

WILLIAMS, JENNIE. INTERVIEW. 12394

278

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Interview with Jennie Williams
20 North Quannah, Tulsa, Oklahoma

I am a native of the Cherokee Nation, having been born there October 25, 1849.

My early life, in fact all my life, was without the hardships of some, as my father was a good business man and good provider. I attended school, that is primary school, near home, but when sixteen years of age, I attended school at the Moravian Mission on Little Spring Creek south of Tahlequah. I was one of the boarding students. At this same time David S. Williams of Tahlequah, son of Leonard Bonaparte Williams, was also a student. It was here that I made the acquaintance of David. Our friendship grew into courtship and three years later, or 1868, we were married.

All the more prominent Cherokees owned slaves, as did my father. He necessarily had several farms, so when I married father gave us a farm near Oaks where we lived for forty years, and where I reared my eleven children.

This farm had improvements on it; a double log house, 18 x 18 foot rooms with a 10-foot hall between

-2-

the two rooms, and was two stories high. The cultivated land was all fenced, so all we had to do was to go to work. Of course, after I married I had to take on the responsibilities of such a life. Before marriage I did not have to do much work, nor did I have any responsibilities. Mine was a rather sheltered life.

We never attended any public dances, such as the Stomp Dance. We had parties and dances in our neighborhood, but we had select crowds and all attending were admitted on tickets. Plans were made a week or two before the time for the dance, and invitations written and sent or given to all who were expected to attend. In this way the rough element was barred. If, however, one did chance to get in, he was promptly put out if he misbehaved.

My husband's people came from Alabama in the 1830s. They migrated from that state at the suggestion of the government. My father was what was termed an old settler, he came before the immigrants. My husband's people were farmers, so we farmed. We put out an orchard and otherwise farmed as other settlers.

WILLIAMS, HENNIE. INTERVIEW.

12394

-3-

When I married I had a cookstove and other conveniences that were considered modern then. Well do I remember the first cookstove my mother had. Father brought it home, or rather had it sent home. My mother and others there did not know how to manipulate it. They built a fire on top of it first, then under it. It didn't work well either way, but filled the house with smoke. Father came home about this time and he put it up and built a fire in it, so mother enjoyed the stove thereafter.

We lived, my husband, myself and children, on our farm for forty years, or until the survey or allotment was made. At this time we all, including the children, received our allotments. Sometimes the farms were improved. When this was the case the people were allowed to live on the place until the rental paid for the improvements.

My husband and I would go to town or the store twice each year, once in the spring and once in the fall. We would buy a six months' supply of such things as we needed and could buy at the store; domestic, calico, shoes, sugar, coffee, etc. After a while we had so many children we couldn't take them all

-4-

handily, so when shoes were wanted in the fall, we measured the feet of all the children with strings and took these strings with us and got shoes according to the length of the strings.

The principal of the school I attended, Moravian Mission, was E. J. Mack, a preacher as well as a teacher.

His son, Ephraim, was a doctor, having studied medicine. He was the only real doctor there at that time. Later, he moved to Alabama so all we had were Indian herb doctors. Most people did their own doctoring, using home remedies, herbs, etc. They were successful in treating most common ailments.

Of our eleven children, nine are still living. None died in infancy, although I did not have the attention of a doctor.

Before and after my marriage we always had plenty to eat. My father always killed from thirty to forty hogs, still I do not remember ever seeing him sell a piece of meat. He would give it to neighbors or lend it to them in the spring or summer and when they killed in the fall they would return the

-5-

meat. "Love thy neighbor as thyself" was a reality then, for as long as one family had anything to eat, it was shared with the neighbors.

I well remember my father getting up before day to go to a turkey roost to kill turkeys, of which there were many. After a few years, though, hunters came in wagons from Arkansas and would kill turkeys and prairie chickens by the hundred to sell back in Arkansas. This continued until the government stopped the practice.

Deer were plentiful even after I married. I had one tenant who always brought me a hindquarter of deer when he killed one.

I knew personally many of the prominent people of my time. My husband always took an interest in politics; however, he never held or ran for a public office.

~~John Ross was chief of the Cherokees at the~~
beginning of the Civil War and he and others took all the funds of the treasury and buried or hid them. These funds were never recovered, for all who participated in the hiding of them died or were killed

WILLIAMS, JENNIE. INTERVIEW. 12394

-6-

during the war. This money was supposed to have been buried at or near Park Hill.

Downing was chief at the close of the War. He was the leader of the Downing Party, which was opposed by the National Party.

After the War we had an exciting election. They elected Joel Mayes. Dennis Bushyhead, who was then chief, refused to vacate, so friends of Mayes met him outside Tahlequah and escorted him into town. They had to break in the door of the Capitol building and force chief Bushyhead to vacate.