

HATCHETT, META B.

INTERVIEW #12102

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

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Field Worker's name Lula Austin

This report made on (date) November 9, 1937

1. Name Mrs. Meta B. Hatchett. (Choctaw & Cherokee)
2. Post Office Address Durant, Oklahoma
3. Residence address (or location) 623 North 6th
4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month September Day 16 Year 1883
5. Place of birth Coffee Bend, Indian Territory

6. Name of Father John Calhoun Yarborough Place of Birth Texas
Other information about father Father came to Indian Territory 1871.

7. Name of Mother Belle Colbert Place of birth Doakville, Indian Territory
Other information about mother Mother born 1865. She is now living

in Mead, Oklahoma.

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 _____.

Lula Austin
Interviewer
November, 11, 1937

Interview with Meta B. Hatchett
Durant, Oklahoma

My father's parents were white people and my mother's father was a Choctaw and her mother was a Chickasaw Indian.

My white grandparents came to the Indian Territory in early days between '65 and '70. They came to this country from Texas when my father was a lad of nineteen and settled on one farm where they lived until they died. This farm was located in a settlement known as "Coffee Bend" because the first family to locate there was named Coffee and the whole settlement was in a bend of Red River. The name remains the same today.

Grandfather died shortly after coming to this country and his wife assumed the responsibilities of the family consisting of four boys and an invalid daughter. She endured a great many trials and hardships.

The road in front of her house was a main highway leading to Denison, Texas, from the southwestern part of the Territory; Denison was a small place but it was the nearest point where things needed by the family could

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be purchased and since the only means of transportation at that time was by wagon drawn by horses or oxen, traveling was slow.

In this sparsely settled country where the houses were far apart there was always someone stopping for a meal or for water or to spend the night. Food, water and lodging were seldom denied even to strangers. Other people would come from up the country and stay awhile.

Although whiskey was not allowed to be sold in the Indian Territory ^{those} who wanted it could easily get it in Texas and many drunken men traveled along that public highway. Travel on the road was almost continuous during the fall and winter.

My grandmother would often be obliged to open her door at night to a drunken Full Blood and she would be very much frightened.

There were no shipping facilities except by wagon trains, and these wagon trails often became mere cow trails.

This country was a waving field of green grass during more than half the year with no lack of water. There were quite a few acres of this excellent grazing

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land leased by Texas ranchers and others, but the real coming of the cow man dates from the building of the M. K. & T. Railway about 1871.

There were many new townsites provided for along the new railroad among them Durant, which was then a lonely farmhouse surrounded by a few acres of cultivated land and a wide expanse of beautiful country in its natural state.

Long before the railroads came through there was a stage coach line through what is now Bryan County. The general direction of this road was north and south, but one traveled many directions before he arrived at his destination.

There were stage stands located on this road about ten to twelve miles apart. One of these stage stands was Carriage Point, which derived its name from a remnant or part of an old carriage that had lain at this particular spot for many years before there were any settlement or buildings of any kind on that site.

Carriage Point was first settled by the Ridge family then owned by the Fisher family, later of Tishomingo and was then purchased by Calvin Colbert

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who operated the stage stand for a period of two or three years until the M. K. & T. Railroad was built through Indian Territory.

The original old house or inn was built in the shape of an ell; it was a rambling one story structure built of heavy hewed logs and faced the west. On the front there were two big log rooms, one about sixteen feet square and the other was about sixteen feet by eighteen feet square with a huge stack chimney built of rock between them.

There was a fire place in each room with closets on either side of the chimney-one opening into either room and one opening into the larger room only. There was a wide latticed porch running the entire length of the front of the house and on the east just back of the big rooms were three or four shed rooms which were used for bed rooms.

Farther east was a wide open hall running north and south and next to and adjoining this hall on farther east were the dining room and kitchen. There were other buildings too, a milk house and a smokehouse, which were very near but were not connected with the main building.

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In the yard, there were black locust, catalpa, hackberry, cedar, wild cherry and mulberry trees; all planted by Calvin Colbert and his wife, Emma.

Another landmark on this place was the old barn which housed the coach horses and other stock. The frame work of this old barn was made of heavy hewed logs put together with wooden pins and it stood until only a few years ago when it was destroyed by a wind storm. There was an old well near by which furnished much cool, clear and sparkling water. This well was famous in its day as there were few wells or watering places at this time along the stage coach road. It was very deep, about eighty feet. It was a dug well, walled entirely with rock. In later years there were many times from ten to fifteen teams watered from the well at one time.

There was a tavern at Carriage Point where food and lodging could be had and for these accommodations the landlord sometimes received as much as \$500.00 in one week.

There were three stage stands along the route in what is now Bryan County. The names of these were beginning north and coming south, Nail Crossing on Blue

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River, Carriage Point, midway and Riverside on Red River. Nail Crossing was given its name in honor of a very wealthy family named Nail. The Nail family belonged to the Choctaw tribe of Indians and were a large family, in fact one of the largest of the Choctaw Nation.

Riverside was located very near Red River at Rock Bluff Ferry which was owned and operated by Frank Colbert's great-uncle. After their marriage my parents lived at Coffee Bend for several years and then moved to Carriage Point. I was four years old at this time.

Father had forty twenty dollar gold pieces stored away in an old ten cent snuff box in the bottom of his trunk, when he and mother married.

My father was one of the well-to-do farmer ranchmen of the country and in that station in life we children were reared. There were six children including an orphan cousin but only four were reared entirely in the Indian Territory. The others although reared in the same home were practically Oklahomans. Since Father's occupation was farming and ranching he kept several farm hands and cowboys.

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Father's cow pony was named Frank and he was sometimes used to drive the calves home at milking time and it was great fun to the cowboys to have a new man ride Frank after the calves. Of course they always sent the new man riding Frank bareback and he invariably came home walking and usually carrying his bridle. Old Frank died around the age of twenty-five years.

As on so many ranches of the middle west there was a bunch of wild horses that grazed on our range. These were not so wild possibly as those on the mountain ranges of Arizona and New Mexico but these were wild enough so that one must take them by surprise and be riding a mighty good horse to pen them, which sometimes took hours to do and often required a fresh horse or two. Notwithstanding this precaution rarely any of the bunch could be penned unless their leader was also penned. The leader was an old gray mare belonging to Mother's estate, raised on the range ^{and} which lived to be past thirty years of age and never had a rope, bridle or saddle on. My father used mules mostly on the farm but when the boys saw the need of another horse to ride, they, with Father's assistance selected one from the wild

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bunch and began the tedious task of taming and training him. This procedure was called "Broncho busting" or "Breaking".

There was always a professional bronco buster at home, and there was one thing that I remember particularly. One of these professional bronco busters grew from small boy to manhood on our ranch and became such an expert rider that he afterwards toured the United States and a part of Europe as the principal rider in a Wild West Show.

During the spring months and summer while the herds are slick and lazy because of the abundance of water and delicious green grass, the ranchman is preparing for the worst season of the year, the winter.

The men labored in the summer and fall, gathering in feed stuff, load after load and storing it away. There were great cribs of corn, tons and tons of the finest prairie hay, and cottonseed stacked in a pen about as large as a five or six roomed house.

The top of the stack was carefully shaped like the sharp, long roof of a house and packed well and smooth with a long wide board or plank and allowed to settle, then the rain had no effect on hay and cottonseed for in this

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way the water was forced to run off and could not soak into the stack.

We were just twenty miles from Red River and the Texas line on the south and the line between the Chickasaw and Choctaw Nations ran through our place. The cattle usually came from the South and the prairie fires were always in the south and west because of the grass lands. It used to be interesting to climb upon the gate post or sit on the high stake and rider rail fence that enclosed the stock pens or corrals and watch the cattle go by with hundreds in the herds.

When we looked over the mountain ridge and saw a huge cloud of dust we knew that a drove of cattle was coming and immediately our men saddled their horses preparing to meet the cowboys and ride with them the full length of our home cattle range, a distance of from four to five miles in order to "cut out" any of our cattle that might go with the herd and be driven away.

It was difficult to drive a big herd of cattle through a country of practically open range and not pick up a few now and then and, too, some cowmen did

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not object to thus increasing their own herd and the natural inclination of cattle to assemble was apt to increase the number of strays which might be picked up.

When there was a prairie fire in the locality every man whether resident or visitor put forth every effort in fighting prairie fires; some going to the barn lot to harness the team to the wagon, some getting out the water barrels and others gathering sacks together. These things constituted the fire department, and crude as it was, it was very effective. The men would drive like wild to meet the fire and would fight the flames, which were sometimes fifteen feet high where the grass was rank, for hours until the men would be perfectly black from the smoke and cinders. Occasionally a man would fall from the heat and exertion while fighting the fire, but his comrades, after caring for him the best they could, continued to fight until the flames were extinguished for the fire must not be allowed to sweep the range of its grass or to burn the old fashioned rail fences that enclosed the farming land or destroy the hay or straw stacks which were being carefully kept for winter forage for the cattle.

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I remember on one occasion we saw a prairie fire coming and there was a family camped in Father's hay meadow directly in the path of the fire, about a mile from our home. The tent of this family was entirely surrounded by heavy grass land and they had a baby only a few hours old. Father saw their danger and began planning to save them and if possible to save their belongings. So he made the necessary preparations and went with his men and an extra team.

They barely had time to hitch the team to their hack and hurriedly make the mother and baby comfortable enough for a wild ride, before the flames were upon them. Father and his men saved this man, woman and baby and on returning to the fire Father was informed that ~~one of his men had risked his life to rescue the horses~~ which were tied to a fence. This brave man's face was blistered and the hair on the horses' bellies was scorched, but aside from this no damage was done. When these fires occurred not only did our people fight the fire but our neighbors very willingly joined the ranks also.

It was not possible to attend church very often for there were few ministers. The ministers were called

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Circuit Riders and usually came no oftener than twice a month. The minister with whom we were the most closely associated in my youth was the Reverend Mr. Reed. He was a Presbyterian and we were Baptists but we were all delighted to have him make our home his stopping place.

There were other circuit riders who were just as worthy in every way but I shall mention only two others of whom it can safely be said that the country is better for their having lived in it; the Reverend Mr. Frank Wright and the Reverend Mr. Dixon Durant. Both were Choctaws by birth and Presbyterians by faith. The Reverend Mr. Wright was a young man during Indian Territory days, a pleasant speaker and a well educated man, who later became an evangelist. The Reverend Mr. Durant, the first resident of Durant and for whom the town was named, was a much older man than Reverend Wright. The little church of our community was located at Double Springs in the midst of an Indian settlement in the Chickasaw Nation about two miles southwest of the present site of Mead.

There was nothing at Double Springs except two Springs side by side, constantly flowing, a church house

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for the winter and an arbor for the summer. The Indians used to hold their meetings there and one of their preachers was the Reverend Mr. Dixon Durant. It was the custom at these old time Indian meetings to cook and serve the food in Indian fashion.

All the food was prepared at the meeting place and there were men and women who did the cooking while the others attended the services. A beef or hog was donated and dressed and cut into small pieces by the men, while the women, with the mortar and pestle, prepared the beaten corn. The corn was placed in the fire to cook in pots that had been set in line and filled with water. When the corn began to get tender the meat was put into it and the cooking continued until both were thoroughly done. No salt was added except by the individual if so desired to his or her individual bowl. This was called Panchi pashofa.

The people would seat themselves on the ground on either side of this improvised table and fill their bowls from the big pots with long handled horn spoons. There were smaller spoons to eat with.

Our lunch was prepared on Sunday morning before

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~~leaving for the morning service and Mother served early~~
dinner and we all attended the evening service. Some times there would be three services, morning, afternoon and evening; in this case we carried our lunch and dinner with us because we lived five miles from the church house and that was too far to make the trip many times in a wagon.

At that time, the only courts we had in the Indian Territory were Indian Courts. The only Indian court house that I remember having seen was one room about sixteen feet square with a loft or garret. It was made of heavy hewed oak logs put together with notches cut in the ends and fitted into each other and daubed in cracks, then painted with lime. The floor was of slabs of rock and at one end was a big rock fireplace.

This old court house was located in the southwestern part of the Chickasaw Nation, four miles north of Red River and one mile north of Bloomfield, a Chickasaw Indian School. These Indians courts tried cases in which only Indians were involved.

There were many white people living here, also, at

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that time; but cases in which a white man was vitally interested were taken to the Federal Courts which was located at Ft. Smith Arkansas. ~~If there was a case~~ between two Indians and either of them was a Federal officer, that case was also taken to the Federal Court.