

HARKINS, WILLIAM

INTERVIEW

1961

35

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

36

**HARKINS, WILLIAM                      INTERVIEW.                      13831**

Field Worker's name Johnson H. Hampton

Report made on (date) May 5, 1938

Name William Harkins, a full blood.

Post Office Address Finley, Oklahoma

Residence address (or location) \_\_\_\_\_

DATE OF BIRTH: Month \_\_\_\_\_ Day \_\_\_\_\_ Year About 1870

Place of birth Near Finley

Name of Father Simon Harkins Place of birth Near Finley,

Oklahoma

Other information about father \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Mother Elizabeth Harkins, Place of birth Near Finley,

Oklahoma

Other information about mother \_\_\_\_\_

Notes or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and  
history 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 \_\_\_\_\_.

HARKINS, WILLIAM

INTERVIEW.

13831

Johnson H. Hampton  
Investigator  
May 5, 1938.

Interview with William Harkins  
Finley, Oklahoma

I was born in what was known as Cedar County, back in the Indian Territory days, sometime in 1870. My father's name was Simon Harkins and my mother's name was Elizabeth Harkins. They died when I was a small boy, running around in my shirt tail. After my mother and father died, I was raised by my uncle who lived near us.

We did not have anything much for we were very poor Cheetaws. My father, I have been told, had to work for other people to get us something to eat, and my mother went out in the woods and dug up some kind of roots from which she made bread for us to eat. She would cut the roots up and dry them on top of the house and then she would beat it in a mortar and make bread out of it. She would go out into the bottom and get some mud-potatoes, as the Indians used to call them. They were the size of a big Irish-potato. She would fry them or roast them in the ashes and they were very fine to eat.

We did not have spinning wheel but my mother used to work for some of our neighbors who had one, and from

HARKINS, WILLIAM

INTERVIEW.

13851

2

them she would get some socks and mittens for us to use during the winter. I have seen some of the clothes that some of the neighbor women made out of cotton and wool. They were very heavy to wear but they were fine in the winter.

We had a little patch where we raised a little corn but we did not raise enough for our bread; in fact, we did not work very much anyway. My father was one of these Cheetaws who did not work very much at anything. He hunted most of the time and my mother worked in the garden. She would raise enough for us to eat during the summer but we did not have enough for the winter so we lived hard during the winter season.

When I was growing up this country was full of wild game. All the deer went in droves just like cattle and the turkeys went in flocks. You could see about 100 in a flock. There were some bears in the mountains where I lived. We lived in the mountains most of the time. My father was a bear hunter, they tell me, and killed several bears in his lifetime, and killed all the deer and turkeys he wanted to eat at all times. After

HARKINS, WILLIAM

INTERVIEW.

13831

3

I got big enough to handle a cap-ball rifle I went to hunting. We did not go out camping to hunt for we could get away from the house a little ways and kill all the deer and turkeys that we wanted and the fish was plenty in the creeks and rivers at that time. They are all gone now and I sure do want some turkey meat and deer, but they are not here anymore since the white people came to this country and filled it up and opened up farms and fenced up the whole country.

The country was full of cattle in my youth, but they were not driven out of the country as they were in other places. Most of the Choctaws at that time had cattle, hogs and lots of ponies. But we did not have such stock at all. We did not have even a team at that time. If we wanted to work our garden we would have to get some one to plow for us and we would work for him to pay him back-that was the way we worked our garden.

I was enrolled and allotted land and still have a part of my allotment on which I am now living. The Indian Agent removed the restrictions on some of my land and built a house for me and that is where I am now living, I got

HARKINS, WILLIAM

INTERVIEW.

18831

4

several payments with the other Cheetaws when they were getting their percapita payments but we have not gotten any payments for a long time and I sure do need some money now and I hope that they will make some kind of a payment soon.

I have attended the Indian camp meetings nearly all of my life. I have gone to churches away from home for several miles to get to attend the meetings. In earlier days there were lots of full blood Cheetaws who attended the meetings but they are now all dead. I am about the eldest one in this county now of the full bloods. I have played several games of ball and can say that it is a hard game. Where two counties got together for a game, we used to fight it out before the game started and sometimes we would have a big fight during the game. They would fight and fight hard among themselves and a good many on the side lines would pull fights. They would bet on their sides and get into an argument and pull a fight and sometimes an Indian would get killed; if he did, they then would put him under a tree and go ahead with the game. After the game they would take him home

HARKINS, WILLIAM

INTERVIEW

13851

5

and put him away and after a few months they would have a cry over him when all of his neighbors would come and take part in the cries. It was the custom among the Choctaws to have the cries about six months after the death of the Indian. Sometimes they would have their cries in the church where his memorial was being preached and some of the time they would go to the house where the grave was. If they were going to give the cry at the house where the man or woman lived they would go and camp there for the night and be there for the next day when the memorial was going to be preached. That was the custom of the Choctaws at that time. But they have abandoned this custom since the country got full of white people and they don't have the cries anymore.

I am a full blood Choctaw and have lived among my tribe ever since I was born. My family were all full bloods. I am the only one of the family living, of three girls and two boys, and I am getting old so it won't be very long until I will be taken from here. Then the whole family will be extinct and gone to our happy hunting ground where all of the others have gone before me. I never went to

HARRIS, WILLIAM

INTERVIEW.

1881

6

school a day in my life and can't speak English at all and can't read in my own language. I can talk it my language but that is all I can do. I am one of these ignorant Choctaws for I did not attend any school at all.