buy our shoes, calico, coffee and sugar. I remember one time when my father got the shoes for the family, mine were too small. I worked one whole day trying to get my feet in those shoes. Finally I gave it up. That left my brother, younger than I, with two pairs of shoes. I begged my father to take them back, but the fall rains had set in and he couldn't cross the rivers; therefore, I had to go barefooted all that year.

In my early youth, I spent most of my time herding hogs. My father usually owned from fifty to five hundred

head. The hogs ran at large and fed upon acorns.

When twenty-three years of age, I went to my first school, for forty-two days. These forty-two days put a new ambition in me, to gain an education. The fall of 1889, I picked cotton, saved every penny I could that winter and attended school for three months near Forrest City, Arkansas. I then took a teacher's examination and received a second grade certificate and taught school that summer. I then attended school at Ouachita Baptist College at Arkadelphia, Arkansas, for three years.

In 1892, I came as a teacher to the Jones Academy at Hartshorne. This was a government Indian School and had an enrollment of one hundred and ninety-six pupils, with eight teachers in charge. The Indians seemed uncivilized. We often had children come here to school and it would be months before we could get them to talk. About all they would say was just grunt when spoken to.

In 1893, two other teachers, myself and a guide started on our vacation in a two seated buggy or surrey. We came west to Anadarko.

Among the first persons I met and became acquainted with was J. J. Methvin and family. We stayed two or three days at the Methvin home. I can still remember how we left our team and carriage hitched near the school. When, several hours later, we returned, we stared at the horses in amazement. They were still standing in their places and harnessed. But such a sight. During our absence the Indian boys had taken the harness completely apart to examine it better, and had then attempted to reharNESS the horses. But not a strap or buckle was in the right place. The surcingle was about the horses neck, the reins used for traces, the bridles put on upside down, and the breeching and breast-band reversed. But the boys were as proud and delighted as could be to think they had mastered the harnessing of horses, and had hitched the horses to the carriage just as the white men did. Instead of scolding them, we each showed them about the harness, reharNESSed the team, then removed the harness again from the horses, and let the Indian boys harness them. As we drove away, this group of boys stood watching us, waving their hands.

Before the Indian child could really walk he was taught to ride a horse, and by the time he was six or eight years of age he was an expert horseman. When about eight years old, they were allowed to go on their first hunts. The boys were taught to use a bow and arrow. At first these were mere toys, but a little later they were shown how to make a bow, using cedar or cherry for a hunting bow. One of the favorite games of the Indian boys was to place an old moccasin on a stake and drive their arrows at this target while riding by on their ponies at full gallop.

In 1894, near Cash, Oklahoma, I held several revival meetings among the Apache Indians. They would come into camp on Saturday morning, and stay until Monday evening. They always brought their food. They killed a beef or two and hung it out to dry. This was known as jerked meat. During these meetings, a man by the name of Ross interpreted my sermons to the Indians. While in camp, ~~every one cooked on an open fire. All were Indians ex-~~cept three white men. The Indians put so much pepper in their food and cooked it so raw, that it was almost impossible for us to eat it. We usually built a camp

-6-

fire and cooked, but we always gave them some of the food that we had cooked and took some of their food, so as not to break the social circle. The Indian women made good cornbread.

There were many customs which to us appeared strange and unnatural. The giving of gifts was an important part of every ceremony and event of importance. When a child was born, the father gave away one of his ponies. At the ear-piercing ceremony, which took place when the child was nine months old, the father always gave a gift to the ear piercer. This habit of giving away belongings was carried to extremes among these people. It was not unusual for an Indian to give away almost everything he owned, leaving himself poor, and feeling himself well rewarded for his good deeds among the tribe. I never knew any of its members to be in actual want, for others would always provide food, shelter or whatever was needed.

Another ceremony was the occasion when they all came together and mourned for their dead. This ceremony was usually held about once a year. They would all get together, cry and moan, and beat their tom-toms. They could

-7-

be heard for miles. They never allowed white people, they always asked them to leave. They never cooked until they finished this ceremony.

Many a time I have heard an Indian yelp at the sting of a hornet or when he stepped on a thorn; yet I have worried an ulcerated tooth from an Indian's jaw by using a pair of pliers, without the Indian so much as moaning at the agony it must have caused.

Many people, I think most persons, regard Indians as treacherous and cruel, but here again white people make a big mistake. Before the Indians learned by sad experience that they could not trust the white men, they were honest and kept their pledges and promises. Treaties and agreements were sacred. Once you have won an Indian's confidence and friendship you can trust him always. Some of my best friends today are Indians.

In 1898, I moved to Duncan, Oklahoma, and began working for a Texas nursery. In this part of the state, I sold the foundation stock of orchards to the homesteaders.

I moved to Chickasha, August 29, 1908.

I married Mattie Wilson.

For the last fifteen years, I have been engaged in newspaper work.