

FOHARI, WILLIAM L. 12:50

BIOGRAPHY FOR
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name Alece D. McDowell

This report made on (date) December 12, 1937

1. Name Mrs. Willie Belle Howard

2. Post Office Address 311 1/2 Dewey Avenue, Bartlesville,
Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 311 1/2 Dewey Avenue,
Bartlesville, Oklahoma.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month January Day 5, Year 1885

5. Place of birth McKinney, Texas

6. Name of Father C. E. Johnson Place of birth Arkansas

Other information about father lives at Sulphur, aged 78.
Ellen Vernon-

7. Name of Mother Johnson Place of birth Texas

Other information about mother buried at Sulphur, Okla-
homa.

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 _____.

Alene D. McDowell
Research Field Worker
Indian-Pioneer History, S-149
December 18, 1937.

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Interview with
Mrs. Willie Belle Howard
311 1/2 Dewey Avenue
Bartlesville, Oklahoma

Mrs. Willie Belle Howard was born January 3, 1885 at McKinney, Texas.

Father - G.E. Johnson was born March 3, 1859, at Little Reak, Arkansas and is now living at Sulphur, Oklahoma at the age of 78 years.

Mother- Ellen Vernon-Johnson was born August 30, 1863 at Denison, Texas, died in 1933 and is buried at Sulphur, Oklahoma. She was of Chickasaw extraction.

My mother was an unusual type pioneer woman, very frail and of a nervous temperament. She was never satisfied with her pioneer life, therefore disliked Oklahoma, however, she lived here for 39 years. She was a highly educated woman and taught in the city schools at Denison, Texas, for three years prior to her marriage.

My paternal grandfather owned the drug store at Merit, Texas, and my father worked in the store as a pharmacist. My grandfather was suffering from

stomach trouble and went to Denison for treatment. While there he heard of the mineral water at Sulphur, Indian Territory, and immediately went there. He returned to Texas, praising the mineral water he had found in the new country and my father sold everything except what he could load into two wagons and started for the health resort at Sulphur. My mother had been in ill health for three years and we feared she had tuberculosis, for her family were tubercular. My father's health was failing because of inside work, and this seemed to be a godsend to us.. We made the trip with two covered wagons, a team of horses and a span of mules, a buggy and horse and a cow. The cow was tied behind one wagon and we drove the buggy behind to herd her.

We crossed Red River on Warrens ferry near Hendrix, Southwest of Durant, about 2:30 in the afternoon and drove into Durant where we stayed the first night. There were no roads and we drove over the prairie in a general direction of where we wanted to go. Durant had one grocery store in a building about 10 X 12 with the postoffice in one corner.

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We arrived in the Chickasaw Nation and settled at Sulphur, November 11, 1894. I was the oldest of four children and my father and mother were both in poor health. I was then 9 years old and of course, being the oldest child, had part of the responsibility of the home.

A man could stake off as many lots as he wished and pay the Chickasaw Nation \$10 each for them. My father took land in Murray County, under Governor Guy of the Chickasaw Nation and staked off several lots south of Sulphur ^{where} he built a home. Sulphur has grown until his home is now in town.

Mr. McCollum came from Kentucky and established a saw mill about ten miles south of Sulphur, on Buck Horn Creek. This mill was run by water power.

My father cut white popular timber, hauled the logs to the saw mill where they were sawed into rough lumber to build our four room home. The shingles were also made at the sawmill. After the house was built my father made a plane and dressed the boards down. The floors were of oak and were

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also dressed down as smooth as the hardwood floors of today. Our little cottage was not painted but the white poplar lumber was very pretty.

We did not have any windows that first summer but before the cold weather arrived my father drove to Pauls Valley, a distance of about 30 miles, and bought windows. Screens were unheard of in those days.

My father was handy and soon made what furniture we needed. We had brought six white wood chairs from Texas that my parents started housekeeping with 55 years ago. These chairs were scrubbed every day. I have one of these chairs now, but it has been laquered black. My father built an oak table for our new home and I remember how much I wanted this table painted, but of course, it was not, for paint was hard to get. We had no carpets and our floors were scrubbed everyday and were as white as the coiled walls. We brought a cook stove with us from Texas but used the stone fireplace for heat. We had a dutch oven and iron pot which we used around the fireplace.

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There was a small country store at Davis, 10 miles west of Sulphur.. The Santa Fe Railroad run through Davis and we received our mail there. We also bought a few supplies at Davis but Pauls Valley and Ardmore were our main trading posts. Pauls Valley was about 30 miles North and Ardmore about the same distance South of Sulphur. Clothes were a small item of expense in those early days and a child could be clothed for a year for the small cost of \$10.

There were no schools at Sulphur when we first settled there. The country was becoming more settled with progressive farmers and shortly after our arrival the men built a one room box school house of solid walnut lumber. Our seats were long boards nailed on large walnut blocks and we had no desks. This school house was built on the land staked off by my uncle, near Mill Creek, an old Chickasaw Indian Trading Post, ~~near~~ was Mr. Phelps who had come here from Tennessee. I attended this school for three years, then went to Ardmore. While I was attending school at Ardmore, a school was built at Sulphur

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and I returned to Sulphur where I completed grade school. I then went to Ardmore where I finished high school. The next year I secured a school at Sulphur and taught for three years before my marriage.

We did not have much law in the Indian Territory for several years after our removal here and the people took the law in their own hands. They made their own investigations and settled their differences accordingly. The United States Marshals governed all the territory between Pauls Valley, Indian Territory, and Paris, Texas. Federal court was held at Paris in the fall and at Pauls Valley in the spring. All criminals were taken to these places to jail and were tried when a term of court was held at the respective places.

My father was a progressive man and prospered in the new country. He had the advantage of many other pioneers for he and my mother were both from very wealthy families in Texas and had financial support.

There was no fruit here except ~~some~~ wild grapes and plums and a few seedling peaches. My mother went to Texas each year and put ^{up} fruit. My father

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would pack the fruit in a wagon load of cotton seed and make the long trip to the Indian Territory. He brought fruit trees and a start of berries from his father's orchards in Texas and after about six years we had our own fruit at home. The wild grapes here were as large as the tame grapes are today. The climate was ideal for raising every thing and we raised two gardens a year.

Most of our neighbors farmed with oxen and few of them owned a horse. The oxen were used for all heavy work and around the saw mill. Most of the farmers in our vicinity farmed with home made tools but my father brought his farming implements from Texas.

My father brought most of the early improvements into our vicinity. He operated the first sorghum mill, hay bailer, threshing machine and many other modern equipments. We used sorghum to make vinegar, canned or dried our vegetables and cured our own meat.

We did not have much grain for our stock the

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first few years and my father wintered the cattle on the canebrake. We had no fences and the stock all run on free range.

There were no churches in our vicinity until the town was about three years old. Our first church services were held in the school house. A Methodist minister did the preaching but it was a Union Service.

The first doctors in Sulphur were Drs. John and Leonard Ryan, brothers. John Ryan, Jr, son of Dr. John Ryan, was the first child born in Sulphur after the town was incorporated. He is now Police Captain at Oklahoma City.

Clay J. Webster, brother-in-law of the Ryans, established the first general merchandise store at Sulphur.

We raised most of our living and our meat was mostly wild game, turkey, quail, prairie chicken, and deer.

There were lots of wild animals in the unsettled area west of the Washita River. The wolves would wander into our community from the Arbuckle Mountains

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in the southwest corner of Murray County. At night they would come to the house and fight with the dogs. There were no wild cats and tigers near Sulphur but they were numerous over in the Kiamichi Mountains in Pushmataha County and a few in the mountains between Sulphur and the Red River. I knew of one lion that was killed in the Kiamichi Mountains.

The first Indian I ever saw was a little Chickasaw girl about my own age. She sat on a bench near me and when she would scoot over near me I would scoot over until I was at the end of the bench. I was very much afraid of her. My mother explained to me that the little girl wanted to make friends and after a while I made a friendly gesture and we became great friends.

Ben and Florence Jones, Chickasaw Indian children, went to school to me the first term I taught. Florence was a very bright child but Ben was the slowest child I ever saw and I thought he would never accomplish the A B C's. When he once learned anything he never forgot it. He later received a good education and

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graduated from the Draughns Business College at Oklahoma City. He returned to Sulphur and worked in the Farmers State Bank and later became a large stock holder in the bank.

January 10, ¹⁹⁰³ ~~1893~~ I married Charles A. Howard at Sulphur. Mr. Howard's parents had removed to the Indian Territory from Sedalia, Missouri, and settled near Sulphur in 1893, a year prior to our removal here.

My husband had received most of his early education in Missouri and studied law at Little Rock, Arkansas. He almost completed a law course. He served several appointive offices and in 1907 he ran for sheriff of Murray County against T.A. Maxwell. Six weeks before election my husband had smallpox, which proved a handicap in his campaign. Mr. Maxwell defeated him by three votes.

Mr. Howard accepted a position of instructor of Agriculture in the A and M. College at Stillwater, under F.M. Gault, President of the State Board of Agriculture. He resigned this appointment in December 1918, and returned to Sulphur.

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The most exciting experience I ever had happened in my early married life, for that summer was a living nightmare to me. Bill Hendrix, a Chickasaw Indian, was a dangerous man and was a quite a desperado in Murray County. His wife was a white woman and they had four children. Her father, Mr. Miller, and Bill had some trouble and Bill killed him. Several days later the United States Deputy Marshal of that district arrested Bill and took him to Paris where he was placed in jail to await trial. It was several months before the Federal Court met and after serving several weeks he was free on bond. While he was out on bond he committed another offense and the bondsmen withdrew his bond and he was returned to jail.

When his case was tried he received a sentence of 99 years at Atlanta, Georgia. His lawyer asked for a new trial and while he was awaiting the court's decision he broke jail.

He controlled a large acreage of the best land in the Chickasaw Nation and my husband had taken a five year lease on this land, for stock range and we lived in his home. The house resembled a

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fortress and he and his pals had good protection there. After his escape the officers watched our house for they knew he would return. An Indian always went home when he was in trouble. It took him 10 days to make the trip from ~~his~~ his. One morning about four o'clock he walked into the house and hid. He was at large all summer. He knew it was not safe for him to go to his family for food so he stole from his neighbors.

It was not safe for the men of the community to be out after dark for Bill thought every body was after him and would have killed his best friend. He would not molest a woman and the women made the necessary night calls. I rode five miles to Scullin one night for a doctor.

The officers watched our house more and more for they expected to capture him there. I have seen men looking in at my window at all hours of the night.

One night two crews of officers were on duty, watching his sister's house. One group on one side of the house and ~~one~~ ^{one} on the other side.

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One of the officers accidentally^{ly} exposed himself in the moonlight and was mistaken for Hendrix. The officers opened fire and killed him. The two crews of officers started fighting each other ~~and~~ which resulted in several deaths. After this battle the government called off the man hunt and everything was quiet for a while.

In the latter part of November, Hendrix became a little braver and sneaked into town for liquor. The Corner Saloon was located on the Canadian River in Pontotoc County and the officers were watching the place in hopes he would venture there for whiskey. Instead he went to Roff, about 20 miles Northeast of Sulphur, and sneaked into the drug store and bought his liquor. The druggist at Roff notified the officers of these trips but they ignored this information.

There was a big reward offered for his capture and the druggist decided to collect the money. He became friendly with Hendrix and let him sit behind the prescription case when he visited the store. One night Hendrix became confidential and the

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druggist was very sympathetic. When he served Hendrix a drink it was doped. Hendrix became drowsy and suggested leaving, the druggist ask him to lie on a cot in the back of the drug store. When Hendrix was asleep he notified the officers who immediately bound him and started for Texas. They were nearly to the Texas line when he awoke. He was transferred to Atlanta where he served 10 years of his sentence, then received a parole and returned to Sulphur.

He had become very religious and was a preacher when he came back. He preached at Sulphur for a while. He then entered the race for sheriff of Murray County, but was defeated. After he was defeated he again became a desperate outlaw and peoples' lives were again in danger. Everybody kept their dogs tied near the house at night to give the alarm of prowlers. We had two valuable dogs my father had brought from Texas. We kept them tied on the porch at night to keep them from being shot.

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My early day experiences as a child in the new country are vivid in my mind and I like to remember the country as it was then. It was wild, unsettled and crude and we did not have the modern entertainment that we have now but we had many good times.

I saw Sulphur grow from nothing to a thriving little city of approximately 4,500 and I am proud of the fact that my parents helped in building the town and improving the community surrounding it. In the 43 years my family have lived in and around Sulphur they have lived in a radius of two blocks from their first home.

INDEX CARDS:

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Orlando
School Teacher
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