

HARRISS, MATTIE LOU RAY.

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

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Field Worker's name Amelia F. Harris

This report made on (date) December 3, 1937

1. Name Mattie Lou Ray Harriss

2. Post Office Address Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 7 South Dewey

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month \_\_\_\_\_ Day \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_

5. Place of birth Whitewright, Texas

6. Name of Father A. E. Ray Place of birth Kentucky

Other information about father \_\_\_\_\_

7. Name of Mother Minta Morgan Ray Place of birth Kentucky

Other information about mother Came to Oklahoma in 1893.

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 \_\_\_\_\_.

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Amelia F. Harris  
Investigator.  
Dec. 3, 1937.

Interview with Mattie Lou Ray Harriss  
7 South Dewey  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

My father was born in Larue County, Kentucky, in 1848 and moved with his parents to Grayson County, Texas, in 1852 and settled in Kentucky Town and lived there until after the Civil War. Father then hired out to Hatfield and Silver, big cattlemen who had a ranch at Silver Bend in Cook County. (The following from his diary).

I was hired to help drive a bunch of cattle through to Memphis, Tennessee. All of the boys had broad brimmed hats which were to shield them from wind, snow and ice, and always wore big bandanas which we pulled up over our noses in winter time, or used to wipe the perspiration in the summer time, then we wore long-haired chaps which protected our legs from brush, thorns or snakes; all wore boots with high heels; the high heels were to keep our feet from slipping when we stood up in our stirrups watching the cattle to keep them from straying, and we took great pride in our spurs, some were very fancy - and almost

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every man, especially the cattlemen, carried a pistol and some carried Winchesters, too; we also had sheep-skin lined coats and slickers strapped to our saddles.

We started with this herd of cattle over the old Texas Road, twice crossing Red River near Denison, continuing on the Texas Road trail to the place where the Military Road crossed it; we then took the Military trail through the Territory to Fort Smith, Arkansas, crossing Arkansas into Tennessee and on to our destination.

We were gone about three months on this trip - grazing was so fine in Indian Territory that we often stopped for two or three days at a time and allowed the cattle to graze. We left Texas the last of September and got back in time for Christmas and after Christmas I went to work for Doumas and Emberson just across Red River on the Texas side. I punched cattle for them for four months and while in their service we had many thrilling experiences with the Kiowas and Comanches and I decided to join the Independent Indian Scouts, called the "Texas Rangers", to keep these Indians from coming

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on the Texas side. Our fort was Red River Station located in the northwest corner of Montague County, which was a frontier town at that time.

The Kiowas and Comanches were the Indians we had to deal with; the Kiowas were more blood-thirsty; they loved to plunder and kill and many were our thrilling and dangerous experiences.

Those Indians committed their depredations always in the light of the moon, they loved ceremony and they had ceremonial dances for almost everything they did and they always had the war dance which was to stir up courage and hatred for the whites among the Indians. We, the Texas Rangers, patrolled the Texas side of Red River and we soon learned that when the Indians were going on a warpath, they had all of their horses lined up, then the tom-toms would start and the Indians would begin dancing in a circle and yelling in their language. The Indian scouts did not wait for the dance to be finished but would cross Red River from the Indian Territory side and kill and raid to the suburbs of Gainesville and on into Wise County. One of our worst battles with

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these Indians was at the forks of Mud Creek in Indian Territory, where we lost three of our men and our pack horses. The men were George Haisell, who worked on the Dan Waggoner Ranch; Jarve Norris, who worked on the Doumas and Emberson Ranch and Willis Emberson, one of the owners of the Emberson Ranch. Dick Cocher was wounded in this battle. We buried our dead at Mudens Creek.

We had all of our blankets (which we wrapped up in at night) on two of the pack horses and two days' rations and camp outfit and we had to make our get-away for the Indians out-numbered us.

We rode up the Little Washita River and camped at a spring where the town of Henrietta stands today. We left here at four o'clock in the morning and headed west to Deer Creek in hopes of killing some wild game for breakfast, but before we got to Deer Creek we struck an Indian trail; the first man to see this Indian trail was Houston Fleetwood, a full-blood Cherokee scout; he was our trailer.

~~We~~ We forgot about breakfast, had no dinner nor supper. We rode hard most of the time in a lope. We

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were mounted on the best horses that could be bought and we only stopped long enough to water them, and about sundown we came in sight of the Indians, and our pack horses which they had taken from us had been left with two Indians in a dry lake, we then increased the speed of our horses, tired as they were, and it was an even fight which lasted until dark when we recovered our pack horses and turned back for many miles. We picked up riderless ponies but when we stopped to camp and took the packs off of the horses the bags of meal and coffee were gone and only a small piece of bacon was left, so again we went to sleep hungry.

The next day we sighted a bunch of cattle which were as wild as buffalo; it was a hard chase to catch one but we succeeded in killing a big fat steer; we tied two ropes on his horns and pulled him about four hundred yards to a good hole of water, some of the boys skinned the steer while others gathered up dry mesquite brush and built a big fire.

We had some real barbecue meat minus salt and bread. We were glad to get out of the Territory and back to Texas and we took a week of rest.

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There were four girls at the station and a bunch of the boys went up to Queens Peak and brought back four more girls so we could dance. When we got tired dancing we ate barbecued beef along with the trimmings. These girls carried guns, too, and some of them were crack shots. After two days of fun the boys escorted the girls home.

The next fight of any note was when we surprised a band of Indians who had just butchered a fat beef and were barbecuing it when we rode up on them and killed the chief. His warriors met our charge and showed much bravery but we out-numbered them and they fled in confusion. The chief had on a hickory shirt and duck leggings, had a shield on his left arm made from a thin sheet of cottonwood about a foot wide and two feet long covered with a buffalo hide with the hair scraped off covered with yellow colored buckskin with a drawing of a beautiful Indian maid whose hair came down to her knees. This picture was painted in red, blue and black ink or coloring of some kind, and over this picture was a covering from a buffalo hide. The chief had long hair



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in two braids. He fell with two bullets through his chest. Bob Sparks and I scalped him and divided the scalp so that each of us had a long braid of hair. We learned later that he was Chief Little Wolf.

My boyhood dreams were coming true - and the Indians kept us busy trying to save the lives of our neighbors and their live stock.

One of the worst things that happened was the killing of John Box, who lived east of Saint Joseph. The Indians killed and scalped him and one hung his scalp on his belt in the presence of John Box's wife, two daughters and small baby. The Indians then captured Mrs. Box and her children and started in a lope for Indian Territory.

They camped that night on Red River. The baby was very fretful the next morning, they took it from its mother's arms and took it by its feet and dashed its brains out against a rock.

The next day the Rangers heard all the details of the Box killing and were told that his family was

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in captivity. The Indians had twenty-four hours start of us and they divided up and went different ways to throw us off their tracks and we never found Mrs. Box nor her family until the next year, 1867, when the Indians sold Mrs. Box and her daughters to some traders at Council Grove, Kansas, and they set them free. Mrs. Box and daughters made their way back to Saint Joe. (This episode is of record in the history of St. Joe, Texas).

The late Senator George W. Barefoot was my buddy and one of the Rangers at the station; we had two big rooms about eighteen feet square with a long hall between the rooms. Our bunk house was in a big lot which joined on to the corners of these log rooms and this is where we kept our saddle horses so they would be close to us in case of an emergency.

We also kept a vicious bulldog and one night the Comanches came and thought they would steal our horses. They stopped down in a hollow about a hundred yards of the lot, and one of the Indians was going up to let the horses out. He crawled on his hands and knees to a

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place about twenty feet from the gate, when the bulldog sensed him and made a leap for him and by the time we got out there the Indian was dead; the bulldog had him by the neck and had pulled his windpipe out. The rest of the Indians ran back on the Territory side.

Another time they came after the horses when Dick Boran was on guard; he was sitting with his back against a post oak tree and said he went to sleep when he was awakened by the zing of an arrow which lodged in the tree just a few inches above his head. He had his gun across his lap with the muzzle pointed in the direction the arrow came from, he raised his gun and fired without aim and "got" the Indian, and the other Indians ran away when they heard the shots.

The Government finally took steps to stop the Indian depredations.

After two years of this wild life I went back to my old home near where Whitewright, Texas, is today and went to freighting to and from Jefferson where all the produce of the southwest was marketed.

It was the summer of 1869 that six of us started out for Jacksboro with six wagon loads of goods. We

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stopped for camp eighteen miles east of Decatur and just before sun down I saw seven Indians riding north on a high ridge, single file, but they soon disappeared behind a high knob. I went back to camp and told the boys I saw them but as the Indians were out of sight and they couldn't see them, they laughed at me and said I was seeing spooks. I was driving mules and I told one of the men if he would let me have one of his horses I would show them they were Indians. I got on the horse and headed the Indians as they came around the bend they kept coming towards me and I opened fire. Their leader fell from his horse at the first shot, the other six turned back, I fired three more shots and think I wounded two of them, but they didn't check their horses just kept them in a run.

It was now dark and I turned my horse around and rushed back to camp. This was the last raid they ever made in Decatur County; it had been two or three years since they had been that far east; they got about one hundred and fifty head of horses that night. The next day I talked to two cowboys and they said there were eighteen or twenty Indians in that raid.

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That fall I was employed on a construction job, grading for a railroad to be built from Corsicana to Dallas, and the next year I worked on grading a railroad from Sherman to Bonham.

The next year, 1876, I married Miss Minta Morgan, and started a small ranch and did some farming too, on South Sulphur Creek. I built my business up by working hard and in 1882 I sold my ranch and cattle to Charles Acres for \$18,000.00.

The next spring I bought 1000 head of cattle and took over the old Tony Ranch at Big Post Oak, which had been abandoned. I built this business up, buying more cattle and taking care of the increase until 1902. I sold out lock, stock and barrel for \$68,000.00. I then moved my family to Caddo, Indian Territory, which was the best farming town in Bryan County, twenty-eight miles north of Denison on the main line of the M.K.&T. Railroad.

I invested in property at Caddo and in 1904 I became manager for Governor Willson Jones, a full-blood Choctaw, who owned twenty thousand acres in farms and ranches with several thousand head of cattle.

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Governor Jones was a high class aristocratic man and the soul of honor. I knew the Governor before I moved to the Territory and he and his white wife visited us many times out at our ranch at Big Post Oak. He had two palatial homes lavishly furnished, one in Sherman, Texas, where he spent his winters and the other eighteen miles east of Caddo on his ranch where he spent most of the summer. I stayed with the Governor until he died about 1905. He was elected Governor of the Choctaws.

In 1906 I was elected city marshal of Caddo and in 1908 I was appointed Deputy United States Marshal under Clipper Hamilton. He was elected the first sheriff of Bryan County, and I served under him for two years. We made arrests from Lubbock, Texas, to the mountain fork of northwest Kansas.

After I resigned I started buying and selling cattle. I never held the cattle over thirty<sup>1</sup> days as there was too much loss in feeding them.

My wife died in 1916 and that fall I got a job with the state, working at the McAlester penitentiary,

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on April 15, 1917. Sam Flornoy and I had charge of the first car load of prisoners transported to Granite. A month later we went back for another car load to take to Granite.

Then the 31st day of July I went back to the penitentiary with an order from Governor Haskell for a hundred negro men. I took them to Cordell, Washita County, and the first night we camped eight miles east of Cordell. The next day we started work on the highway, the first road work in that county. We worked there until the next spring when we went back to the penitentiary and worked there under different wardens.

With a crew of men we built the Jefferson Highway through the Atoka County and the next spring I took a crew of white men and we worked and built the Pike to Coast Highway across the Winding Stair Mountains in LeFlore County.

The next year I resigned until 1922, went back to McAlester and worked under Warden Switzer as guard until Colonel Keys was made warden. I then was appointed to take a bunch of prisoners to work on a highway surveyed through the Arbuckle Mountains. I spent three

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months here and resigned from this work and went back to Caddo and went into the real estate business until 1927. I then moved to Oklahoma City and was appointed market master of the vegetable market on California Street until John J. Hardin built the Public Market out on Exchange Avenue.

I often think I would like to have just one more year of the wild frontier life but those days are gone forever. No more wild Indians, no more buffalo or wild game on the plains - fences and farms and civilization have taken their place. I have killed many buffaloes, deer, antelope, cougars, turkeys, prairie chickens - but I never killed but one black bear on the plains of old Oklahoma and Texas where I was with the Texas Rangers. I can only reminisce. Now Finis.

This diary was finished in 1930. A. E. Ray died in 1935.