

WATTS, THOMAS BRADFORD INTERVIEW 9412

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

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WATTS, THOMAS BRADFORD.

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Field Worker's name Ethel V. Elder.

This report made on (date) December 2, 1937. 1937

1. Name Thomas Bradford Watts.

2. Post Office Address Waurika, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 318 North Meridian Street.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month June Day 23 Year 1874.

5. Place of birth Cave Springs, Floyd County, Georgia.

6. Name of Father George Troup Watts. Place of birth Mount Hope, Georgia.

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Ella Matilda Bradford. Place of birth Cherokee County, Alabama.

Other information about mother _____

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 11.

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Ethel V. Elder,
Investigator,
December 2, 1937.

An Interview With Thomas Bradford
Watts, North Meridian Street, Waurika.

I was born June 23, 1874, at Cave Springs, Floyd County,
Georgia.

My father's name was George Troupe Watts, born at Mount
Hope, Georgia. He died May, 1882, and is buried at Cave Spring,
Georgia.

My mother's name was Ella Matilda Bradford, born in
Cherokee County, Alabama. She is buried at Cave Springs,
Georgia.

My grandfather on my mother's side was named Judge James
Bradford; buried in Cherokee County, Alabama.

All I know about my grandmother on my mother's side is
that she is buried at Cedar Town, Polk County, Georgia.

Grandfather on my father's side was named Hope Hull
Watts, a Methodist Circuit Rider; buried at Mount Hope, Polk
County, Georgia.

Grandmother on my father's side was named Malasia King;
buried at Mount Hope, Georgia.

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I left the state of Georgia the year I was sixteen years of age with three other men.

We finally reached New-Orleans and I bought a yoke of oxen from a man name Merriwether, and drove on down to Louisiana and was there about ten or eleven days prospecting and fishing; then I sold the oxen and bought two horses without saddles as I used my bedding for a saddle and started to Texas riding horseback. I was on the road about ten days; I camped at Maples, Texas, for a few days to rest up and let my horse rest. While here at Maples I met a first cousin of my father, named J. B. Watts, we bought three head of horses, and came on over to Marietta, crossed Red River at the ford of the Old Spanish Fort, Texas.

The first job I had was with Jerry Washington and two brothers and Sobe Love; they were all connected in business some way and I worked there for over three years on their ranch; they owned most all of the Chickasaw Nation's cattle ranches.

I left there and then went to Burneyville and worked there at the corn sheller for two seasons, sold grain to Keels Grain Company at Vernon, Texas; we hauled the corn overland to Marietta.

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In the spring I went back to Alabama to relieve my brother who was working at the lumber mill. I worked there about one year and then when the Spanish-American War broke out I enlisted at Rome, Georgia, in May 1898.

I served only fifty-four hours in regular service and was promoted to Secret Service for the army the rest of the time I was in the War with Spain.

I received my honorable discharge on May 17, 1899, at Fort McPherson and immediately went back to my old home at Cave Springs, Georgia, to see my mother; worked there for one year for R. B. Tilly and Company and came back to Marietta. I came on the train to Gainesville, Texas, and then rode on horseback to Marietta. The following spring I went to my brother's up in the Arbuckle Mountains where there were six boys from Atlanta and Cave Springs, Georgia, who had come down to be at the Opening. Some all started out for Lawton to register, some riding without saddles, some riding saddled horses and some in covered wagons. We all drew large numbers but only one boy filed and he drew land where the town of Chattanooga now stands. He farmed the land and made two crops, then sold it to Ned Sessions at Anadarko for a townsite.

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I went to Chickasha then and went to work for a cotton oil company as cotton buyer and they erected about thirty gins; then I was transferred to Rocky in Washita County and bought gins for my company for a while then went back to Chickasha and worked there till the gin burned and was then put in the construction work.

We built seven gins that year and the next built a few and then were sent over to Apache for several months.

We went to Wichita, Kansas, and worked for a few months with an engineering corporation and the big Arkansas River flood came down on us and we lost everything in a night except one feather pillow and one rocking chair. We then came back to Anadarko where I worked for a few months with a produce storage distribution company out of Oklahoma City.

Then I went to work in the spring for the Rock Island and Pacific Railroad as freight foreman at Anadarko, was promoted to be yard foreman and worked on the train service of mixed local and passenger freight trains for several months.

I was then sent to work on a flanging job on the Rock Island and Pacific Railroad out of Anadarko.

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After I left and I came to the place where Waurika is and bought a home here and have been here ever since.

WOLF HUNTING.

Over at Chattanooga, several years ago, I was one of the party of about fifteen men who helped to entertain former President Theodore Roosevelt on a wolf hunt. He had about seven or eight of his invited friends in his party. That was the first wolf the president had ever roped and he was greatly thrilled over his luck. This party lasted for one week.

BUFFALO TRAIL.

West of Rocky, down near the old Washington ranch, one buffalo trail began and wound on into the Northwest Panhandle to the old Wagoner Trail, later to another.

CAMP MEETINGS.

The old Robbins Camp Ground was one of the largest camp grounds I remember any where. There were about forty shacks built from the saw mill's lumber to take care of the visitors and all of the preachers; the land was endowed from private

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ownership and deeded to the Conference which superintended the grounds consisting of about forty acres. The tabernacle was built from native trees and covered with shingles and had home-made benches and a straw floor. The tabernacle covered about one acre of ground and was built in a beautiful grove of trees with running water from the mountain springs.

The preachers' tent built for the preachers to study or rest in was about forty by eighty feet; several bunks were built along the walls and tables were made too out of native lumber to use in the preachers' room. Lanterns and coal oil lamps were hung every where in the trees and from supports under the tabernacle.

Bishop Tom Pierce was the noted preacher and John B. Robbins was the circuit rider. I have seen from five to eight thousand people on the camp ground and during one meeting I saw two hundred and fifty people converted in one night, in a meeting held by B. T. L. Timmons, John B. Robbins and Sam Jones.

Sam Jones was the greatest Methodist Evangelist of his time; he died on the train going out of Oklahoma City a few years ago after holding a meeting with C. C. Carey.

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My father built a four-room suite on to his home place just especially for the headquarters of preachers of all denominations, consisting of two bed rooms, a reception room and a library, all completely furnished.

CATTLE RANCHERS.

Skad Suggs, Bill and J. C. Washington, Dick McClish, Bounds Brothers, Daddy Coil and Calvin Holmes were prominent ranchers of that vicinity.

Daddy Coil was a very prominent man in church and fraternal affairs and was descended from the Rush family for whom Rush Springs was named.

SALT GROUNDS.

The salt grounds went from Red River to Rush Springs, along on Beaver Creek both east and west and on Cache, Cow, and Rush Creeks.

COW TOWNS.

Madill, Rush Springs, Caddo, Chickasha, Ada, Addington, and Sugden were the leading feeding places, shipping and concentrating points.

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DEPUTY UNITED STATES MARSHALS.

Nathan Ross, Charlie Lehman, Mount Morriss and Claude Talbot were some of the Deputy United States Marshals whom I knew.

FERRY LANDINGS.

Frog Creek, Texas, southwest of Red River Crossing, old Spanish port,exter ferry, Horse Shoe Bend and Red River Station, southwest of Marietta, were the ferry landings.

FRONTIER TOWNS.

Chickasha, Ada and Pauls valley were among the earliest of the frontier towns.

Hunters.

Calvin Holmes, a Sergeant at Fort Sill, also did service at Fort Arbuckle in the mountains, sent out mounted attachments to kill the buffalo around Fort Sill and in the Arbuckle Mountains in order to try to starve out the Indians.

FINANCING.

The cattlemen were financed by the commission companies and they in turn helped the smaller merchants and farmers by taking chattel mortgages.

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HORSE RACES.

The races always met starting on Friday and lasting till Monday, and they would bet, loose saddles, guns, coats and their saddle horses or anything they had that they could bet. The races were usually held in the spring about March and in the fall in October over at Marietta. Many Indians would attend the races and also the American cowboys would be there in large numbers.

TAXES.

A fee of \$5.00 was paid for citizenship privileges, and from \$25.00 to \$150.00 were the fees for a trader's license, cost for the stock handled with the Chickasaw and Cherokee Nations.

STAGE ROUTES.

There were stage stands at Fort Worth, Texas, Fort Sill, Fort Cobb, Fort Gibson and Fort Rowson.

MEMORIALS.

When I was a little boy my sister and I used to help a man keep his vineyard clear of all the weeds and loose rubbish. We would always pick some cotton to make our own

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money, too, and when they were making plans to build a brick church we decided we would contribute our little offering.

I gave \$5.00 in gold as my part, so instead of using that toward the building fund, it was placed inside of a Bible that my mother gave to be placed in the corner stone. I did not know this until I was a big sized boy. This church was built, finished and furnished by Frank S. Hudson.

In an old church in Washington D. C. there is a memorial window dedicated to my grandfather Watts, who was a pioneer Methodist preacher of Georgia and a bold confederate; after the war he joined the Methodist Episcopal Church South.

HERBLOOM.

I have a beautiful hand painted pitcher decorated with flowers which are all raised. It is hand-painted and edged in gold. This pitcher was handed down the generations from my great grandmother McCray to her daughter, my grandmother Bradford, and on to her daughter, my mother, and then it came to me.

This vase was used on the table at a banquet given in honor of Lafayette at a place in Virginia near Mount Vernon;

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the home of George Washington. It is at least two hundred years old.

My wife's father and mother, with twelve other families consisting of about fifty or more people, emigrated from Virginia to Georgia, then to Texas and on to Oklahoma by ox-wagon; there was a long train, all driving ox teams. After they reached Texas they located in Johnson County and from there they came to Indian Territory, and bought relinquishments from Marley and Trout of two quarter sections. I met my wife at Rocky, a very small place in Washita County where, at that time, there was only one store building of brick, one merchandise store and a post office.

We were married at Hobart, at the First Methodist Church by the Reverend Mr. J. A. Parks. We lived at Hobart for a while and went to Chickasha and then on down to Waurika.