

INDEX CARDS:

Chickasaw Nation  
School  
Camp Meetings  
Hunting  
Dugout.

---

El Reno  
Herd Law  
Cheyenne-Arapahoes  
Sod Houses

WILLIAMS, JESS R. INTERVIEW.

Ethel E. Palmer, Field Worker  
Indian-Pioneer History  
June 3, 1937

292

Interview with Jess R. Williams,  
Rural Route, Leedey, Oklahoma.

Jess R. Williams was born February 3, 1886, in Robinson County, Louisiana. Parents were James H. Williams and Clarence Williams, both born in Louisiana. Mother buried in Oklahoma.

I came to the Indian Territory in 1895, settling eighteen miles north of Ardmore. Woodford was the postoffice. We came from Palo Pinto County, Texas, and I was just nine years old. My brother and I drove sixty-one head of cattle. My parents were ahead of us in a wagon. The way we trailed them was by the horses' tracks. In those days everyone did that way.

The reason we moved here was that there was a drouth hit Texas. We never got any rains there so we had to leave.

When we asked to be directed to certain places, when we first came to the Indian Territory, we were directed thus; Take first right hand road, go 'till you pass a big tree, cross the creek, pass up the next right-hand road and then to the next fork in the road, take the next right-hand road,

There were a number of Indians in the Indian Territory and we lived on an Indian lease. They were nice people except when they got drunk.

I went to school a quarter of a mile north of Woodford on the east side of Hickory Creek. I walked two and a half miles to attend and there were only two houses in sight anywhere. The school house was a log building and for seats we had an old rough board, with small posts nailed on it for legs. We scarcely knew what desks were for we never had such things. The professor would sometimes have a drygoods box for his desk. Three months was a term of school and all we had to study was a speller, arithmetic and a reader.

There was lots of timber in that country.

Our house was a two-room log building with a small hall dividing the rooms. We also had log cribs in which to keep our corn. There would be a shed on each side of the crib which would be used for protection for our stock. We cut old hollow logs in two for our feed troughs.

We raised lots of corn, and we always snapped our corn. The morning glory vines were so thick

they would get wound upon our wagon tongue and stop the team.

We had church in the school house except when we had an arbor meeting. We would build this arbor out of brush; the meeting would last for weeks and weeks and people from a distance would bring their bedding and stoves and just stay. Regardless of how the weeds grew at home or how things went, people stayed.

Preachers those days never thought about preaching less than two hours. There would be as many as sixty people shouting at one time. We had puncheon boards to sit on at these meetings.

Many a day, I would work hard, and then go coon hunting at night. Sometimes we would be up all night on a coon hunt. Our dogs would go in a hole of water after a coon; those coons would drown them if we didn't go to them.

There were lots of wild turkey and deer in the Territory then. I helped catch a fish out of the Washita River in the Indian Territory that weighed sixty-five pounds. When we dressed this fish we found that it had swallowed an eight-pound

We moved to this part of Oklahoma in 1899, came in a covered wagon. My parents filed on land and we moved here in December. There was a well eighteen feet deep. We had to tie a rope to a rail and let it down in the well to break the ice in order to get water. We first dug a square hole in the ground four feet deep and not very large and we stretched a tent over this for the top. Later we built a sod house and lived in it for sometime. Still later we built a house. We had no barns, nothing except a barb wire fence to protect our cattle.

When we first came to this country we had to go to El Reno to buy our groceries. We had no bridges and scarcely any roads, we just followed the ridge road. We forded the rivers and large creeks.

I remember going to a dance one night to Camargo when the river was up. . . Once my mules went under the water and when they came up they were both on the same side of the tongue. Listen we really had music at our dances; we had a fiddle and a banjo.

I happened to see a little of the trouble between the herd law and free grass people. I saw them shoot a horse down on which Frank Speer was riding. The horse soon died.

There were a number of Indians in this part of the country when we came here. We would trade them watermelons for their beaded shoes, blankets and things that they would make. Once seven wagons loaded with Indians started across the Canadian River. The old Canadian was up and was still coming up. They all got across but one wagon; this wagon contained a squaw and a buck Indian, a young deer and a little white dog. I was watching them. All at once those two horses went out of sight. Just about the time they went down the old buck went down and somehow he cut the horses loose from the wagon. One of the horses came up about twenty feet from the wagon. When the other horse came up, the old buck was holding its tail. Two Indians who were on horses finally got to the wagon and got the squaw out. They were all saved, but the last time I saw the little dog he

was going down the river . The wagon and deer were never seen again.

A few miles south of us was a family living in a sod house. It rained and stayed damp for a long time. One day this sod house caved in and killed the man and little child. The rest of the family escaped. That made us afraid of sod houses.