

YATES, BELLE M.

INTERVIEW

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

YATES, BELLE M. - INTERVIEW.

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Field Worker's name Grace Kelley

This report made on (date) January 27, 1938

1. Name Belle M. Yates

2. Post Office Address Henryetta, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 308 N. 7th Street

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month _____ Day _____ Year 1883

5. Place of birth Texas

6. Name of Father P. R. Capps Place of birth Tennessee

7. Name of Mother Sarah Ann Flowers Place of birth Missouri

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 12.

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Kelley, Grace - Investigator.
Indian Pioneer History-S-149.
January 27, 1938.

Interview with Belle M. Yates,
308 North 7th, Henryetta, Oklahoma.

My father was P. R. Capps, born in Tennessee, and my mother was Sarah Ann Flowers, born in Missouri.

My mother had died so my father brought us little children to the Chickasaw Nation. My older sister had married Jim Lane, who made a living hunting in that territory and they had written Father that he could get a good farm just by improving it and that it would be like owning a place for when the lease was out he could release it if the Indian liked him. Another reason Father came was so that my sister could help him take care of us children.

Our New Home among the Indians.

We located close to Dougherty where there were quite a few Indians. The children were afraid of them at first but they came to our tent and acted friendly and we found that they were as good as we were and couldn't help liking them. When we got sick an old Indian woman, we called her a squaw, gathered some wild herbs and made some medicine for us and doctored us until we got well. Father wanted to pay

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but she charged nothing for she said, "God made the herbs and intended for us to use them."

They had a log church in the country close to Dougherty and there were a lot of smaller houses where each family could camp and do their cooking but we went in to town to the church the white people had.

The Indians had given land to the white people so that they could bury their dead but they buried their own on their homeplaces.

Roff -- 1889.

The next year we all moved to Roff so that my father, brother and brother-in-law could work at the mill. Joe Roff had a gristmill, sawmill and cotton gin and ten or fifteen men worked there. It was across the creek but in Roff Town, -off to itself for they were afraid of fire.

The water was pumped from Rock Creek by a little engine and my brother-in-law took care of the engine and boiler.

The reason it took so many hands was because almost everything was done by hand. They had a press at the cotton gin but the cotton was fed to the gin with baskets and it took lots of men to keep it going. After the cotton was pressed, it was tied out by hand, etc. The power was

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steam and the furnace was fed wood and sawdust. It took one man to take care of the fire because they had different belts and quite often they had two of the three mills going at the same time.

Davis was the nearest town which had a gin and people used to come to Roff when it would take them two days on the road. Of course, ten miles was a long trip to make in a day, especially when the wagon was heavily loaded.

Joe Roff had married an Indian woman, who had died, leaving some children. He had the logs brought off of their land, post, red and white oak were used mostly, some cottonwood and sycamore were used but it warped so badly that they didn't like it. I've seen lots of trees as big around as a washing machine.

I had one brother, Johnnie, who was pretty good about letting me go with him. Sometimes he wouldn't let me go hunting with him but other times he would. All around us was big tall timber which was pretty, not much underbrush. He would shoot squirrels that were up high on a limb and we'd see deer loping along that looked like they had little chairs on their heads.

The Indians didn't care for us settlers killing the

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game but they got mad when people from Texas and other places would come in here just to hunt. They would cripple things and just leave them to die and we didn't like it either. We killed several deer that we had to throw away a leg as it had been shot and was knitting back but not fit to eat.

One evening we heard a woman screaming and ran out in the yard and answered her several times for we supposed the neighbor woman had gotten lost in the timber. Father listened awhile and then told us to hush, as it was a panther. It had a kind of growl if you listened for it but no child would know what to listen for. It sounded just like a woman to us.

Three Springs Close to Chimney Hill.

This was another of our favorite playgrounds. Sometimes we would go there hunting or just to play all afternoon. The pecans were so thick that we could rake them up by the handful and there were also nuts of almost every kind. There were some coffee berries that looked like coffee but they grew on trees. We tried to make some coffee but it was so bitter that we couldn't drink it.

Three springs ran out of the mountain. One was a

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sulphur spring. I haven't been there since I was a child but I don't think it was where the town is. There was one that salty water ran out of but I heard that it later went dry. The other one was a tar water spring. I remember going and getting the tar to chew. It wasn't strong like the commercial tar but tasted more like licorice and made good chewing gum.

There was lots of fruit for us to help ourselves to, besides the game and nuts. We didn't need to feed the stock either in the summer or winter if we didn't want to, for the grass was so high they could live without feed.

The Indians would tell us that we ought to fix our home and farm so that they wouldn't burn when the high grass was burned off. Every year they set that high dead grass on fire and it was dangerous. We always said that they didn't know any better but they might have had a reason for burning it.

All the farmers would work together and plow all around the crops to make a fireguard; then they would back-fire or burn the remaining grass between the plowed ground and the crops. It was hard work for all of them and had to be done when the wind was just right or the fire would get

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away from them. They had to do that or they wouldn't have raised anything, everything would have been burned.

The burning of the grass might have been to keep the insects down for we weren't bothered with them. There were no web or army worms and the cabbages were free from worms. We always raised lots of cabbages and made kraut for winter. The cucumbers were without beetles so we always had plenty of pickles.

We never had to depend on anyone helping us with groceries but once when Father and the whole family got sick, we had something to eat but it wasn't what we needed.

White Frost heard about our being sick and loaded his wagon with good groceries and brought them to us. That was the first canned goods that I ever saw. Father was so happy that he cried, then he would laugh and then cry again.

The richer people were sociable and kind and always helped the sick and needy.

In the Seminole Nation.

I married Robert E. Lee Yates who was a farmer and leased a farm from Governor Brown so I moved to the Seminole Nation.

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Governor John Brown.

It was in 1901 when the Governor started leasing ground. Before that ^{my} husband and others who were white had just worked for wages.

Governor Brown had three sets of children. I don't remember who the mothers of the last two sets were but his first wife was old Colonel Jumper's daughter. Somehow he had gotten to be governor through Colonel Jumper. He talked about the old man and his daughter quite a bit but not so much about the other two wives. When the Colonel died - he and his daughter died with consumption - the Governor took his children and reared them as his own. I couldn't tell which were his own and which belonged to his father-in-law.

He took care of all the Indians; they came to his store for what they needed whether they had money or not. Then if they got money they paid for what they had gotten. If you asked them what church they belonged to they would tell you that they belonged to Governor Brown's church, a Baptist church three miles west of Sasakwa.

He was like a father to all his work hands and we used to go to him for advice because he had good ideas.

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Whenever we needed to borrow money it was loaned to us and we paid it back out of our wages.

I don't care what others say about him - he did have the store and got the Indians money when they got it - but they had already had what they needed when they needed it badly. He was one man in a million, good and smart.

Governor Brown worked lots of hands at his place, which was more of a farm than a ranch. There was a sixteen-room house that was built of rock or brick - I can't remember exactly which-but it was a red looking house. At first the store was between a quarter and a half of a mile from the house; it was called Sasawka even at that time, that is a Seminole word.

The railroad came through there in 1900 and the Governor moved his store to New Sasawka, three miles from the old to the new location. He hired my men folk to dig a well for the "city" to use. It was on the southeast side, in back of the store, and everyone used water from there until they could get one of their own. For quite a while Governor Brown's store was the only one there, then a Mr. Harris put one in, but I don't remember his first name.

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Mail and Railroads.

There was no railroad there when we first went there so the mail was brought from Holdenville to the Governor's store and we went there for it but after the railroad came the mail was brought on the train.

It took a long time to get the railroads ready to carry the mail, though. It took a year-1900-to put the pillars in for the railroad to cross the South Canadian River.

My father worked on the railroad in the Choctaw Nation in 1893 or 1895. We called it the C. and G. but I don't remember the name or anything about it as I was just a child.

White Settlers not Interested in Openings.

I had brothers, a father, brothers-in-law and a husband who could have been in the Runs if they had been interested but none of them went to them.

They had leased good land where we were already located and knew that when these leases ran out they could release them. We could manage without going and if they had gone we would have had to move and start all over again.

They had heard bad things about the Runs - how one man

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would get a good place and another would claim that he had got there first, and one or the other would be killed.

That was too dangerous and unnecessary.

Bob, my husband, improved four farms, one at a time. The lease was for four years and we built a log house on the first one but the others had three-room box houses on them. We didn't stay the full four years on either of them but sold one lease to his brother. Most of the fences were three strands of barbed wire to keep the stock out. They didn't have to be hog-proof, and we could ^{have} used rails if we had wanted to.

When any of us white people sold our lease to another white person we had to get the Indian to sign the lease with us but we never had any trouble for they would do anything for a person if that person had treated them right. We valued their friendship so we treated them as we would have wanted to be treated - that was all that was necessary, for they came half way.

Bob died on the Witi Harjo lease in 1907 and I reared my children without remarrying.