

WILLHITE, ANDREW J.

INTERVIEW

12650

97

BIOGRAPHY FORM

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name Grace KelleyThis report made on (date) January 11, 1938

1. Name Andrew J. Willhite
2. Post Office Address Henryetta, Route 2, Oklahoma
3. Residence address (or location) 8 miles southeast of Henry-
etta.
4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month May Day 14 Year 1869
5. Place of birth Missouri
6. Name of Father Dan W. Willhite Place of birth Tennessee
Other information about father _____
7. Name of Mother Caroline Huggard Place of birth Missouri
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 _____

Grace Kelley, Investigator,
January 11, 1938.

Interview with Andrew J. Willhite,
Henryetta, Oklahoma.

I came to the Choctaw Nation in 1900 and at that time there was a toll bridge at Denison on the Red River. There were two families of us. From there we went to Durant and on up to Wapanucka. We had had a hard year in Texas and had been led to believe that money grew on saplings in the Territory and it was more plentiful than in Texas. The Choctaw Nation was the best part of the whole Territory as it was very good for farms, stock raising and hunting.

Wapanucka.

There were one or two stores here and the mail was brought from the railroad which went through Boggy Depot. There were from twelve to fifteen families at Wapanucka. That was a farming country and a lot of race horses were raised there. They were good horses that were taken to run at the fairs. These fairs were like rodeos.

Horse Racing.

Mr. McMullin was one of the owners of these horses.

-2-

That year I went to one of the races. The riders had to be small, not over a hundred pounds, because the added weight would keep the horse from running as fast as it would when carrying a light rider. Mr. McMullin strapped his son on the horse so that he wouldn't fall off while they were running and get hurt. Those horses were so quick that they would throw a good rider. I know for my stirrup cut a gash across two different saddles when the horse was going a certain way and gave an unexpected turn and I hit the ground both times. The horse fell on the McMullin boy. He lived but has acted dazed ever since.

Mill Creek.

1901 was the year that they were building the new Mill Creek which was located three miles east of the old Mill Creek. The railroad had just come through there and a good little town was built on it. That was a farming country but was mostly settled with Indians.

The Town of Burnett in 1901.

It had been eight years since my wife had seen her mother so we went twelve miles southwest of Tecumseh, close to Burnett, to visit her. When we got there my wife's

-3-

people talked us into renting a farm. That was in the "Pot" country and there was too much sand there to suit me.

There were three stores, a hotel, saloon, blacksmith shop and cotton gin at Burnett in 1901. The mail was brought from Noble in a hack to the largest store. Noble was on the Santa Fe Railroad.

There was plenty of hunting and fishing close to Burnett but as they were the only recreations it was the loneliest place I was ever in. Every Saturday everyone drew his wages and went to Burnett. It was called Silver Saturday and a lot of visiting was done in town.

How Extra Money Was Made.

Everybody farmed and bought on credit. But people worked at any other work they could get, and there were plenty of jobs to be had for the settlers and for transients, too.

There were cleaning, picking cotton, cutting wood, gathering strawberries and blackberries to sell in town, building houses and fences. The turkey and deer had been killed out then but there were opossum and skunks that were hunted for the hides.

The stores of Burnett hauled their supplies from Tecumseh and Shawnee. The town was named for an Indian named Burnett

WILLHITE, ANDREW J. --INTERVIEW.

12650

-4-

who was a church Indian and a good citizen. Bill Bostic was another well-to-do Indian but he was more of a rowdy.

Henryetta--1901.

J. W. Scott, now of Henryetta, and his brother had found that there was coal at Henryetta and had had it tested and advertised. People had dug coal out of the banks of a hollow for their own use. There was a small canyon about four miles southeast of Henryetta where the coal crept out along the bottom edges.

That brought the Frisco Railroads to Henryetta for they wanted to develop the coal fields around there.

We heard about the coal mines and the booming tent-town where there were lots of people, work and trading. So like a lot of other folk, we moved there. We camped northwest at Turkey Hollow which was a half-mile north of where the

Henryetta Cemetery is now though there was none there at that time. There were six or seven families of us and that was a good camping place with plenty of wood and water. We dug a cellar to live in as there were no houses to be had.

Henryetta had a long, rocky road with a very few shacks and the rest were tents. There was a restaurant, a little store; it was the newest town I had ever been in.

-5-

We lived in that cellar for six months and then moved onto a farm that I leased from an Indian. These leases were on farms or rather on ground that had been given to some Indian's children and he wanted improvements on it without doing any work himself. The lease was made for from four to six years and the white person or renter was to break the land, fence, build houses and sometimes he had to give between \$20.00 and \$40.00 besides the improvements to the Indian.

Building a Cotton Gin.

When the railroad came through Henryetta a little cotton gin was put in that would put out three or four bales of cotton a day. We took our cotton there though because it was close.

In 1903 I helped to build the first real cotton gin there and it was owned by George Tate, the father of John and Tom Tate, now of Henryetta. I rode eight miles on horseback, cut through the mountains and worked from daylight till dark and rode home. Then I plowed my cotton by moonlight. I know this sounds unbelievable but I can prove it is true.. My wife hoed the cotton during the day while I was at work. By working hard we got the gin ready to work

in the Fall. It put out round bales that were about one-half as large as these that are made now. We burned coal for fuel as there was no gas then.

There was not much farming in this country as it was mostly a coal and stock country. There was one house between Tiger Mountain and Henryetta and Mose Grayson, a Creek negro, lived in it.

Mail Route and Post Offices.

There was a woman mail carrier from Henryetta to Burney, a Mrs. Kellogue. Sometimes she drove a two-wheel hack but she always had her saddle with her and when she went as far as she could go in the hack she put the saddle on the horse and went on to Burney.

Burney was a little store on the North Canadian River that was owned by Newt Pearson, at the east edge of Tiger Mountain near the river. Mr. Burney was a white man who fell in the river and was drowned. ~~Pearson was later a~~
deputy sheriff and was killed by a negro.

John Likowski had a post office at Sonora that was on Mrs. Kellogue's route.

WILLHITE, ANDREW J. - INTERVIEW.

12650

-7-

Hoardsville was just west of Wolf Creek where the bridge is now. There was a store and post office owned by Mr. Hoard so we just called it after him.

Mrs. Kellogue passed this place, eight miles southeast of Henryetta, and went to Bun, a post office without a store that was run by a negro, three miles east of here. This post office was used during 1905 and 1906.

The next stop was at Burney about eight miles east of Burnett.

Andy Armstrong Ranch.

Andy Armstrong was a Texas man. He came here and leased "the whole country." I went to work for him and helped to build the fence. There were about three thousand head of cattle that were kept in a fenced pasture but it was so large that they seemed to be turned loose.

To locate the fence we'll start at the east side of Henryetta, it was called the Hugh Henry Ranch, and it went east through the country where Dewar is now and four or five miles into the Deep Fork Bottoms then it turned south to the North Canadian River and turned west to North Fork and turned back toward Henryetta, to the starting place. After it was built and the cattle turned into the pasture I had the job of riding around the fence every day to see that it was not

WILLHITE, ANDREW J. - INTERVIEW.

12850

-8-

down in any place.

We had to have gates because the fence went across all the roads and trails and we had to leave a way for folk to pass as it would have been too far for them to go around the pasture. Some of them would leave the gates open and the cattle could get out. At other times the cattle would get stampeded and break through the fences, for a quarter of a mile the fences would be torn down. Another time the lightning melted the fence for a quarter of a mile. Our job was to keep our cattle in and to keep other cattle out. Another thing we had to watch for was the Indians who did not want the white folk in here ^{and who} would cut our fence. So you see it was very necessary to keep a close watch on the fences if they were to do the work they were built to do.

John Likowski did the leasing of the ground.

In the winter time there were ten hands working at the ranch for we had to feed the cattle and it took more men. In the summer there were just four and their work was to watch the fences until shipping time, then an extra hand was hired for the shipping. We drove the cattle to Henryetta where there were some stockyards and shipped by rail from there.

MILLHITE, ANDREW J. - INTERVIEW.

12650

-9-

Armstrong stayed about four years and sold to Sam Hunt, another Texas man. Mr. Armstrong had about seven thousand head of Texas longhorn cattle; their horns were so long that they could hardly get through the car doors. The young ones had horns longer than the grown cattle seen now.

They were easy to handle if you knew how and stayed on a horse but they would kill a person on foot. They would follow a person on a horse clear to Henryetta and you would have to ride fast to stay out of their way, too.

I did not see the steers in Texas but the Texas men told me that in the place where they were bought the flies and mosquitoes were so bad that cattle had to stand in the water to get away from them.

The cattle were raised on the coast and had not seen a person since they had been branded when they were calves and some of them were five to seven years old when Mr. Hunt bought them. Some of the steers were so poor that they had to be dragged out of the cars as they were too weak to stand. Others would get out to the pastures and then get down and die. But the most of them started fattening as soon as they were turned loose and made good meat.

WILLEITE, ANDREW J. - INTERVIEW.

12650

-10-

Plenty of Meat to Eat.

We butchered beef for our own use like people butcher hogs now. We had a smoke house where we kept beef smoked and salted down besides having plenty of hogs that were fixed the same way.

Once we had a big steer hanging in the smoke house and a negro came for a piece of beef for his wife who was sick, we knew that she was sick so we gave him a good big chunk. The next day or so every negro on Wolf Creek had somebody sick and wanted some meat.

Visitors Always Welcome.

-My wife had the job of cooking at the ranch for eight years but the only unusual thing about that was our company. It was nothing to see two or three wagons driving up full of people who had come to stay all day or longer. And it didn't inconvenience us for we had plenty of good meat to cook besides the other things that were always on hands. The children all played out in the yard and had a big time, the men talked and the women got in the kitchen and all cooked. Bill Hudson was the handiest man to have around the house. He was a friendly young fellow who worked out on the ranch but if

WILLHITE, ANDREW J. - INTERVIEW.

12650

-11-

there were an extra amount of dirty dishes he would grab a tea towel and go to work. Maybe he would get a spur caught in a chair and knock it over or do something else clumsy for the women to "bawl him out" but they all liked to have him around for he helped them.

Levi Pickering and George Mitchell bought Hunt out then Colbert bought Mitchell out but I worked on all the time. Pickering moved the ranch house two miles east of the original places.

High Grass and Fires.

The grass grew as high as fence posts and was fine for the cattle. They would eat the tender shoots and the stems went to seed. These stems protected the other grass during the winter.

When this grass got on fire it looked like the whole world was burning. The Indians and negroes usually set the fires but a few were accidental.

My barn, horses and everything in the barn were burned by an Indian who thought it belonged to Mr. Armstrong and he was mad at him.

Later, I hired this Indian, -he is dead now and it wouldn't do any good to tell his name, -and we got very friendly. He

WILLHITE, ANDREW J. - INTERVIEW.

12650

-12-

asked me if I ever found out who set the barn on fire and I said "No." So he told me that he and one of his friends, another Indian, had burned it thinking it belonged to the ranch. They did not like white people, did not want them in here and turned the cattle loose every chance they got. I did nothing about it for the burning of the barn was past and the Indian and I were friends and I had nothing to gain and everything to lose by making the Indians mad at me for I intended to stay right here among them.

Hickory Ground Inside the Fence.
The Snake War.

The fence that went west from the North Canadian River to the North Fork went right past the Hickory Stomp Ground, or town; and enclosed it inside the pasture.

The Indians camped there for two or three years. There were about seven hundred persons in the camp; old men and women, young men and women and children. In other words the whole families moved there. Some of them were negroes with Indian wives. Others were Indians with negro wives. I guess there were a few full-blood Indians. I know Chitto Harjo was there. Some of them just looked like a low grade of negroes.

WILLHITE, ANDREW J. - INTERVIEW.

12650

-13-

They had tents--and I remember a restaurant, for I have eaten there when I was riding the fence. It was just like I would come to a restaurant in town at the noon hour. I would go in and buy my dinner. I was not afraid of the Indians but if I met six of them on the trail, they usually came in groups like that, I knew enough to pull out of the trail and let them pass.

I've seen Crazy Snake spread a blanket on the ground and preach to them and have seen them throw their money on the blanket. They were not penniless but had sold their land and had the money but wanted the land back. This money was supposed to go to lawyers who were getting the land for them. Anyway Crazy Snake took money from them.

I don't think they stole. I know that they did. They did not sneak around to do the stealing but there was nothing that we could do about it. My wife and I have watched them ride by, down in the woods, with our turkeys on the saddle. We knew it was best to say nothing as they had the advantage of us right then. Every so often a steer would disappear but they just took what they wanted to eat and we figured it was cheaper to give them a few that way than start the war that was impending.

WILLHITE, ANDREW J. - INTERVIEW

12850

-14-

The whites got scared and some of them went to Henryetta and others camped on the North Canadian River. We boys had to stay with the cattle, and they were right in the pasture. Everyone carried six-shooters but it was not on account of these followers of Chitto. It was as natural for a cowboy to put his gun on as to put his clothes on. One reason was that a steer might attack him. They would kill a person on foot.

Finally the people got tired of their stealing and went in there and cleaned them out but I do not get any of the credit as I had taken a bunch of cattle to Beggs. It was on the eighth day of March. I met the boss there as he went on the train. He told me about the fight and gave me the paper that told about it. I was surely worried until I read that no women and children were killed as we lived just three miles from the fight. My wife heard the shooting from our home.

Some of the Indians left horses and cows and scattered like quail but others loaded their dead and wounded into wagons and took them away.

When I got home two days later there were soldiers here, about three hundred.

WILLHITE, ANDREW J. - INTERVIEW

12650

-15-

Odom and Bumgarner Killed.

Odom and Bumgarner were young fellows from Checotah who came out to Crazy Snake's house. They had known him a long time and figured they could take him in. They were killed three miles east of Pearce (the place is on the highway now). No one knows who was in the house but it was a bunch of Chitto's friends or relatives. Odom was the son of the sheriff from Checotah.

Since then I have gotten acquainted with the Harjo family and was told that Chitto went to the Seminole country and died from the effects of wounds he received during the war. I do not know where he is buried.

Mollie Davis is a sister of Chitto Harjo. She is a rich Indian who lives a mile and a half north of the Been school. The Reverend Mr. Wadley Kelley of Muskogee has taken care of her business for years.