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No. 2176

Chauncey O. Moore, Supervisor
Indian-Pioneer History, S-149

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James R. Carselowey
Research Field Worker

Interview: J. Wes Harris
Vinita, Okla.
R. F. D. #4

NAME - J. Wes Harris, born at Durand, Winnebago County, Illinois, on June 23, 1867. I have one sister, Eulalah May Harris, no brothers. My mother's maiden name was Rachael Putney. Her father's name was Perry Putney. All were of Winnebago County, Illinois.

I came with my parents to Oklahoma, then Indian Territory, and settled on Cabin Creek, 7 miles northwest of Vinita, in the Pheasant Hill neighborhood. We leased a farm and lived there for several years. We landed in the Territory on December 3, 1883.

Married an Indian

On July 10, 1886, I was married to Ida J. Jenkins, daughter of Elias and Amanda Jenkins. She had one own brother, Henry Jenkins, one own sister, Mrs. Charley Tyler, two half brothers and four half sisters.

We had five children, three girls and two boys, namely: Flora May, Gertie N., Elizabeth S., Ray C. and John W.

Father and Mother Dead

My father and mother died in the Pheasant neighborhood, where we first settled after coming to the Territory and were buried in the "Farview Cemetery" at Vinita.

After my parents died, I took my little family to the southwest part of the county, four miles northwest of Big Cabin, where we took up our claim and allotted our land, my wife and five children all being entitled to draw.

When statehood came in 1907, I was elected as the first county commissioner from the 3rd commissioner's District. George Costly of Centralia and Art Barker

of Chetopa, Route #3, were the other two commissioners.

They elected me as chairman of the commission and we had quite a task in getting started off right, as none of us knew anything about such matters. The officials of Old Oklahoma, which already had a government set up at Guthrie, were very thoughtful and had awaiting us a copy of the County Commissioners' minutes, and other matters that would help us get information and we pasted the minutes in our minute book and they will be found on the first page of the county commissioners' proceedings from this county.

Other Officers Elected

Other officers elected at the first election after statehood were: T. D. R. Frear, County Judge, Edward L. Brady, County Attorney, E. D. Ficklin, County Treasurer, L. F. Ridenhour, Sheriff, L. N. Williamson, Registrar of Deeds, George Ashb, County Surveyor, Robert F. Nix, County Clerk, D. S. Statesman, Court Clerk, Felix L. Adams, Coroner. The first meeting of the commissioners was held on November 3, 1907.

During my administration we built five steel bridges and five separate school buildings.

When I first came to the Territory there were no savage Indians living here. Beside the Cherokees, the Shawnees and the Delawares had settled here and there were a good many full-bloods among them. The Indians had their own school system with a National School Board, located at Tahlequah, who would appoint the teachers and send them out to different parts of the nation. School houses were scarce in the early days and the only country school in our neighborhood was located at Estella. It is said to be the oldest school in Craig County.

The white children were allowed to attend the Indian Schools by paying a tuition to the teacher, which he was allowed to keep, as an addition to his meager salary. \$30.00 per month for a second grade certificate and \$45.00 per month for a first grade certificate teacher was the average salary of teachers. The average

tuition for white children ranged from \$1.00 to \$1.50 per month. If I wanted to
work for an Indian I had to take out a permit of 50 cents per month.