

WRIGHT, LEMUEL. INTERVIEW 5139

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BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

WRIGHT, LEMUEL

INTERVIEW

#5139

Field Worker's name O. C. Davidson

This report made on (date) March 9, 1937

1. Name Lemuel Wright

2. Post Office Address Muskogee, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 722 Houston

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month - Day - Year 1848

5. Place of birth Fulton County, Kentucky

6. Name of Father Wm. Dixson Wright Place of birth -

Other information about father -

7. Name of Mother - Place of birth -

Other information about mother One-eighth Cherokee Indian

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 Eleven

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O. C. Davidson
Field Worker
March 9, 1937

Interview with Lemuel Wright
Muskogee, Oklahoma.
722 Houston

I was born in Fulton County, Kentucky, in 1848. My father, Wm. Dixson Wright, was a Baptist minister. In the year 1851 we came west and settled in Carrol County, Arkansas, near Berryville. We made the journey in an ox wagon along with several other families; there were fifteen wagons in the train. My family consisted of my father, mother (one-eighth Cherokee Indian), four brothers and myself. Mother had a big iron wash-kettle which she wanted to bring along and they put it in the front-end of the wagon and threw a quilt or something in it and that was where I had to ride.

Upon our arrival in Arkansas father and the older boys cut logs, built us a house and cleared up land and started farming, using oxen to break the ground. The land was very productive and we got along fine; by the time I was eight or nine years old I made a regular hand

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on the farm? My oldest brother died at the age of twenty-one with measles just before the Civil War began in 1861.

At the beginning of the war my father and my next brother, Jim, enlisted with the Northern army. My brother took sick and died just a short time after he entered the service. My father also became disabled before the war was over from white swelling in his leg and was discharged. He lived for many years but never recovered from this disability. After the war started we were almost constantly molested by the Rebel soldiers and bushwhackers. We were robbed of practically all of our live stock and our feed stuff and a lot of our household goods.

One night just about midnight my father knocked at the door and he had six other soldiers with him; I heard him and my mother whispering; he told her to wake Bill and Louis, my two brothers older than I, and tell them to get old Dick and Bright and yoke them to the wagon as quickly as they could and not to make any more noise than they had to. "We will have to get out of here or we will all be killed." Within thirty minutes after they came to the door we had an ox wagon

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loaded with the things that we needed the worst and were driving away. We drove the rest of the night and all the next day covering a distance of about twenty miles to White River. We were uneasy all the way, fearing that we would encounter rebels at White River but when we got there, two companies of Federal soldiers were camped there, so of course we felt pretty safe. We camped there that night; next morning the river was up and overflowing and it looked impossible to cross it but we had to get out of there so we took a chance. We swam our oxen and the ten head of sheep we had brought along and we got a couple of dugouts---logs cut and hewed into the shape of canoes and dug out hollow and ran them up to the bank side by side so that two wheels of the wagon would ride on each canoe and in that way we managed to ferry our wagon and other belongings across.

After crossing White River we had about twenty-five miles of wilderness to cross where there were no inhabitants at all. We were expecting to be attacked any minute. We camped in this wilderness that night but I don't think anyone slept any that night; the six soldiers who were accom-

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panying us were on constant guard. The big timber wolves howled around the camp all night.

After about three or four days travel we arrived at Springfield, Missouri, which was about sixty miles from our farm in Arkansas. We were all about starved when we got there; we had been robbed until we had very little food stuff to take with us, but we got relief in Springfield.

We rented a farm near Springfield and my two brothers and I farmed there until they had to go to war. They both had to go before it was over, but I never did go, I stayed on the farm and raised what little food stuff I could.

There was a man in that country by the name of Alf Bolin who was a bushwhacker. He was the most brutal man I have ever heard of; he would rob the people and take them prisoners and keep them awhile, then he would ask them if they wanted to go back home to their folks; naturally they would say they did and he would blow their brains out. There was a company of Federal soldiers camped at Ozark, Missouri,

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and they laid a plan to capture Bolin who was staying with a woman near there. They disguised a soldier and he made friends with Bolin and also with the woman, and then he engaged the woman to help him to capture Bolin. They arranged for her to prepare a dinner and invite Bolin. She placed a coulter (an iron bar about two feet long and sharpened at one end like a knife blade, which farmers used to attach to the beam of their plows to cut the roots) under a table by the wall on which she set her waterbucket. When they came to the table she seated Bolin with his back to the waterbucket and the soldier on the other side. When Bolin was seated, the soldier said he wanted to get a drink of water and went to the waterbucket and picked up the coulter and sunk it into Bolin's brain. As soon as he struck Bolin, he started to run back to Ozark and notify his company but by the time he got out in the yard Bolin had raised up on his all-fours and the woman called him back to finish the job; he went back and finished it.

He notified the soldiers and they came and cut off

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Bolin's head and took it to Ozark, put the head on the end of a sixty foot pole and dug a hole in the ground, raised this pole and left it there for weeks. People went miles to see it; I could have seen it but I did not care to see anything so horrible, even though Bolin had killed lots of men.

When the war was over we wanted to go back home so we started back and we got to White River. It was crop time and we knew our farm was in ruins and it would take a long time to get it in shape to farm again, so we rented some land and made a crop there on White River about twenty miles

from our farm. We raised lots of corn and feed-stuff. When we got home it took us about a year to get our land cleared again. It was fresh land when we were forced to leave it and of course in four years it was almost as bad as clearing it the first time. We had about sixty acres cleared and fenced; we had split rails to fence it. This was a claim; father later homesteaded one hundred and sixty acres.

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When I was seventeen years of age I was converted and joined the Pleasant Hill Baptist church. It was just a little country church.

About this time I met Sarah Jane Ledbetter, a beautiful Irish girl. She with her parents, William Isaac and Minerva Ledbetter, had also come from Tennessee before the war. They were a very prosperous family, had always been used to having anything that they wanted. In their journey to this country they came in nice carriages, drawn by fine horses and bringing their belongings in wagons. Like us, everything was taken from them during the war. The Ledbetters were also in sympathy with the Union and several of their relatives were killed by bushwhackers. In May, 1863, Wm. I. Ledbetter, father of Sarah Jane, was on his way to mill two miles from Berryville with some wheat to be ground into flour. He had with him six dollars of his own money, and two dollars belonging to a woman whose husband had enlisted in the Southern army, with which to purchase her some flour. When he was overtaken by a band of bushwhackers or guerillas who took the money from him, and when

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he asked them to give him back the two dollars belonging to the woman so that he might buy her some flour, he was beaten over the head with the butt of a musket and later his body was riddled with bullets.

This left no man in the family and her mother decided that they were branded as union sympathizers and had better waste no time in escaping with their lives. During the night Sarah Jane yoked their two oxen, Price and Lincoln, to a wagon, loaded their most needed belongings and started on their sixty mile journey to Springfield. Their last meal was beef without salt, bread made from bran and wheat coffee. Sarah Jane, who was sixteen years of age at that time, walked beside the wagon and drove the ox team on that journey. Upon their arrival at Springfield they were furnished protection and provisions by the government.

After the war was over they also came back to their farm near Berryville, Arkansas. Sarah Jane also joined the Pleasant Hill Baptist Church and we were baptized at the same time along with about fifty others. We never had met until the day we were baptized, then our courtship began.

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In those days the young lady never escorted the young man to the door or gate when he went to leave. We did our courting right in the presence of the mother or anyone else who happened to be there in the big house. We never made dates but it was just a kind of mutual understanding that I would come to see her every Sunday.

We were married in 1867 at her home. Had a big supper that night and there were about fifty people present. We settled on a farm, built us a log house and I made rails and fenced my land. At that time all we had to do was to find a piece of land that we liked and go to work and improve it; no one could bother us. About all the farming tools we had was an axe, hoe, and a georgia stock, and a bull tongue plow. About the first thing a couple got when they married was a spinning wheel and a loom. I got Uncle Levi Stanley to make us a spinning wheel and loom, also cards. My wife would card and I would spin; I could spin as well as she. We would spin the thread and weave the cloth to make all of our clothes. The women would dye the thread different colors and weave their Sun-

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day dresses that they wore to church. They were pretty in stripes and checks. They made their dyes from barks and nuts.

When we went to church the men would sit on one side of the church and women and the children on the other. The women never had any voice in business matters of the church unless they would get happy and shout.

We made our own candles by melting tallow in a teacup or something and put a strip of cloth into it for a wick and let it cool.

We also made our own soap; we would make us an ash hopper and save the ashes from our fireplace all winter and in the spring we would begin to pour water in the ash hopper and the water would soak down through the ashes and come out, strong lye. With this lye and the scraps of meat and grease we had saved we would make our soap. We used battling-sticks instead of washboards; we would carry our clothes to the creek or river, dip them in the water, soap them, and spread them out over a bush and beat the dirt out with the battling-stick. Then we would put them in an old iron kettle and boil

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them, then dip them in the clear stream, rinse them, and hang them on the brush to dry.

When we all had to leave the country during the war we left our hogs; we had nearly a hundred head when we came back. The woods was full of wild hogs, and in the fall those hogs would get fat on the mast, such as scorns, hickory nuts, chinquipins etc. When cold weather would arrive we would go out and kill our meat; we would also kill deer and barbecue the venison and put it in meal sacks and hang it in the smoke-house and it would keep all winter. Wild turkey was also plentiful; I make me a turkey-call from the quill of a feather and would go out any time and give a few calls and pretty soon I would hear an old gobbler answer me. It never took me over thirty minutes to go out and get us a turkey dinner. But the wolves finally got so numerous that they killed off about all the hogs. They went in packs and sometimes they would attack and kill a grown steer or cow. They would come so near our house some nights that we could hear them sniffing the air trying to find a calf, pig or something to eat.