

WILLIAMS, CHARLES H.

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Nora Lorrin, Interviewer.  
September 10, 1937

Interview with Charles H. Williams  
535 S. Keith Street, El Reno, Okla.  
Born September 16, 1870, Kansas.  
Father-J. R. Williams  
Mother-Mary E. Humphrey.

The mother of Charles H. Williams was Mary E.  
(Humphrey) Williams and she was born in Hancock County,  
Illinois, on February 14th, 1840.

His parents were married at Fort Scott, Kansas,  
about 1856.

His father came to Kansas in 1854, when they were  
having guerrilla warfare. He was an independent scout  
for the Union Army. He was at Lawrence, Kansas, when  
it was sacked and burned. Charles H. Williams' father  
sold a farm in Linn County, Kansas, and came to the In-  
dian Territory in 1879, first to Coffeyville and then  
to a farm on the Verdigris river in the Indian Terri-  
tory. Game was very plentiful, though the kinds were  
limited. There were prairie chickens, wild ducks, wild  
geese, and plenty of deer. There were lots of fish in

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the Verdigris river and in the little side streams. You could catch perch with a twine string and a bent pin. It was an easy matter to catch enough perch for a meal in a short time.

The Williams family rented a farm from a squaw man named Walker. They made the trip down from Linn County, Kansas, with three covered wagons coming across country and following Indian trails, as there were no regular roads in the Territory. Their rented farm was located on Vinegar Creek, just three miles due south of Coffeyville, Kansas. They raised wheat, corn, and did general farming.

They got along fine with the Indians as everyone did who let them alone and attended to their own business.

A custom prevalent in those early days and in that part of the country was that if an individual was roving around and happened to run onto the body of a dead

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man he did not stop to see what had happened—he just went right on as though he had not seen the dead man until such time as he could accidentally (?) discover the body when there were other people present. This was done to prevent being held accountable for the death.

The Williams family lived on the farm south of Coffeyville, Kansas, for about five or six years and then moved to a farm a few miles west of Coffeyville and they lived in that neighborhood for eight or ten years and the father, J. R. Williams, died while they were living there. Mrs. Williams and the children stayed on the farm and Charles H. Williams got married and went to live again on the Verdigris River in the Indian Territory, renting a farm from the same man, Mr. Walker, the squaw man from whom his father had rented when they had lived there before.

Charles H. Williams lived in a house that had eight

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rooms. It was a two-story house with a basement. They had a good well of water and they burned coal and wood. They butchered their own meat and cured it for winter use, killing beef or hogs whenever they wished. Sometimes they would dry their beef. They also canned and dried fruit and canned the kinds of vegetables that would not keep otherwise.

They did pretty well on this farm or would have if the high water had left them alone. As it was the farm was overflowed thirteen times in eight years. The high water would come more often in the winter time. They were living on this place in 1902. Their crops were not always ruined by the floods but they got tired of living in dread of high water and came to a farm six miles west and four miles north of Geary. The farm belonged to W. H. Brown and they rented it.

The Williams family lived on this farm for six years and then moved to the home they now occupy at

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535 South Keith Street, El Reno.

Charles H. Williams has done a little of everything; in 1904 he helped Sam Peach plant and build his private park called "Peaches Park". The lake was deepened with scrapers and Mr. Williams helped with that work until it was finished. Peaches Park used to have a little narrow tread train that ran on a track around the lake for the amusement of the public.

Frank Townsend bought the park from Sam Peach and then sold it to the city of El Reno. It was turned into a public park in 1920 and is now called Legion Park in honor of the American Legion. It is situated in the southwest part of El Reno. There are about seventeen acres in the park and there is a swimming pool and ball grounds. Legion Park is El Reno's finest playground.

There are about four blocks in the park proper.

Mr. Williams drove a Raleigh Medicine Wagon, for

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four and a half years, beginning in 1909. Then he worked six months at the mills and six months at the gas plant. In May, 1916, he worked at the post office and then took over the managership of Legion Park and has been at that job ever since. In fact he has been pretty closely associated with Legion Park ever since it was built.

He had the care of a couple of alligators for a long time. A couple of our business men took a trip to Louisiana a good many years ago and conceived the idea that it would be a huge joke to send their wives a little alligator apiece. The wives of the two men did not know what to do with these alligators so they turned them over to the city. These alligators grew to be so large that they were dangerous. They were kept in a cement tank in the park in the summer and in the basement of the City Hall in the winter. Later these alligators were turned over to the Zoo at Oklahoma

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City.

Mr. Williams has a conch shell which his father obtained in 1854. It is made into a dinner horn.

There used to be a toll bridge between Geary and Bridgeport. Mr. Williams was at Bartlesville, the Osage Agency, Tulsa, Wagoner and in many other northeastern Oklahoma towns when they were just very small cow towns. Among the United States Marshals whom he has known are Bud Heddy, Frank Dalton, Bob Dalton, Bill Dalton and Charlie Keith. From 1885 to 1900, headquarters for the United States Marshals was at Fort Smith, Arkansas.