

WATKINS, JESS JIM.

INTERVIEW

10173

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

WATKINS, JESS JIM. INTERVIEW

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Field Worker's name Raymond C. Jantz

This report made on (date) March 1, 1938 1938

1. Name Rev. Jess Jim Watkins

2. Post Office Address Anadarko, Rural Route

3. Residence address (or location) Anadarko
5 miles east and 5 miles north of

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month April Day 26, Year 1859

5. Place of birth North Carolina

6. Name of Father Ennis Watkins Place of birth North Carolina

Other information about father Farmer

7. Name of Mother Mary Francis Bryants Place of birth North Carolina

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 _____

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Field Worker, Raymond C. Jantz,
March 1, 1938.

Interview with Jess Jim Watkins,
Anadarko.

I was born in North Carolina in the year 1859. In the year of 1879 my parents emigrated to the state of Texas. In 1882 I first entered the Indian Territory. At this time you couldn't find any work except with cow outfits. Most young fellows like me worked for these cow men. The Territory in those days was a good hideout for many outlaws. The reason for this was that there wasn't any law except a few Deputy United States Marshals and they had to much country to cover to bring justice to all the Territory.

I have seen this country grow from bare prairie and brush to thriving cities and productive farms. When I first entered the Territory a man could ride for miles and miles and never see a house or a living thing except a coyote or some cows.

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Cow-men and Cow-camps.

When I first entered the Territory I went to work for Andy and Jim Roff and I also worked for Bill and Jerry Washington. These were the leading cow-men and ranchers at this time within the Territory. Bill and Jerry had the largest ranch of any that I know of in the Territory at this time. Bill Washington married a full blood Chickasaw Indian woman and this gave him his legal rights in the Territory. He and his brother ran their cattle under one brand. No one knew or had any idea how many cattle the Washingtons had because they had three different brands. Bill's wife and son each had a separate brand. At one time I remember that Bill got hard pressed for some ready cash so he called a round-up. On this round-up, they gathered together twenty thousand head of cattle with his own brand. Bill still had plenty of cows over the range.

I have made several trips up the cattle trails with trail herds into Kansas. I traveled up the

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Old Chisholm Trail from the Chickasaw Nation to Kansas City several times in the early days. A man who worked long for the Washingtons had to steal or leave the payroll so I didn't work long for them because I wouldn't steal for myself. Every man was instructed at headquarters to brand every cow or calf that was found unbranded. Also to brand over any cow that was already branded that could be blotched into his brand. The Washingtons put up a drift fence that ran from Thacker to Cornish, a distance of about forty miles. Washington's herds were so large in number that he had to build this fence to keep his cattle from straying too far from headquarters. This also shortened the round-up season.

This drift fence stayed up until the Government compelled the people to cut their holdings to about six square miles. Washington didn't take heed of the Government orders so the Indian Department sent out the Indian Policemen and cut the wire between every post. They did this so it couldn't be tied back.

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I worked longer for Andy and Jim Roff than for any other outfit. The Roff Bros, were square shooters and welcomed everyone. They never required any one to steal for them. I started my missionary work while working for the Roff Brothers. The first church that I was pastor of was called first Sweetwater, then later known as Lone Grove in the Chickasaw Nation.

Indians.

I have never had an enemy among the Indians but I never had many close dealings with them. The Indians would gather in the river bottoms in the fall in great numbers. They would stay until early spring, then scatter out again. They always moved just before the spring floods that always came to flood the lowlands. We always knew when the Indians started to move that it wouldn't be long till it would start raining.

Churches.

The first church in the Territory that I can remember was called the "Addington Bend Baptist Church."

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The church derived its name from a man of the name of W. H. Burch. Every one knew him only as Reverend Ben Burch. When the church first started only three families attended besides some of us neighboring cowboys. This was because there were only a few people around. W. H. Burch would come once a month from Burns City, Cooke County, Texas, and preach for us. Reverend W. H. Burch was the first Baptist preacher to hold a church or preach in the Indian Territory. There was a small log house used as a schoolhouse that we had for a church. This was very small but served the purpose.

Old Oklahoma

The opening of Old Oklahoma was a sight that I shall always remember. People were there from every state in the Union. They were there in wagons, carts, buggies, horseback, afoot, riding burros, and every sort of way that they might travel. People were "land crazy." One sight that I shall always remember was

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that of a Dutchman. When the run started the people didn't wait to find a crossing on the Canadian River which was bank full. They would put their horses into the water at the first place that they could.

This Dutchman plunged his horse into the water and made it across but his horse was exhausted when he reached the other side. The horse could not climb the bank and bogged down in the quicksand. The Dutchman couldn't go on so he staked his claim right there.

The town of Lexington now stands on his place that he staked in the run. This fellow probably wouldn't have gotten as good a location if he had gone on in the race.

Railroads work and Missionary work.

I saw all the railroads come and build. I helped put up the Chicago Rock Island line from Anadarko to Lawton. I did all the finish work from Richards Spur into Lawton. I also preached in all the railroad camps from Anadarko to Lawton. My first service in Fort Sill was held under a great elm tree. This was at the railroad camp at Fort Sill. Everyone brought his

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own wagonseat, feed-boxes or camp stools. We were just about ready to start services when the soldiers and their families from Fort Sill came and with the railroaders and soldiers and their families there was a great crowd.

Early days.

I was at the location of Chickasha when it was only a prairie. No one ever thought there would be a city on that spot. If you had told someone that Oklahoma would be as it is they would have thought you were insane. I was also in Anadarko when it was only a trading post and the Indian Agency was there.

I didn't get any land or even a home at any of the openings. I registered in the 1901 opening for Caddo, Comanche and Kiowa Counties. I, together with a bunch of men from Lawton, registered for this opening but not one of us drew any land. I have spent my life bringing the Gospel to the people over the entire Indian Territory and Oklahoma. I have

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pioneered from the Red River to the Kansas Line. I have also been east and west. I have seen this country grow from the scrub longhorn steer to the pure breed shorthorn. I have seen it grow from a prairie dog mound to great towns and striving cities. When settlement and development struck the Indian Territory, they came like prairie fires before a stiff breeze. I am old and my time is about done but I would take no worldly possession for what I have seen and learned from nature's own book and from the great book, the Bible.