

WILLIAM ; MINNIE

INTERVIEW

7747

122

BIOGRAPHY FORM  
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION.  
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name Johnson, H. Hampton

This report made on (date) October 4, 1937

1. Name Mrs. Minnie William

2. Post Office Address Antlers, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) \_\_\_\_\_

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month Don't Know Day \_\_\_\_\_ Year Don't Know

5. Place of birth Red Oak, Oklahoma

6. Name of Father Joshua McCurtain Place of birth Red Oak, Oklahoma

Other information about father \_\_\_\_\_

7. Name of Mother Don't Know Place of birth Red Oak, Oklahoma

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 seven.

WILLIAM, MINNIE

INTERVIEW.

7747

Johnson H. Hampton,  
Interviewer.  
October 4, 1937.

Interview with Mrs. Minnie William,  
Antlers, Oklahoma.  
Father-Joshua McCurtain

I was born near what is now Red Oak, and when I was five years old my mother died and my father did not keep any record of my age nor the date of my birth, so I do not know in what year nor what month I was born but I have been told that I am about sixty years old.

My father's name was Joshua McCurtain, and he was a relative of the late Governor Green McCurtain. My father was not in the Civil War. I think he was not from Mississippi. He was practically a young man when I was born. I never did know what my mother's name was; when I was a small girl, children did not call their mothers by name; they did not know what their mothers' names were until they got about grown, and someone would have to tell them about their mothers' names, their fathers would not tell them the names of their mothers and that was the reason that I did not learn my mother's name. I do not know what my

WILLIAM, MINNIE

INTERVIEW.

7747

- 2 -

mother's name was. When we lived near Red Oak there were no white people there but a good many full blood Indians lived in that community.

That country is in a valley between two mountain ranges running east. The land was not much account but it was home to us Choctaws and in later years the white people came in there and located coal under the ground where we had lived and all round there and then pretty soon, the Rock Island Railroad came through and opened the coal field; then several little coal towns began to be established and among them was Red Oak, which was just a small coal town and it finally came out that all that country was underlaid with coal. We Choctaws knew there was some coal there for we had already some croppings of coal, but we did not know that the country was full of coal at that time. When the Indians selected their land we had to move off of the land we all lived on, for the Government reserved all the coal land so we moved off and left there and selected our land elsewhere.

WILLIAM, MINNIE

INTERVIEWS.

7747

- 3 -

We had a small farm of about ten acres and on this farm we had cattle, hogs, and a few ponies, and mother had some chickens, turkeys and ducks; we raised some corn on this farm; we did not raise much but enough for our bread. We had to beat the corn in a mortar with a heavy pestle. It was hard work but that was about the only means of getting meal to eat. This corn meal was not like corn meal that is ground by a gristmill, and it is better meal than ground meal but at that time there were no gristmills any where that we could get to, so we had to beat our corn for meal.

Our trading point was at Fort Smith; my father would yoke up his oxen to the wagon, and go to Fort Smith for our groceries; it took him several days to make the trip, but after the railroad went through that part of the country he traded at Poteau for some years and then the Rock Island built a railroad running east from Howe and then when Red Oak was established as a store and Post Office he began trading there. I do not remember what year it was when the railroad went through that country

WILLIAM, MINNIE

INTERVIEW.

7747

- 4 -

but I was living close to Red Oak when that road went through.

When I was a small girl the country was full of wild game such as deer, turkey, and there were lots of fish in the creeks, and men said that there were some bears on the mountains; the men killed some of these bears they said but I never saw one of these bears dead or alive. The Choctaws used to go out and kill anything they wanted; they did not go camping for they did not have to do that to get meat to eat.

It seems that the Choctaws never had dances nor anything else although I understand that the other Indians out west of us still have those dances but the Choctaws do not have dances like that. They used to dance square dances when I was a girl but they even quit that and they do not dance at all now.

We had no spinning wheels, nor looms, and I never saw anyone making baskets in my growing up. I have seen some baskets that were made by Indian women but I never saw a basket being made. We lived in a log house; in

WILLIAM, MINNIE

INTERVIEW.

7747

- 5 -

fact all the Indians who lived in our community at that time lived in log houses. Some houses had flooring in them and some had dirt floors. There was a church in our community built out of logs and seats were made out of split logs. It was a Methodist church but I do not remember the name of the church.

I never saw an Indian ball game in my life; I have heard of Indian ball games but I never went to them. My father was a ball player and when they had a ball game somewhere they would come and notify him to come and assist in the game; he had two ball sticks that he used, and several days before the ball game he would get out and practice playing; he would play all day long by himself getting ready for the game and when the day arrived for him to go we would get him up some lunch mostly banana, put it in a sack for him and he would go, and be gone for two days before he would come back and tell us about the game.

When I left the place where I was raised I married a white man and we moved to what was called the Seven Devil Mountains it was then in Cedar County but now it is in

WILLIAM, MINNIE

INTERVIEW.

7747

- 6 -

Pushmataha County and we lived there for about twenty-five years until my husband died then I moved to town; there used to be lots of wild game there, and lots of wolves and they were big ones; they would carry off our pigs and the wild cats would catch our little pigs and the fox caught our chickens. Where we lived there was no house for about five miles. A full-blood Indian lived in this house; he was our nearest neighbor.

I went to school very little. I was raised to speak English; my father and mother both taught me to speak English when I was small but I don't know how to read English but very little, and cannot read nor write in Choctaw; in fact I can understand Choctaw but I cannot speak it very much.

I never was around my own people much after I married this white man. Mother and father were not full bloods, and I am not a full blood but I do not remember what degree of Choctaw blood I have. I could find it out from the rolls if I had time.



WILLIAM, MINNIE

INTERVIEW.

7747

- 7 -

I have lived among my own tribe ever since I was born, and my father and mother died and are both buried near Red Oak where I was raised. I am a Choctaw Indian but I do not know to what clan I belong.

NOTE-This interview is written by an Indian and his interviews are expressed exactly as his talk. No effort is made to change his manuscripts to correct English. Ed.