

WILLIS, J. HAMPTON

INTERVIEW #4510

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

Field Worker's name Salfridge, Jennie.

This report made on (date) June 18, 1937

1. Name J. Hampton Willis

2. Post Office Address Kingston, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) Kingston.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month April Day 17 Year 1873

5. Place of Birth Willis, Indian Territory, Chickasaw Nation.

6. Name of Father Brit Willis Place of birth Willis, Chickasaw Nation, Indian Territory.

Other information about father District Judge and County Judge. Member of Chickasaw Legislature.

7. Name of Mother Margret Page. Place of birth Arkansas.

Other information about mother White woman.

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 8.

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Selfridge, Jennie  
Interviewer.  
June 18, 1937.

Interview with J. Hampton Willis  
Kingston, Oklahoma  
Born April 17, 1873.  
Father-Brit Willis  
Mother-Margret Page.

In 1842 my grandfather, J. Hampton Willis, came out from Mississippi and settled where the present town of Willis is now located.

The Chickasaws endured many hardships on this trip. The government was supposed to have furnished them with meat on this trip, although much of the meat furnished by the contractors was tainted and rotten.

Overton Love's sister, Elvira Love, was my grandmother. She also came here with the Chickasaws. Grandmother was first married to W. P. Jones, a white man, and her sister was married to J. Hampton Willis. Aunt Mandy and Jones died, and Elvira Jones married J. Hampton Willis, who became my grandfather. Grandfather died in 1861 and was buried in the Willis

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Cemetery. This is one of the most beautiful natural cemeteries in the state. It is covered with a natural growth of large cedar trees and is located on the bank of Red River.

Governor Benjamin F. Overton's home is still standing at Willis. The fireplace is still in good condition and is one that would be nice in any home. This fireplace was built by a rock mason whom Governor Overton picked up over at Denison.

In early days part of the supplies for the Willis community were hauled from Shreveport, Louisiana. These trips were made in ox wagons and sometimes the men would be gone so long and have such a growth of beard that their younger children would not recognize them when they returned. On several occasions when the river was high, rafts were launched at Willis on Red River, and the cotton was floated down to Shreveport. There was not much excitement at Willis during the Civil War. The Comanches stole a good many horses and Quantrell's men camped there one winter.

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My mother saw one execution in the Choctaw Nation; probably at Atoka. The convicted man, and his mother, and sister came to the court ground together on the day of the execution. He was first taken to his coffin and got into it and lay down in it in order to see if it would fit. After that he tried on his new suit of clothes. He was then stripped to the waist and some one took some powder and painted a large black circle over his heart. He was then led to the courthouse door and seated. A man stood on each side of him holding his arms. An officer fired at him but missed. He was then placed against a large tree on the court ground and the men again took their places. The officer fired again and in a few minutes he was dead.

The Hardwick brothers lived near Willis and were friends of Governor Overton's. Governor Overton married my father's half-sister and was always my father's enemy. On one occasion the Willis brothers and the Hardwicks went over into Texas and got whiskey.

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On the way back they were all drinking. Joe Hardwick saw a man going down the road ahead of them in a wagon. He told the others that he intended to kill the man when they caught up with the wagon. Willis told Hardwick that if he shot the man he (Willis) would shoot him. They rode on a little ways and Hardwick said he had changed his mind and was just going to kill one of the farmer's mules. Willis told him he would kill him if he killed the mule. Hardwick killed the mule and Willis shot Hardwick's jaw off. Later Governor Overton had Willis killed.

Governor Overton disarmed Dad one time; put him in his buggy and started with him to the Overton home to kill him. On the way they began to talk about not having any cigars. Overton told Dad not to worry because he would not have any use for cigars. Finally

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Dad persuaded them to go back to a store, where he went in to get the cigars. Dad went into the store and picked up an old gun that did not have a ram-rod on it and went out and disarmed Overton and his companion.

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Bill McLaughlin was killed at the Overton home.

My dad whipped a man at the Briar Creek courthouse when he was sheriff and constable. The law provided for the use of second growth hickory four feet long. Dad went out and looked for switches but could not find any. He wanted to resign. Another man got on a horse and rode away. In fifteen minutes he returned with an arm load of switches. Dad gave the prisoner thirty nine lashes. Before he finished blood was running down the man's back. After the whipping the man went home with Dad and stayed two or three weeks.

I was in jail at Fort Smith with Ed Reed, son of Bell & Starr. The reason for my being in jail was that my cousin killed a man at Madill and the United States Marshal arrested several of us boys. I was fifteen years old at the time. Judge Parker was the judge and we really dreaded him. Cherokee Bill was also in jail. He was part negro and part Cherokee. We would hold kangaroo court in jail. I was always sheriff.

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I served for a good many years as an Indian Police. I received my first appointment shortly after my marriage. My wife's father, Governor Harris, was governor of the Chickasaw Nation and gave me a recommendation to Dew M. Wisdom, United States Indian Agent. For several days my wife and I discussed whether or not we should make the trip to Muskogee to see about the appointment. I only had \$10.00 and did not know whether to risk it on trying to get a job or not. The Indian Agent had a whole stack of applications but I was the only one who appeared in person so I got the job.

The Indian Police received their appointments from the Indian Agent after being recommended by the Governor. The salary was \$10.00 a month and a uniform. We were paid quarterly and received our appointments for one year at a time. I was glad to get the appointment but really took a long chance with my \$10.00. I always invested my check each quarter in cattle. At that time cattle sold for \$7.00 a head.



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The principal duties of the Indian Police were to look out for fires and to collect the cattle tax. My father was tax collector and collected taxes from white people who lived in the Territory..

Jack Ellis, a Cherokee Indian, was captain of the Indian Police. Alph McKay, an Indian policeman, still lives at McAlester.

One time the Indian Agent ordered a flour mill at Chickasha moved out of the Chickasaw Nation because they would not pay the tax on it. A train was put in readiness at Chickasha and Jack Ellis waded into the mill with a sledge hammer. The miller told him that he should get a mechanic to take the mill apart. Ellis informed him that he was getting along very well with a sledge hammer. When the owners realized that Ellis really meant business, they begged him to stop and paid their tax. They also paid the expense of the Indian Police and of the train.

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I was National jailor at Tishomingo for several years. I acted as jailor and worked in Rennie's store. At one time I only had one prisoner in jail. He was charged with first degree murder without bail. Everytime I would take his meal to him he would beg me to let him go home for a few days. One Thursday evening I gave way to him and let him go. He pointed toward the west and said he would be back on Sunday afternoon when the sun was just so high. Rennie said he wouldn't come back. On Sunday evening just a little while before sun down he came riding up on a horse. I gave him his supper and carried him back to jail. Later he ran out over me one morning and after a struggle he got away. We captured him and he was tried and found not guilty of the crime of which he had been accused.

I served as Mine Trustee for the Chickasaw and Choctaws for seventeen years at \$4000.00 a year.