

WILLIS, NATHANIEL D.

INTERVIEW

#7791

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WILLIS, NATHANIEL D.

INTERVIEW.

Form A-(S-149)  
7791.

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

Field Worker's name Wylie Thornton

This report made on (date) October 11, 1937 1937

1. Name Nathaniel D. Willis

2. Post Office Address Welling, Oklahoma, Route #1

3. Residence address (or location) Six miles southeast

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month April Day 18 Year 1867

5. Place of Birth Dawson County, Georgia

6. Name of Father Pickens Willis Place of birth Sumter County, Georgia

Other information about father Died at old home

7. Name of Mother Francis Blasingame Place of birth \_\_\_\_\_

Other information about mother Died at old home

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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Wylie Thornton,  
Interviewer.

October 11, 1937.

An Interview With Nathaniel D. Willis,  
Route #1, Welling, Oklahoma.

I was born April 15th, 1867, in Dawson County, Georgia.

I received very little education there in the public schools.

I came to the Cherokee Nation at the age of twenty-two years.

I bought my ticket for Illinois station, Indian Territory. This, today, is the town of Gore.

At that time, the railroad was the Arkansas Valley railroad, and then this later became the Iron-Mountain railroad and was then changed again to the Missouri-Pacific railroad. I got off the train at Illinois Station and hired a man to take me across the Arkansas River in a ferry-boat toward what is now Webbers Falls; then we went on southwest to a point near the present site of Briartown beyond where Porum is now.

We came to a place where I expected to find two brothers, Ben and John Willis, who had come to this country a year before. I was disappointed to find that they had left for a place near Weuhillau, Indian Territory, not over two miles

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from right here where I am today; they had rented part of Sicky Sanders' place.

Sicky Sanders was Long John Sanders' brother, and every body knew Long John Sanders.

Here we all farmed for two years and made some mighty good crops on that rough land. The dirt we did scratch up was black as the ace of spades and corn and cotton grew almost too large for us to gather.

We boys were making money all right and during all this time we were trying to learn the Indian language.

We talked it over several times and thought inasmuch as we were about one-sixteenth part Cherokeee blood ourselves we ought to be able to master the Indian language, but we never have been able to talk the Indian language to this day. We can only understand the Indian enough to know when they are trying to tell us that they want something.

My grandfather and grandmother left the state of Georgia in the year of 1833 and came to this new country of the Cherokees. They made the journey in a covered wagon. My grandfather's name was Pickens Willis and father was

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named after him. My grandparents endured great hardships on that journey in 1833; there were no bridges over the large streams of water; there were no roads, no medical aid, and few homes and these homes were from fifteen to twenty miles apart.

The open Indian Country was absolutely alive with wild animals and game of all sorts and the underbrush and grass and vines almost covered the dim, winding trails.

My grandparents were helped, and protected by some very faithful negro slaves who came out here with them.

The negro slaves went ahead of the wagons with axes and guns to cut out the way for the on-coming train of wagons and to kill any wild beasts they might see. The wolves were very dangerous at night, coming quite near to the campers.

My grandparents said afterward that they often saw panthers slipping up near them. The wild pigeons would come over in great swarms and in such great numbers that they would cover the skies and many times the day light was shut off by these flocks of wild pigeons and the sky was dark as on an evening after sunset.

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My grandfather decided to go no farther and they settled on a place a few miles south of what is now Siloam Springs, Arkansas, on what finally came to be known in the last few years as the Old Ledbetter place. They began to chop out and clear up the land for cultivation and they had to fight with wild fowls and "varmints" to keep them from eating up their crops.

The squirrels would run up and down the corn cobs and the dead trees in the new ground afforded roosts for squirrels to outrun their pursuers and they would just run up and down rail fences to keep from being caught by hand, and wild coons did about the same thing and wild turkey gobblers would come into the yard to fight the home fowls.

Once, grandfather sent two of his slaves to a certain place to hew out some certain kind of timber and instructed them to get a certain amount done for a days work.

Anyway they were until after dark getting it done and they started home and got lost in the woods and wandered in the woods for two weeks seeking their home.

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I worked first ...  
gave up the post office to Levi Keys who put up a small  
store. I changed and followed up the post office and  
began to work for Levi Keys and I worked for Levi Keys  
for two years.

WILLIAM WASHINGTON ...

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Usually the farmers here are by the fields.

The horse track is called the race track. In the days of yore little girls used to walk

with a flock of geese, she would

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Prominent among the early law settlers who were interested in church and religious matters was Nat. Whitfield.

THE STATE OF TEXAS, COUNTY OF DALLAS.

1915

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