

HOLLENBEC, TOM

INTERVIEW . 6661

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HOLLENBECK, TOM.

INTERVIEW
BIOGRAPHY FORM

Form A-(S-149)

6661

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

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Field Worker's name Bradley Bolinger

This report made on (date) July 14 1937

1. Name Tom Hollenbeck

2. Post Office Address Wilburton, Oklahoma, General Delivery

3. Residence address (or location) 2 miles on the south side of Town.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month March Day 10 Year 1871

5. Place of birth Near Russellville, Arkansas

6. Name of Father Square Hollenbeck Place of birth Michigan

Other information about father Died at the age of 70 and buried in a community burying place 2 miles west of now Wilburton.

7. Name of Mother Mary Clover Hollenbeck Place of birth Russellville

~~Other information about mother Died at 51 years of age.~~

Buried Perryville, Oklahoma.

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 6.

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Bradley Bolinger
Field Worker
July 14, 1937

An interview with Tom Hollenbeck,
Wilburton, Oklahoma.

My father's name was Square Hollenbeck and he was born in the state of Michigan. Father died at the age of seventy and was buried in small country burying place about two miles northwest of where Wilburton is now located.

My mother's name was Mary Clover Hollenbeck, born near Russellville, Arkansas, died at the age of fifty-one and was buried near Perryville, Oklahoma.

I was four years of age when my family moved to the Choctaw Nation; we stopped at a very small place then called Savanna. When we came to this country only one railroad had been built in the Choctaw Nation; it was the Missouri Kansas and Texas railroad. This railroad made a stop in what was known as McAlester and is now known as North McAlester.

At that time there was only one store in North McAlester which was just a trading post operated by J. J. McAlester. There had not been any coal discovered around

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McAlester then. All the coal that I knew of then were two shallow mines near Savanna.

There was no railroad in what was called Gaines County and later after statehood re-named Latimer County. There was only one traveled road in the whole county that extended from Fort Smith to the Texas border. When my father moved us to this county we lived out on what was called Limestone Prairie then. This locality is still known as Limestone Prairie.

When a white settler came to this country if he expected to live here he had to apply to the Choctaw Governor for a permit to settle in the new place.

In those days the Choctaw tribe had what they called scrip and much of this was used for money. This scrip was obtainable from the Choctaw Governor for 50¢ on the \$1:00. Along in the early day the Indian sheriff had a force of deputies who would travel all over the Choctaw Nation and collect these yearly rents from the white settlers. The deputies would make this trip once a year along the month of March to collect these rents for the proceeding year. This money was turned over to the Federal Indian Department.

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There was not much farming in this country in those early days and about all that was raised then was corn. Most of the entire country was on the out side; there were hardly any fences except around the small corn patches. The cattle and hogs just ranged outside in the open and kept in reasonably good shape the year round. There was practically ~~no cotton raised in this country then and when cotton was~~ raised you had to take it to Fort Smith to sell. I believe as I remember this cotton was only worth about 5 cents per pound then.

~~The early settlers in this county in those days~~ traveled all the way to Fort Smith to do their trading for the necessities that they needed. The hogs that had raised themselves in the open woods would be loaded into a wagon and the cattle that they wanted to sell or trade for supplies were driven overland to Fort Smith. They would haul the hogs and drive the cattle to Fort Smith and trade them for such commodities as sugar, flour, coffee and a full supply of tobacco. We did not have to keep hogs in those days in a close pen to fatten

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them. They would get in very good shape on the outside range and you could go out in the woods and kill a very nice one for meat and lard most any time you needed one.

There was an abundance of wild game in this county in those days as this had always been a mountainous country. I have seen wild turkeys come close to our house and even graze with some of our chickens. Most of the Choctaws would hunt the fur bearing animals and make part of their clothes out of the hides of these animals.

Green McCurtain was the last governor of the Choctaw tribe. There was a lot of trouble in his term as governor.

There were two clans organized in this tribe then. There was a land clan organized who did not want the land allotment at all; they just wanted the white settlers kept out of their Nation and they wanted the land to remain as it was and they were even against the Territory accepting Statehood.

The average Indian who was against all this belonged to the part of the tribe which had never had any education. They wanted the country left alone just like they had found it.

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The governor, Green McCurtain was a leader of the more intelligent clan of the Choctaws then. These two clans were pretty well divided; one was called the Buzzards and the other, the more intelligent class, did not have a nickname. *

I have seen Green McCurtain travel through the Choctaw tribe on horseback and in those days he always had a bodyguard to travel with him which consisted of eight men also mounted and well armed. They traveled three men ahead and three in the rear and two rode along with the Governor McCurtain.

There was a great deal of fighting and killing in those days. I personally know of four men of that part of the clan that was against the Indian land allotment who came to a house within a mile of the place where I lived and called four other Choctaws out of their cabin, shot them all four and rode away.

Federal Judge Parker of the Federal Court of Fort Smith had to send a regiment of soldiers out into the Choctaw Nation to try to stop all this killing and fighting. This regiment did slow it down to a great extent.

* Eagles.

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The town which is now Wilburton did not have anything but one small country store or trading post and did not get any larger until the Choctaw Oklahoma & Gulf railroad started to build its road through here as coal in quantities had been found all round where this town is now located. After the railroad came through lots of ~~white people moved into the Territory and the post of~~ Wilburton became a growing town.