

WATKINS, WINGEON.

INTERVIEW

#12626

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

12626

Field Worker's name Comer CoverThis report made on (date) January 8th, 19381. Name Wingeon Watkins2. Post Office Address Spiro, Okla.3. Residence address (or location) Same4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month September Day 19th Year 18515. Place of birth Lake County, Mississippi6. Name of Father Isom E. Watkins Sr. Place of birth MississippiOther information about father Buried at New Hope Cemetery  
LeFlore7. Name of Mother Charlotte Watkins nee Place of birth MississippiOther information about mother Sister of Campbell LeFlore

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 \_\_\_\_\_

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The subject of this sketch, Wingeon Watkins, is a one-sixteenth Choctaw Indian and was born in Lake County, Mississippi, on September 19th, 1851. He is now approaching his eighty-seventh year of life.

He came with his parents, Isom E. Watkins, Sr., and Charlotte Watkins, nee LeFlore, to the Indian Territory in 1871 and settled at a point about four miles south of the present city of Spiro, in LeFlore County, and has lived in this vicinity all through the years.

On November 30, 1876, he was united in marriage to Lora Bilbo and soon thereafter he was appointed District or Circuit Clerk in which position he served for a period of eight years under Judge Joseph McCurtain, after which he served one and one-half years as County Clerk of Scullyville County.

After this service for his District and County, he engaged in the mercantile business with his brother, Isom E. Watkins, Jr., at Scullyville, where they conducted a flourishing business for a number of years.

During the period in which the brothers were engaged in the mercantile business he was appointed Deputy United States

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Marshal and his brother Isom appointed as Deputy Sheriff under Robert (Bob) Ward, an outstanding sheriff of that period.

Of that experience of the two brothers, he relates that both were very lenient toward offenders and consequently made but few arrests. However, on one occasion, a man who had just arrived from Fort Smith in an inebriated condition stopped his hack near the store and in a maudlin manner, proceeded to make a speech in which he scored the Democratic Party in a derogatory way, to say the least of it. This was too much for the brothers as both were dyed in the wool Democrats of the old school. After making repeated efforts to quell the would-be orator, advantage was taken of the supposition that liquor could be found hidden in his hack. Finally, a search of the hack was made and a small quantity of whisky was found, whereupon he was forthwith placed under arrest, jailed at a private residence and on the following morning was taken before Judge Parker at Fort Smith, who for lack of vindictive evidence, bade him go his way after he had been excoriated to no end by the Judge.

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According to Mr. Watkins, there were quite a number of Choctaws who remained in Mississippi at the time of the removal and that quite a number of those who emigrated returned to their former homes in Mississippi rather than undergo the hardships attendant on establishing new homes in the Indian Territory.

Then, too, of those who had taken up their abode in the Indian Territory, quite a number returned to Mississippi shortly before or at the outbreak of the Civil War. Among these was an older brother, Greenwood LeFlore Watkins, who had come to the Indian Territory with his uncle, Campbell LeFlore, in 1859. The latter returned to Mississippi and organized a troop of Choctaw Indians and entered the service of the Confederacy, while the former, Greenwood LeFlore Watkins, his nephew, served under General Robert E. Lee and was killed in the battle of Gettysburg.

An interesting item in the reminiscences of Mr. Watkins, is his great respect for Sheriff Bob Ward under whom his brother-in-law served as Deputy Sheriff. Of the ex-sheriff he relates concerning the execution of Levi James, a Choctaw

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Indian who was a hopeless cripple, that the sheriff declared he would resign his office rather than inflict the penalty of death which had been imposed by the court upon a helpless cripple without defense. In that instance, Levi James had been convicted of the murder of one Folsom, while he, James, was under the influence of liquor. He was tried, convicted and was sentenced to be shot. On the arrival of the appointed day of execution, Sheriff Ward called upon Deputy Sheriff Jim Jarneal to put the decree of the court into execution. Deputy Sheriff Jarneal remonstrated but upon being told by the sheriff that the Choctaw law so directed, he reluctantly agreed to perform his duty, saying in broken English, "Me no like killem Levi, law say me kill it, me kill it. Levi he killit good man. All right for killit Levi." His trusty Winchester rifle sped the bullet which reached the vitals of Levi James and thus was done an offended Choctaw law.

Mr. Watkins, in company with Parson Shappard of the New Hope Female Academy, was present at that execution, but the two spared themselves the pain of witnessing the actual shooting by remaining behind the courthouse until after they

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had heard the fatal shot.

Mr. Watkins enjoyed an intimate acquaintance with Doctor Shappard and the missionary, Willis Folsom, and speaks of both as being men of most lovable character. They often rode together in making their circuits and were loved by all who knew them.

He not only enjoyed an acquaintance with Governor Jack McCurtain, but was also favored with his confidence and was often called upon by the Governor to participate in conferences at which matters of state were discussed. On one of those occasions, he was called upon to report at Armstrong, the then capital of the Choctaw Nation. The Katy Railroad at that time was the only railway in the Territory. The journey to McAlester, the nearest railroad point, in the direction of Armstrong from the home of Mr. Watkins at Scullyville, was made on horseback, the horse left in charge of a friend and the remainder of the journey by train from McAlester to Caddo. Upon the conclusion of the conference at Armstrong, the Governor accompanied Mr. Watkins and others on the train as far as McAlester, where he would leave the

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train and ride home on horseback. He then lived at Red Oak, about forty miles distant from McAlester. Strict as was the law regarding the introduction and sale of intoxicants within the territorial limits, Mr. Watkins had inveigled an obliging dark-skinned porter on the train into selling him a small bottle of liquor. Observing that the Governor appeared weary as a result of the weight of matters of state with which he had just been battling— and perhaps feeling that he would like to take a nip himself; he asked the Governor if he would like to have a taste. The answer can be surmised, whereupon the bottle was produced from its hiding place deep in Mr. Watkins' breast pocket and its contents devoured with the utmost relish.

From the foregoing it is interesting to note that Mr. Watkins, the subject of this sketch, has ever been in positions which brought him in contact with people. Those contacts have cultivated in him a most pleasing personality.