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Field Worker: Jennie Selfridge
March 4, 1937

BIOGRAPHY OF Mr. Rose Mercer (Negro)
216 School St., Ardmore, Okla.

BORN Greenville, Alabama
December 16, 1819 (?)

PARENTS Father, William Failes (White)
Mother, Mary Hamilton (Negro)

I was born December 16, 1819, at Greenville, Alabama. I was a slave of my brother-in-law, Seth Mercer. Seth (Seith) Mercer, who was a white man, married my half sister, Irene Failes. Her father was William Failes, a man of Scotch-Irish descent. My mother was Mary Hamilton (colored), and William Failes was my father. Since the Mercers fell heir to me, I carried the name of Mercer.

Seth Mercer usually had only about ten slaves. He rented out several of his farms, and cultivated on an average of one thousand acres of cotton. He also gave land to his relatives.

I can remember well when General Jackson surveyed out the "Sparta" road from Greenville, Alabama, to New Orleans, Louisiana. Just before Abraham Lincoln was elected President, I saw him and shook hands with him. He came through Alabama riding a grey mule. The people of Alabama had said that they would kill him if he ever came through that country, but he came through spying as to conditions of the slaves. On this trip, Lincoln saw one baby taken from a negro woman and sold for five hundred dollars. He also travelled down the Mississippi on a flat boat.

When the Civil War started, I joined the Confederacy to wait upon my old boss (who was also my brother-in-law). I had to carry his luggage for him. I also worked in the hospital at Greenville, Alabama. When they would bring the wounded soldiers into the hospital to have their arms or legs removed, I would hold the cedar "noggin" or pails which were used to catch the blood while the operation was being performed.

Squire Hornbeck, who died at Marietta, Oklahoma, last week, fought with the Union soldiers. He was captured by the Confederate soldiers and forced to fight with us. I fought with him. I had to fight with the Confederacy, yet I wanted to be free.

There was an old Irishman, called Pat, who used to slip out from camp at night, and steal everything he could find to eat. Always when a battle started he would lay down and pretend to be dead. After the battle, if anyone would ask him about being dead, he would say, he just lay down before he got dead.

When New Orleans was captured by the Yankees, me and my old boss had gone home on a furlough. At that time the Yankees fired into a steamboat at New Orleans. I had a brother-in-law and a fellow servant on the boat. They both jumped into the water. They almost reached shore and went under twice. Two white men jumped into the water and pulled them out.

About forty five years ago I moved to Ran(Ryan?), Indian Territory, in what is now Love County. I know I was sixty five years old at the time, since I left Alabama on the sixth of January, the day my brother-in-law, and my half sister celebrated their sixty-fifth wedding anniversary, and they were married in January after I was born in December.

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After I moved to Ran I leased eighty acres of land. It was not necessary to pay money for this land. The only thing asked was that it be improved. My children could pick from two to three bales of cotton a day, and they kept me on the road hauling cotton to Marietta. I later leased one hundred sixty acres of land. We lived one and one half miles south-east of Oil Springs, and carried oil water from the springs to drink.

When I first came to Love's Valley, old man Sobe Love had about forty or fifty head of his former slaves still working for him. Old man Denton was running the post office at Marietta. One day, one of Love's ex-slaves, Lige Shambray received a check at the Marietta post office, in care of Sobe Love, for \$2,000. When Love saw the check, he said, "By hells, Lige, understand I can't make no more money off of you. You want to go somewhere and get on a lease."

One night an Indian shot into Governor Overton's home trying to kill him. Overton lived down the river somewhere. He had Dan and Green McCarroll, who were working for him to go get the Indian and bring him back. He then made him show the spot where he stood to fire into the house. When the Indian told him the place, Overton took his gun and shot the Indian, and had him wrapped in his blanket and carried away.

I worked with the thrasher for Pittman, old man Tom Norris, and Jerry Washington. One day Pittman bet me \$25 to \$5 that I couldn't feed the thrasher as fast as a man there by the name of Brown. I called the bet.

Brown fed one hundred five bushels of oats in one hour and I fed ¹⁶⁵ one hundred twenty five. After that Pittman paid me \$5.00 a day to work for him. I worked there until they moved down to Thackerville. Then I stopped, because they did not allow colored people down there.

Twenty four years ago I moved to Ardmore. After coming here I ran a dray and hauled freight in town. Several times they refused to let me have freight at the wholesale house because I could not sign my name.

Note: Mercer claims to be 118 years old, but according to his story he is 110.