

HAYS, J. H.

INTERVIEW

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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) May 2, 1938

1714 North May Avenue, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

1. Name J. H. Hayes,

2. Post Office Address 3209 North Virginia Avenue,

3. Residence address (or location) Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month April Day 4 Year 1870

5. Place of birth Indiana

6. Name of Father John D. Hays Place of birth Indiana

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Mary Elizabeth Place of birth Indiana

Other information about mother Pioneered in Texas.

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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Amalia F. Harris,
Journalist,
May 8, 1938.

An Interview with J. H. Hays,
3209 North Virginia Avenue,
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Pioneer of Early Indian Territory Days.

My parents migrated from Indiana to Mt. Pleasant, Texas, when I was about three years old. They engaged principally in farming and had a few sheep. I grew up on this farm, working hard, and not getting very much schooling.

When I was sixteen I thought I was about grown and it was time for me to start out on my own. I decided I would go over in the Territory, not any place in particular, but looking for a job. I had a good horse and I saddled him up early one morning in May (crops were all in), told the folks "good bye" and headed for Indian Territory. I crossed Red River at Garretts Bluff, about eight miles northeast of Denison, Texas. My first stop in the Indian Territory was at Doakville which was just a little town with quite a few full blood Indians. I didn't stop here

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but a day or so and I drifted on toward Boggy Depot.

At Boggy Depot I got a job feeding cattle for Mr. Risner out at his ranch about six miles southeast of Boggy Depot. Mr. Risner also had a general merchandise store out there. I helped him feed these cattle for two months, getting them ready for market. I also helped him drive them over the old Texas Cattle Trail as far as Durant, he was taking them to Paris, Texas, but I left them at Durant and went north to Lehigh and got a job working in the coal mines, setting props or braces made of lumber down in the pits. They paid me \$2.35 a day. This was the biggest money I had ever earned and I sure was proud.

I only worked at Lehigh a month when I was offered \$2.50 a day over at Coalgate. I took it and worked at this place three months. I worked right by the side of Italians but I never did learn to speak their language.

Then from Coalgate I drifted over to McAlester and worked in the stripper mines. I was paid by the ton on this job and I averaged from \$2.50 to \$3.00 every day.

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I am carrying a scar on my hand received while working here. We were loading a small car with coal and as I came up with a fork of coal a second workman came up with his fork full and as I drew my hand down he struck his fork and one of the prongs went through my hand. The Superintendent sent for the Company Doctor and he ran a ribbon through the hole pulling it backwards and forwards to clean all of the coal out of the wound and ^{so} there would later never be any signs of the wound but he failed to get it all and I carry a black streak near my forefinger.

I worked at the stripper about six months when I was offered a job on a ranch located between Atwood and Calvin near the South Canadian River. There I worked for Geo. W. Scales, an intermarried citizen whose wife was Mattie Bolen, about one fourth Choctaw. Mr. Scales was rated as a millionaire. I don't recall how many thousand acres of land he had. He had cattle scattered all over that country and thousands of hogs and horses. He also owned a general merchandise store, a cotton gin and a grist mill. He burned wood in the boilers. Mr. Scales also owned a post office called Loader. I had to

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sleep in the store to guard his money. He always kept several thousand dollars in a small safe at the store.

Here is where I really picked up what little education I have. At night, I would light the coal oil lamp and read everybody's papers and when I got through reading I would put each paper right back in its pigeon hole. Mail was brought to us about twice a week, the mail carrier riding horseback and carrying a double mail pouch of duck bound with leather. It took him two days to get the mail and bring it back from Stonewall, a distance of twenty miles.

I only stayed at the store at night. I rode the range, helped brand cattle and cut the ice on ponds in the winter. I froze both my feet in cutting the ice one winter. I had been cutting near the edge of the water, but it would snow over the ice and I couldn't see where I had cut the day before. That day I was cutting when my horse got loose and started off in a lope. I thought I would cut across the pond and catch him as he came by but I stepped onto thin ice and down I went in the icy water. I just rolled over, stuck my feet up and shook

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the water out, got up and caught my horse. My feet were awfully cold but I never stopped until I got ready for bed. I noticed when I pulled my boots off there was ice in them but my feet didn't hurt until after I had gone to bed and fallen asleep. I woke up with my feet hurting, they had thawed out in the warm bed.

I didn't get any more sleep that night. I got up, rubbed a while and walked a while. I was glad when it was daylight. I went up to the house and told Mrs. Scales and she scraped an Irish potato for a poultice and bound up my feet in it. The next day Mr. Scales said he had ordered a big pair of lace boots for one of his customers and for me to wear them on top of my poultices. I did and got along all right, never lost but one day of work, but I lost every one of my toenails.

Every night I would read and by reading other people's newspapers I learned that Uncle Sam was going to survey the Indian Territory preparatory to allotments. Then I told Mr. Scales that I could get \$30.00 and board from the United States. Well, he said he couldn't pay more than he was paying

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which was \$25.00 a month and board but he said if I did go, to come by the house, he had something for me. I got my things ready, saddled my horse and rode by the house. He gave me a letter to J. J. McAlester, asking him to see that I got a job but he told me if I fell down and didn't get work, that there would be a job for me back with him.

Mr. McAlester was a good Indian and helped me get on the Government surveying. That was in about 1893 or 1894. I worked for them six years. The first work I did was to take an ax and blaze a trail--walking. Next I drove a wagon and marked the section lines. I was called the mound man. The first year they paid me \$30.00 and board; the second year \$35.00; and the third, \$40.00. If I had had an education I could have drawn better wages but I couldn't figure much, but I kept a book and took field notes. One day I said, "Captain Harrison, I am afraid no one will be able to read my notes but me." He said, "Let me see". He looked at them and said, "Did you know you write like George Washington - see here", and he opened up a chest and took out some of Washington's field

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notes and compared the writing. They did look alike. After that I didn't feel so badly about my writing.

I stayed with the Government surveyors until they finished, which was at Duncan here. We tied onto the Cheyenne and Arapaho corners.

Then we were all given a chance to be transferred to Washington Territory and I was the only one who went. Surveying was too confining on the college graduates. I was saving every dollar I could. All told, I was with them seven years and I saved \$8,000.00.

Washington Territory was a mountainous country and we used pack mules for transportation. Sometime we couldn't make more than 10 chains a day, going up and down mountains. We started in May and quit September 15th, as it got too cold to work.

I then decided to visit Mother but I drifted through the Indian country and I got to the Cheyenne and Arapaho country where I met up with an old friend, Jim Belcher, and he persuaded me to stay and make the Run. We decided to look around and select a quarter section beside each other,

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which we did. I filed in the northwest corner of Washita County on Oak Creek where there was plenty of wood and water. He filed on the section south of me. He helped me dig a dugout and then I started to Texas to get my mother and bring her to the Territory. Father was dead and she was just getting well from the measles. I started out horseback, leading a horse with a set of harness on it; people would ask what I was going to do with the harness and I would say, "Well, I was going to buy a wagon." I met a man over near the Caddo County line who had an extra mare, for which I traded a gold watch and a gold ring I had. Now, I was leading two horses which wasn't so easy, but I took the trail on down towards Erin Springs. I struck up with a man and I traded the mare to him for a wagon; then I hitched my team to the wagon, threw my saddle in wagon, and pulled out for Texas to get Mother.

We loaded Mother's things in and I started back to Oklahoma via Allen where I stopped a day to get married. My wife had a team, too. I hitched them to the wagon, driving four. We were twenty-one days on this trip--our honeymoon.

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Roads were bad, creeks and rivers up and there weren't any bridges so we would make camp and wait for the river to run down.

Finally we reached our home. I unloaded Mother's and my wife's things and when I got them in my dugout, there wasn't room to stow the cat. I drove to Chickasha for a month's supply of groceries, and coming back I picked up about 250 powder cans (had high side boards). The railroad builders had thrown them in a heap when they were putting in the railroad tracks from Chickasha to Lawton. I took these cans home, ripped some open and used them to cover the barn and hen house and I cut the ends out of three and made a smoke stack to my fireplace. I also used some of the cans for chairs. Those cans were the handiest things I ever did have.

I built another dugout about four feet from the first one and tunneled a doorway between them. Then I went over into the Cheyenne and Arapaho country and cut cedar posts off the reservation. This was against the law and a full blood Cheyenne Indian came upon me while I was cooking dinner. I

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made friends with him and invited him to eat, which he did; then he helped me load one hundred posts. I made three trips and each time the same Indian came, ate with me, helped load and I would give him 25 cents in money. The third trip, after we loaded the posts, I gave him some bacon, two cans of tomatoes, a can of corn and some coffee, and 25 cents in cash. I never went back.

I went clear back to Erin Springs and bought barb wire from Martin Colbert, a Chickasaw Indian, who had had thousands of acres fenced and when the Government cut the acreage down he had to give up a lot of land so he removed all of his fences. I bought 1,800 pounds of wire from him cheap and loaded it in my wagon and started home. I got stuck in the Washita River and had to take all the wire out and roll it up the banks, then pull out the empty wagon and reload. This was a job but I got home with it and built a good fence.

Next I went down in Miller County, Arkansas, and bought fifty head of heifers at \$4.00 each. I also bought a fine male at Dallas, Texas, from Silver Stein, paying \$80.00 for him. I had two grown boys to help drive these cattle home.

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We drove them from Titus County, Texas, crossed Red River near Paris, Texas, and then into the Territory over the old Texas Cattle Trail, through Bennington, Caddo, Atoka, Lehigh, Coalgate to Allen; then across the country to Pauls Valley, to Chickasha and here. The Judge let me put my cattle in the courthouse yards. There weren't more than four or five hundred people in Chickasha then.

From Chickasha I went west to Cloud Chief. They had a quarantine line at Caddo County and my cattle were inspected for ticks there, the inspector being Bill Rogers. He didn't charge anything for inspecting. He told me to rub them with coal oil and lard which we did and we then drove them on home.

That year I broke out forty acres of sod and planted corn and kaffir. Had plenty of feed in the Summer months. I would take my team and work in the wheat fields at \$2.00 per day for me and the team.

The increase in my cattle netted me a good income and I bought three tracts of land, that had small mortgages on them, which made 700 acres in all that I had.

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Mother filed on a claim, too, about two miles from me but never lived on it.

We lived on our farm better than forty years and raised six children here. They went to school at Canute, Clinton, to the Christian College at Cordell and Hill's Business College in Oklahoma City and all now have good jobs. But we lost our land through sickness and drought, and I am too old to work now.

When we moved to Oklahoma City to our daughter's home, we brought a few antiques, my wife's side saddle, which is 55 years old has her mother's stirrup 75 years old; an old high chair, 83 years old; an old oak chair that has worn out two rawhide bottoms, and now has a rope bottom, chair is 75 years old; and a family Bible, 84 years old.