

WILLIAMS, W. M. (Mrs.) INTERVIEW

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Inez A. Merrick, Interviewer
June 18, 1937.

Interview with Mrs. W. M. Williams
Rural Route 5, Randlett.
September 20, 1873, Mineola, Texas.
Father-Henry Clay London
Mother-Frances Washington.

On January 30th, 1906, my husband, our six children and I left the town of Petersburg in eastern Oklahoma and started west. We were going to the Big Pasture which we had heard was open for settlement.

Our "outfit" consisted of two covered wagons drawn by four mules and loaded with our bedding, cooking utensils, wood cook stove, and food for the trip.

The weather was bitter cold and we all suffered from frost-bitten feet and hands on the trip. Towns were few and far between, so we camped where night found us.

Late in the evening of February 6th, we camped on Rabbit Creek, five miles southeast of what is now the town of Randlett. We decided we would not go on any farther but would try to get an Indian lease until we could file on a homestead of our own.

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Two young men were building a shack near where we camped. They came over and asked us if we had a stove and when we told them about our cook-stove, they suggested that we bring it over to their shack and set it up so we all could keep warm. It was bitter cold and we had been wondering how we were going to get through the night with only a camp fire. We put the stove up in the shack and rigged up a stove pipe out of some tin. We sat up all night around the fire. We were thankful that we had brought the stove with us.

The next day, we leased a hundred and sixty acres of Indian land and as soon as possible we hauled lumber from Temple and built a two room house on the lease.

Temple was about twenty one miles northeast of our lease and to get there it was necessary to ford Cache Creek. Fording Cache Creek proved very difficult at times when the creek was on a rise.

Red River was two miles south of us. Sometimes we

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did our trading at Charlie, Texas, which was only about six miles across the river from our place.

Mr. Williams swam a horse across the river, went to Charlie, bought a milch cow, and swam the river again with the cow.

The nearest doctor was at Charlie, Texas.

I was the first white woman in this district. My son, Joe, born three months after we arrived here, was the first child born in the new settlement.

The blue-stem grass was so tall that one could easily get lost. When Mr. Williams did not get home before dark, I would hang a lantern outside, high upon the house; so he could see the light and come to it.

We broke the sod and planted corn and cotton. We made a good crop and hauled our cotton to Temple, Texas, to sell it. There were no roads and we had to ford Cache Creek. The trip always took two days.

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Our furniture was nearly all homemade. There was timber on the creeks and we cut our firewood there. We made a good garden and so had plenty of vegetables. Fish and quail were plentiful.

We filed for a homestead and drew the southeast quarter, section fourteen, township fifty two, range 12, west.

In the fall of 1906, more settlers came who had children of school age so a tent school was erected one half mile south of our home. School was conducted for three months out of the year. The children were taught by Mrs. Lee Elkins, a homesteader's wife. There were seventeen pupils enrolled.

At Christmas time an entertainment was planned. There was to be a Christmas tree and a Santa Claus in a homemade red suit with cotton whiskers. His whiskers caught on fire and there was lots of excitement for a few minutes.

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School was conducted in the tent for two years. In the third year, in 1908, the farmers donated money to build a one-room school house themselves, to save expense. There was not enough money to buy seats and desks so each pupil brought his own chair and held his books on his lap. The school house was located in the southwest corner of the southwest quarter of section twenty-two, range fifty-two, twelve west, and was called Rabbit Creek School. Today a fine new brick school house stands on the same location.

When the town of Randlett came into existence in 1907, I bought the first yard of calico and spool of thread that was sold.

My sons trapped skunks, opossums, and coons and made extra money by selling them. Wolves were numerous and the boys hunted these on horseback with dogs and guns.

Rattlesnakes were also numerous. It was a sport of the children to capture rattlesnakes alive and put

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them in prairie-dog holes. The children would then retreat and watch the prairie-dog come out and summon the other inhabitants of the dog town to come and help him pack dirt in the hole and seal the snake in. Upon investigation, it was found that the dirt was packed in the hole so tight that it could not be scratched. By these incidents ^{we found out} that the old belief that rattlesnakes and prairie-dogs will live together is erroneous.

We received our mail at Temple, Texas, until 1907. At this time, Randlett was established and was put on a Star Route. Later, Randlett had a second class post office.

The life of a pioneer is a hard one and I ^{would not} want to go through with it again but I feel a great satisfaction in having carved a home out of a raw wilderness.