

VANDERGRIFT, C.S.

INTERVIEW

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

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Field Worker's name Hazel B. GreeneThis report made on (date) August 19, 1937.1. Name Cas Vandegriff.2. Post Office Address Hugo, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month August Day 22 Year 1862.5. Place of birth DeKalb County, Tennessee.6. Name of Father Chris Vandegriff Place of birth Tennessee.Other information about father was buried in Tennessee.7. Name of Mother Martha Hendrickson Place of birth Tennessee.Other information about mother was buried at Wellington, Texas.

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 10.

Hazel B. Greene,
Interviewer.

Biographic sketch of Cas Vandergriff.
Jailor of Choctaw County, Oklahoma.

We were originally from Tennessee, but came from Hopkins County, Texas, ^{to} Indian Territory.

In the summer of 1894, my father, Chris Vandergriff, came over into Indian Territory, Choctaw Nation, and rented a place for us to live, three miles north of what is now the town of Soper, Oklahoma, just because it seemed like a good place to make a living, and a new country. Then in December of the same year he loaded his wife and three children in wagons and we trekked over here. We brought a small bunch of cattle too. We started early each morning and drove late, so that by the time we had traveled about four days the cattle were suffering from sore feet and were given out. We had come about ninety miles from Hopkins County, Texas.

When we reached Billy Russell's place, we were only about two miles from our destination, so we penned our cattle for several days and went on.

Ours was the usual double-log house that most people lived in in those days.

We went to school only in summer. These were subscription schools. I don't suppose I ever went more than two months at

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a time to school. My first teacher was a white man named Roy Montgomery. Later I went to school to W. E. Larecy, who is now a merchant in Sober, and a very prominent man.

All teachers were white people. We had no Indian teachers for subscription schools for white children then. There were some well educated Indians teaching in the academies.

We went several miles sometimes to church. There was a Baptist Church about two miles from us called "The Baptist Church". It was away out to itself and had no other name. Later the place was called Atlas. There was a Methodist Church at Nelson, about four miles away from us and sometimes we attended that, because father was a Baptist and my step-mother was a Methodist.

I remember the night that Spencer Academy burned. A bunch of us boys were out looking for traps, and caught three coons, and were about three miles from the academy when we saw the light of the fire. We didn't go to it though. However, next morning we went to Doctor John's office and saw the poor burned fellows on pallets. Some of them were burned so badly it looked as though their eyes were burned out. Some of them died later. We went to the ruins of the building next day and saw some of the bones of those who burned to death, in the ashes.

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Nelson was our post office. Bob Woods, who died year before last, carried the mail on horseback for about five years from Atoka to Nelson, a distance of about forty-two miles, over bad roads, swollen streams, through rain, snow and everything. He then became postmaster at Nelson. That was before the railroad was put in, running north and south. After that, the mail was brought from Antlers, only about twelve miles.

Traveling over this country in those days was a big task because of poor roads and so few bridges. They were not real bridges, just makeshifts. There were no real bridges in Choctaw County until about 1912, when the County courthouse was built. Then we had our first Agricultural Fair, in that incompleated building. Joe Wyatt was our first County Agent I believe; anyway, he was the man who started our County Fairs.

We raised stock mostly here in the '90's.. That was the way we made the most of our money. However, we did not ship any cattle. Father sold only to Dillard or Harry Duncan. They shipped to Saint Louis, from Goodland. Goodland is really a ghost town. It was once a thriving place having three or four stores, a blacksmith shop and a hotel. There was a great deal of business going on. Many cattle

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were shipped from there. Joel Spring had a good business in his big store.

We raised some cotton too and, of course, feed, corn, cane, oats, etc., for our stock. The cattle and hogs just ran out on the range. That is the reason so many Indians and negroes were so well fixed then. I mean the full-blood Indians. They just raised their stock out in the woods without any care whatever. Every Indian and negro had a few head of cattle and hogs in the woods. Meat was their main diet. They killed all the hogs they wanted, but never wasted any, nor did they sell any. There was no market for hogs here then. We bought our hog meat the first year we were here from Judge Tom Oakes at five cents per pound.

We rented from George Thompson, an intermarried citizen.

We had to haul our cotton to Paris, Texas. We could have it ginned here, Judge Thomas Oakes had a gin at his place which was later called Atlas. We would take it to Paris, Texas and bring back sugar, coffee, and flour, and shoes enough to last the family all winter. We raised almost everything that we ate.

It usually took us three days to go to Paris, and back, forty-five miles. We would get up and start before daylight, get there late that day, maybe in the night. We would attend

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to business the next day and start back home, and camp out on Pine Creek, about five miles from Paris, so as to get an early start next morning and get home without driving so hard. We crossed Red River at Garrett's Bluff at the mouth of Boggy River. There was a ferry there.

I never could understand why court was held in the forks of Boggy, forcing everybody who attended to cross a river, unless it was so nearly the center of population. There were no bridges, nor ferries either above the forks of Boggy. The only ferry that I recall was below the forks of the rivers. There was a rock crossing onuddy Boggy where it could be forded when low. I went over there once to see an Indian executed, but he was given a new hearing and was not executed that day. My brother saw him executed later. I saw some whipped. This was usually for stealing. I never heard of a woman being whipped or shot.

In winter we enjoyed Church, Sunday School, parties, dances, and singings. In summer our diversions were protracted meetings, picnics, and the best sport of all were Indian fish fries. Everybody was invited. Sometimes one would last two or three days. Folks would go there and camp, have the fish fries in daytime, and maybe build a platform and dance at night. Not only the young folks,

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but all. . I have seen a father, mother, and three daughters dancing in one set.

There was a rule that no fish were to be killed until everybody was ready, unless they had reached the fishing place near time for the meal, then two or three were appoint-

~~ed to kill enough for that meal.~~ The men would start dressing them and the women frying them, while the majority of the men and boys kept beating devil's shoestring in the water, to stupefy the fish, which the old white men would stir, and the young white men and all of the Choctaw Indians would shoot with bows and arrows. It was such sport that the young white men got to be just about as good with the bows and arrows as the Indians were. I am a white man. My wife is white also.

When a big old fish come bobbing up, no matter if it weighed fifty pounds an Indian would not hit it, but a white man could not wait until all were ready, according to their rules. He would nearly always hit one. Indians did not waste game. White man does. When statehood came in, a law was passed against fishing with devils' shoestring. So that ended a great sport. We fished mostly in White Bird Lake six or seven miles northwest of Soper. It was the best lake in the county before it was ditched and messed up with the

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exception of Lake Roebuck. Sometimes we fished in Clear Boggy. I never will forget some trouble we had with some Snake Indians on Boggy. A bunch of us were up there, on this side of the river, but had gone over into the forks of the river hunting, when my father came upon some Snake Indians, or they came to him, and asked if he meant to fish. He replied that he did. They told him they thought he had better be gone out of that part of the country by nine o'clock next morning. There were about twelve of us in camp. Only three wanted to stay. My father was not scared, but thought it best not to antagonize them, so advised us all to go home, which we did. We saw old nets belonging to white men, that the Snake Indians had cut-up. There were a good many Snake Indians in the forests in between the two Boggy's, and they always ran the white men out, occasionally killing some of them. We didn't need to go over there to hunt. One could flush ten or twelve deer or turkey most anytime in the river bottom on this side or on the prairie, and didn't need to go very far in the bottom to find plenty of squirrel. There were not so many white people in this country for years after we came over here. The most of the full-bloods lived in the timber and usually tried to lived on a creek or branch, or

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near a spring. The mixed breeds, realized the value of the prairie lands, took advantage of it and settled around the edges of the prairies. The mixed breed Choctaw Indians were usually the most prosperous. The full-bloods seemed not to have the executive ability that the mixed breeds had. But nearly every full-blood and nearly every negro had a few cattle and other stock, and mostly lived at home. About all they ever had to buy was coffee, sugar, and flour. Of course they raised corn for the native dishes. We had our corn ground. After Judge Oakes put in a sawmill at Atlas, it was my duty to ride an old sway-backed mare to the grist mill that ~~he~~ put in at the same time. I would have to take a bushel or two at a time, to have enough to do us from one week to the next, or to the next grinding day.

There were no whiskey stills in those days. That is something else the white man brought here. Of course, the Indians would drink whiskey, but they would have to go to Texas or Arkansas to get it and they seldom did. Sometimes some enterprising white man or negro would go over into another state and get it, and peddle it over here. When this was done, they really "raised Cain".

I remember something about an old Annuity Payment ground upon Beaver Dam Creek where Indian payments were made, but

cannot recall enough about it to be of value to you.

I know I heard that the Indians would camp there by the hundreds, waiting for annuity payments, which they said were made in gold; but where they kept the money, or what kind of buildings there were, I just cannot say.

I just kept farming and raising stock until 1926, when I became a deputy sheriff out here in the country north of Soper. Ambrose Spear was High Sheriff of Choctaw County. Then he resigned, and the County Commissioners appointed W. L. Ellis, who was already office deputy, to succeed him. Charlie Weddington was the next sheriff. I became his jailor the first Monday in January, 1928, and have served in that capacity ever since.

In 1903 I married Miss Lee Males at Antlers in a double ceremony that ^{also} united another couple in marriage.

The Males family lived in the old dormitory of New Spencer Academy after the Academy burned. It was a big sixteen-roomed, two-story building, frame at that, and, strange for that day and time, not a fireplace in the building, all flues. There was a big family of the Males. The father, mother, four boys, and two girls, and an uncle of the family, so they managed to use the whole building. They rented it from Judge Oakes, who had charge of the

property at that time, and after we married we lived in the old Spencer Store Building. In that old orchard there were big pear trees, which bore that year, and those trees are standing today and loaded with pears.

Beside my wife's bed room window, in the dormitory, there was a cottonwood sprout. It is now three feet in diameter, a fine, big tree. The big old Academy barns are in fair shape now. Mrs. Howard Morris, who was Sue Oakes, daughter of Judge Tom Oakes, built a nice house where the Academy building burned.