

WILSON, BIRD.

INTERVIEW

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

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Field Worker's name Robert H. BoatmanThis report made on (date) August 16, 1937

1. Name Bird Wilson
2. Post Office Address Rosedale, Oklahoma
3. Residence address (or location) Rosedale, Oklahoma
4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month March Day 25 Year 1855
5. Place of birth Texas, Dallas

6. Name of Father Bill Wilson Place of birth Kentucky7. Name of Mother Harriet Wilson Place of birth Kentucky

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 5 sheets.~~

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Investigator  
Robert H. Boatman  
August 16, 1937

Interview with Bird Wilson  
Rosedale, Oklahoma

I grew up in the State of Texas, having been born in Dallas on March 25, 1855; Dallas was then just a very small place.

My parents knew nothing but work, as they were slaves, and in the way of managing their own affairs they knew very little. As I was born during the days of slavery I did and do as yet respect the white man as my superior and was always very considerate and polite to the white people, but as I grew up I realized we negroes had to look out for ourselves. At the age of twenty-five, in 1880, I left Texas and crossed over into what was then known as the Indian Territory.

I wandered around for some time and finally located near Sacred Heart Mission, a Catholic Mission or school established at Sacred Heart in a very early day, located near the Canadian River, not far from what is known as the Young's Crossing. This Mission at Sacred Heart is still in existence and is known to be one of the oldest throughout the entire state.

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So here I stayed for sometime, working first for one and then another. I ran a few cattle and did chores around the place; I was what you would now call a flunky. After a few years I again started on my travels and the next time I stopped at Tishomingo, about the time that the Choctaw and Chickasaw Indians began registering. The registration of these two tribes was at Tishomingo.

Governor Byrd was the Governor of the Chickasaw tribe, and Judge Durant was Governor of the Choctaws. John Brown was Chief of the Seminoles and Jackson Brown was Secretary to him.

An Indian was never carried to <sup>Port</sup> Smith, Arkansas, or paid taxes to court unless he had committed some crime among the white people. Each of the tribes had its own form of government and they usually settled their disputes by caucus. That is the leaders of the different tribes would meet at some place and caucus, coming to some agreement and whatever <sup>was</sup> the agreement/between the men or leaders of the tribes it was final.

Bill Murray was interpreter for the Chickasaws.

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John Brown, Chief of the Seminoles, was very loyal to his people; there seemed to be a kind of feud or grudge between the Seminole and Pottawatomie Indians, and John Brown erected an eight strand barbed wire fence as a barrier on the Seminole and Pottawatomie line. It seemed as though those Pottawatomies held a kind of hatred toward the other tribes, especially toward the Seminoles, though they didn't have so very much trouble as long as each of the tribes would stay within the boundary line of his territory. There were no towns to speak of at all; the Territory was just a big open country filled with cattle and almost all kinds of wild game. Deer roamed in great herds; I have counted as high as forty deer in one bunch. Turkey were very plentiful.

One time one of those Pottawatomie Indians was put in jail for getting drunk and it was very interesting to watch the others who were in the little town. There must have been some twenty to thirty of them and when this one was lodged in the calaboose the others gathered up in a bunch some fifty feet away from the jail and would talk and point their finger at him; then one of them would go up and take hold of the bars and shake them and look them over very closely,

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but they never would speak to the one in jail. Then returning to the group again, they would all talk and make signs. This went on for sometime until finally one of them went over to where the officer was and held a rather lengthy consultation with him. All the while the bunch was at what might be called attention and looked very sad. Then the one who had been talking with the officer returned, made a few signs and said a few words. The rest of them began giving him money, which he took over to the white man. The Indian was then released from jail. He came out looking very sad and walked over to the bunch and shook hands with each of them, though never a word was spoken. It wasn't very long after this until they all left town and it all seemed so curious to them that they couldn't seem to understand.

Then came the Opening of the Cherokee Strip, which lay along the line of Kansas. This Strip of land was a very fine grazing country, and was called the cattleman's kingdom. This country was to be opened by a Run similar to that of old Oklahoma proper; only those who were to make the Run would have to be registered. A white man made a deal with me to make the Run for him. Of course, I would not have been

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allowed to run myself but anyway I went up and registered at Orlando and got by with it. Then on the day of the Opening I made the Run and staked a claim on Black Bear Creek some twenty-five miles north of where Perry is now located. The white man for whom I staked the claim never did go up there and I couldn't file on it myself, so I came back to Lexington.

I begin work for Frank Barland, who ran a saloon at Lexington, as a partner. It was quite tough around there in those days; I stayed and worked until 1907 when the Territory was admitted as a State and I have the honor of casting the first vote in the town of Lexington for Governor Haskell.

The country since 1907 has been developed by leaps and bounds. I have lived near Rosedale for some twenty years, I own my little home of twenty acres here, which I bought and paid for. Rosedale is a small inland town located in the eastern part of McClain County, and is just south of the South Canadian River on State Highway 59, some twelve miles south and east of Purcell.