

WILLIAMS, ED

INTERVIEW

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L. W. Wilson,
Interviewer.

September 28, 1937.

Interview with Mr. Ed. Williams.
2 Miles E. of Hulbert Highway No. 54
Born in Flint District of Cherokee Nation

Ed Williams is about eighty-six years of age, is a negro and was born in the Flint District of the Cherokee Nation. He does not know who his father and mother were. If he was ever a slave he did not know it; as a boy he was raised by white people and by part Indian people. He never had the opportunity to go to school and his education is practical. He reads well, saying his ability to read was acquired after he grew to manhood.

He lives in a two roomed log cabin with his wife about two miles east of Hulbert on Highway 51. This has been his home for more than fifty years. It is the same log house he built then with no additions other than a porch of native lumber.

The floor is of native lumber. The roof is of clapboard and on the ground were more clapboards for later use in re-roofing.

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Lying in the yard is a very large grind rock, that Ed had an Indian make for him when he built the cabin. The Indian's name was Fish.

Ed also uses his old mortar and pestle to grind or crack corn for his chickens and make corn chops to feed the hogs.

Ed said they used to plow with a deer tongue made of wood, and produced part of an old deer tongue.

Under a shed Ed has stored an old high wheeled, top buggy, in good repair and well cared for that he used in making trips to Hulbert to do their trading.

He is familiar with the trend of late affairs having to do with farming and stock raising and being in comfortable circumstances financially, he has on his place of some two hundred acres, all kinds of late farming tools and machinery.

Being too old to work, he has built little cabins at different points over his farm in which live negro and Indian families and it is these people he depends on to do his farming, supervising it all himself.

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They used to go to Arkansas for their cattle, at p ints which would now be about Texarkana, and buy Texas cattle and drive them through to Kansas. The route or road traveled was close to the Indian Territory line to Fort Smith. Fort Smith had been a fort during the Civil War and soldiers were still encamped there at this time. They would ford the Arkansas River at Fort Smith oftentimes having to swim the cattle.

This outfit drove from five to six hundred head of cattle through at a time. The cowboys would graze the cattle through slowly so that they could eat as they went along.

The cowboy's outfit consisted of the herders, horse wranglers and the chuck wagon.

At Texarkana they got their provisions to last them until they got to Fort Smith, and there, their supply was replenished.

Ed said that they did not drive the six thousand head of cattle into the river in one

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continuous stream of cattle, but would cut out two hundred and fifty or three hundred head get them in the river and when they were across, would get another bunch in the river.

It took practically all day, from daylight to dark to get across the river with the herd. After crossing the river, they usually bedded down for the night on the Indian Territory side about four miles out on the old Military road between Fort Smith and Fort Gibson.

They would always be up for chuck at daylight and have the herd moving down the trail toward Fort Gibson.

Along this road the grass was up to the horses' sides and the cattle did not keep exactly down the old Military Road but the cowboys kept them to the left on the road on the stretches of prairies, until we came to the head of Vian Creek and then they put them through the valleys, into Fort Gibson.

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The cowboys always bedded down on what was Drake Prairie near what is now Sallisaw, and again on the Little creek before they reached the old Mackey Salt Works near the Illinois River.

They forded the creeks and the Illinois River with the cattle and bedded down again about four miles from Fort Gibson.

They kept our herd a mile or so to the north of the fort at Fort Gibson and usually got them across the Grand River by sundown that night. They had two rivers to cross in one day, the Grand River and the Verdigris River.

The cowboys got their supplies again at Fort Gibson enough to last until they got to Coffeyville; many soldiers were at Fort Gibson in those days.

After reaching the point below what is now Gibson Station on the M.K. & T. Railroad, the entire travel was on more open prairies than before but the grass was no better and the cattle did not fare as well due to the green head flies.

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The cowboys did not always drive their herds to Coffeyville. Some times they headed into Wichita, Kansas.

These drives usually started in the Spring from Texarkana and arrived at Coffeyville or Wichita in the Fall of the year.

When they reached Kansas the cattle were sold and the cowboys all got paid. They would get liquor and have a time. There was more gambling done at Wichita and Coffeyville in one night than there is today in the whole state of Oklahoma.

Ed Williams worked on this trail for six years and when he quit, he went to work on a farm for Mr. Gulager, father of our late State Senator and present Attorney H. M. "Clu" Gulager, who is of Cherokee descent.

Mr. Gulager lived on the old Fort Gibson and Tahlequah road and it was at this place all stopped and camped at the famous Gulager Spring.

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Besides farming Ed Williams also handled many hundred head of cattle for Mr. Gulager and while living at the Gulager's Ed married and moved to the place where he now lives.

Indian foods were, canuchi, or hickory nut kernels, canahonie or hominy grits, or skinned corn, corn bread, pumpkin bread, bean bread, green corn and all kinds of wild game.

Game as very plentiful; there were wild turkeys, deer, squirrels, and wild pigeons.

There was a lot of wild fruits and berries of all kinds. All in all the Cherokee Indians lived well, really better than some of them do today.

The Osage Indians were wild but they never bothered the cowboys' herds. These Osages lived in the tepees on the prairies and about all they had to eat was buffalo meat and what they stole from the other Indians. The Osages cooked outdoors on open fires, while the Cherokees usually cooked in fireplaces.

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The Cherokees buried their dead in the ground just like they do now. Sometimes they would place little trinkets in the coffin with the dead body.

The Osages would take their dead and set them up against a tree or a big rock and put their blankets with them and also guns and then would pile rocks all over them so that the wolves and coyotes could not get to the dead bodies. That did not stop these animals for I have seen in the distance a whole pack of coyotes around the burial place of one of these dead Indians digging him out of the rocks just like dogs digging for a rabbit.

All Indians dressed about as they do now, except the children, who wore long shirts until they were about twelve years old when they would put clothes on them. Some of the full bloods here in the hills today dress their children in just about the same way.

The Osages wore hardly any clothing at all in the summer, just a breech made of cloth or fur or hide.

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In the winter they dressed principally in buffalo hides.

Ed Williams makes a medicine and sells it and has done so for years. It is good for liver, kidney and stomach ailments; it purifies the blood, corrects faulty elimination and naturally by doing this it cures rheumatism.

The Indians doctor with bark, roots and herbs and that is what Ed's medicine is made out of.

The Indians used button snake root, bone set, dog fennel, sassafras bark, mullen, slippery elm and the like for all different diseases. Catnip tea was given to all babies. That is the best baby medicine in the world.