

WILLIAMS, MARY ELLEN

INTERVIEW

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414

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INTERVIEW

6877

Interview with Mrs. Mary Ellen Williams
 Soper, Oklahoma
 Hazel B. Greene----Field Worker
 July 23, 1937

I was born in Arkansas, in 1879. My mother died when I was quite young and I went to live with my grandmother in Texas. Father had come over into the Indian Territory and married a three-fourth blood Choctaw Indian woman.

She died and Dad sent for me to come and live with him. He lived out east of Soper on Bokchito Creek, where he and his Indian wife had settled on a place. (Father was born in Arkansas in 1861. He now lives at Antlers, Oklahoma, with his present wife.)

I was nearly sixteen years old when I came to Goodland on the train, and got into Goodland after night and had to ride out to Dad's place in a wagon. I was absolutely scared to death. I didn't expect anything else but to be scalped if Dad got out of my

WILLIAMS, MARY ELLEN

INTERVIEW

6877

2

sight. Well, we got to his house at bed time, and his two Indian children didn't look so wild, so I decided then and there that maybe they were not all bad.

I stayed with Dad five years, then I returned to Texas and stayed a while. Then I came back here and got married. Dad had a neighbor. Nearly everybody called him "Uncle Dick" Crowder. His wife had been Fannie Durant, a Choctaw Indian. She was blind and old when she died, in 1900. They had one son, George Crowder, who is now dead. When I came back from Texas, in 1901. I married Mr. Crowder. We were married on December 24, 1901. We had five children, only two are living, W. U. (Bill) Crowder, Tulsa, and Mrs Mattie Wood, Soper.

Mr. Crowder died July 19, 1921. He was 86 years old. He was born in Mississippi, in 1835, and migrated to the Indian Territory from the Choctaw Nation in Mississippi with the other Choctaws when he was ten years old. He said they came by boat up the Arkansas

River to the Cherokee Nation and right on down here.

I don't know how they came.

One can get lots of historical information from Uncle George Crowder or Mrs. Bill Crowder who are 90 and 80 years old respectively and live on Crowder prairie, south of Boswell about eight miles. Crowder family cemetery is there, too.

The Crowders were once very well fixed and were prominent in affairs pertaining to the up-building of the country, and their tribe. They were Choctaw Indians. Uncle Dick was one-fourth Choctaw Indian, and though the family cemetery is at Crowder Springs or Crowder Prairie, he is buried at Honey Springs, south of Cooper; so is his first wife, who was Fannie Durant.

Mr. Crowder first settled down near old Carvin, on Red river. He built a big house on that place, but it was an old place before he got it. He said the fields were old years before he went there, but he didn't know

WILLIAMS, MARY ELLEN

INTERVIEW

6877

4

whose old place it was. I don't know whether his place was in Red River County or Towsón county.

Once down there he lost some hogs and accused a neighbor Indian of having stolen the hogs. Later, this Indian was found murdered. His friends thought that Dick Crowder had murdered him and made all kinds of threats against him and one drunken Indian even came to his home to kill him, but he made the mistake of whooping before he got there and Mr. Crowder hid behind some bales of cotton. When the Indian rode up he shot his arm in order to make him drop his gun. The Indian wheeled and rode away quicker than he came.

Mr. Crowder had to get away from there then, so he came up Red river on the Texas side and joined his family on this side after they had brought all the household goods up in wagons.

He had located the place he wanted prior to that on another trip up here, when he realized that he had to get out from down there, but he was afraid to come

WILLIAMS, MARY ELMEN

INTERVIEW

6877

5

along with his family. He got right out and beat it over to Texas and came up on that side. He was afraid the Indians would waylay him and kill him. After that he kept an alert look-out for them. But he was really for law and order

After Mr. Crowder moved up here he was one of the leaders of the Anti-Horse Thief Association. There were some horse thieves living where the Barnhill ranch is now, and they told him all kinds of tales to try to scare him out of this country, and even threatened him. He continued to carry his gun and watch his corners, and went on raids with the other members of the association, hunting the thieves, but they usually "got away". My opinion is that they were killed and thrown in rivers. Occasionally they caught one and sent him to the penitentiary. Some Lees who lived here were sent to the pen. The older ones were, and one of the younger ones was sent to the reformatory. He came back a good boy and made a respectable citizen.

WILLIAMS, MARY ELLEN

INTERVIEW

6877

6

Just the scrapings of creation from Arkansas and Texas came in here to steal and run out stock, any way to make a living without working for it. Being on the border, the citizens here had to organize the association in self defense.

After I came here, my father farmed for a while, then after I married he moved to Antlers and ran the Cottage Hotel, but he is retired now. Mr. Crowder's place was on Crowder creek. We were pretty well fixed, though not as well off as people usually thought. But I know once we had saved up a thousand dollars in gold and we got afraid of being robbed, so we put it in a little satchel and got on the train and took it to a bank in Paris, Texas, and deposited it.

There were no schools for white children around in this county when I first came here. There was a school for Choctaws over at Honey Springs. Then there were academies dotted around over the country, Armstrong Spencer, Tuskahoma, Wheelock and Goodland.

WILLIAMS, MARY ELLEN

INTERVIEW

6877

7

This whole prairie, where Soper is now, was bare to Stumptubbe hill, where there was an Indian cabin on top. The sage grass was waist high and full of prairie chickens and quail; and covered with cattle, deer and turkeys. Soper was built in 1901.

After Mr. Crowder died, in 1921, I married E. A. Engle. We moved to Cloudy and operated a store until he died. He went to Antlers on some business and was going to get a shave before he attended to the business. He was also going to have a tooth pulled, and knew he could not get a shave after having it pulled; so as he waited for the barber to get ready for him, he dropped his hat; he reached for it, but fell with a stroke of paralysis. He died the next morning and we buried him in the Soper cemetery. That was in 1928.

I am now married to W. G. Williams, a white man. I am all white, but an intermarried citizen. I drew an allotment and payments just like any Indian.

INDEX CARDS:

Opening-Old Oklahoma
Caldwell, Kansas
Fort Reno
Living Conditions
Opening - Cheyenne-Arapaho
El Reno
Dressmaking