

CASLEBERRY, RITTA

INTERVIEW

#8456

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Investigator, Ethel Mae Yates,
Interview with Ritta Casleberry. Elk City, Okla.
August 25, 1937.

I came from Missouri to Arkansas with my parents in the year 1876. We came by rail until we got to Fort Gibson and went from there to Arkansas in a wagon. The Ridge and Ross parties were fighting when we came by Fort Gibson.

The warriors would come by our wagon and we were really frightened, but they told us that they were not bothering the whites. They told us that it was an Indian fight.

One night there was a white man killed about a mile from where we were camped at Fort Gibson, and one night a white woman came by our camp and told us that her husband was an Indian and he was supposed to be coming home. If the Indians caught him they would kill him so she was going to head him off and have him go the other way.

On our way we crossed the rivers where the Grand and Arkansas Rivers meet. One river, the Grand River, was clear and the other, the Arkansas, was muddy. We crossed the Arkansas River at Fort Smith.

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I met and married Mr. Casleberry and he and I and three children came to the Territory in 1892. We were on the road three days in a covered wagon.

It rained on us all the way and one night we were camped out and it rained so we could not cook any breakfast. We crossed the Arkansas River at Fort Smith and went on to a store, and when we got there there was another family there. Dr. Jarrals was running the store so we and the other family at the store ate breakfast with him.

Tom Steel, Mrs. Jarral's brother, had built a log cabin close by the store and as it kept raining they told us to stop and stay in this cabin until the rain was over.

There was another log cabin nearby so this other family moved into it. The house we lived in did not have any fireplace so we had to cook outside on a campfire. This other house had a fireplace but had no gable.

The men left us here and went on farther into the Territory to look around some.

The night was cold so I took my children and went and stayed that night with our neighbor, and along about dark the dogs became restless. While we were eating supper,

we heard a loud noise in the distance. Some of the dogs would run and bark and some of them would try to get in the house. Later in the night we were awakened by a noise which was close to the house. There was the most awful scream I had ever heard and we were so scared that we did not know what to do; we were expecting something to spring in at the gable and eat every one of us. The next day a panther was killed not far from where we were then, and we knew that it was the scream of this panther which we had heard.

The men came back and my husband cut up some wood. He then moved a woman and her goods over into Arkansas.

The other family, who had been living near us, went over into the Cherokee country.

It kept raining and my husband was delayed in coming back. My wood was all gone. I would cut wood a while and cry a while. I would go over where the fireplace was and get warm and then go back where I could lock up the house.

We carried water from a well which belonged to a neighbor named Mrs. Spry. She came over one evening and asked us to go over to her house for the night. I was going over there after water when I saw a woman coming, carrying a baby in her arms. She wanted to stay all night. I told her

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that Mrs. Spry might keep her . The woman with the baby asked Mrs. Spry if she and the baby could stay all night, but Mrs. Spry refused. It was cold and raining so I could not turn the woman and the baby away. I took her and the baby into our house but I was so scared that I took the ax into the house and every time this woman would move I would sit up in the bed and watch her. She told me that her husband had died and she was trying to get to her people.

My husband came back. He had bought a cow.

We went twenty-five miles north of Fort Smith near a little town called Shakerag, in the Choctaw Nation.

We got there with a run-down wagon and a plug team and two dollars in money. We rented some land and moved into a one-room, log house. It had one shed room.

My husband had to get out and work to make money to buy food, so we never got a furrow plowed until the first of March.

My husband plowed ^{our} ground and planted it but the sprouts grew up until it looked like a wilderness and people would come by and say that our crop was lost.

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I took our boy, seven years old, and we took an ax and cut those sprouts down and dug the weeds out of the cotton and we also planted some oats.

I never saw anything grow like our crop and when we got it laid by we went back to Arkansas on a visit. We had been so homesick to go back but had not been able to go back to Arkansas before, but when we got back to Arkansas and saw what little cotton and corn crops the Arkansawyers had we were not homesick for Arkansas any more.

We came back to Shakerag and gathered our crop. Our cotton made a bale to the acre and our corn and oats were just as fine as they could be. Near us was a great deal of fine fruit.

- There was a little glade which ran down from the house and I could go down into this glade and gather any amount of strawberries and plums of many different kinds. The grape vines were as high as my head and every vine was black with grapes from the top to the ground. Also, there were large quantities of fish. The men made a fish trap and would get fish by the sackful.

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One time they caught so many fish that they had to get the wagon and they caught it full, and they took the wagon and carried fish to the people all over the country.

The wild turkeys would come up in the yard and eat with my chickens and one day a drove of turkeys came up close to the house and my husband got a gun and went out to shoot at them but just as he was ready to shoot a stick hit him in the eye. Something had scared these turkeys and they flew up in a tree and I counted them as they flew and there were thirteen of them.

My husband saw two deer but he just had a shot gun. He said that if he had had a rifle he could have shot them, so he traded for a rifle but he never saw any more deer.

While we were at Shakerag an Indian man came up to the yard fence and set his gun down and then we asked him what he wanted he just stood there and would not speak and when dinner was ready, we asked him in to dinner. He began to smile and we found out that he could talk just as good as any one.

Our children went to school in a little log school house. The name of it was Glory and the teacher's name was Waterfield.

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We had Subscription Schools for a while until we saw that they would not work so we went to having block schools.

We lived in Shakerag three years and then moved twenty-five miles west, near Holdenville, between two little towns, and leased land from an Indian, a Choctaw. We lived here for three years and farmed..

There was a spring close to us from which the railroad company wanted to get water for their trains. This spring belonged to an Indian named Rabbit. He let them have this spring and watched the workers for the railroad fix it all up.. They dug it all out and walled it up with ties and covered it over and when they got it all done this Indian put up a door with a lock on it and would not let them get water without paying him for it. After that it was called Rabbit Spring.

We leased land from an Indian named Amos Nelson, who was always coming and wanting something. We would give him whatever he asked us for and we gave him a little book in which to make a memorandum of everything which we gave him and he liked us very much.

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The Choctaws had some land sales for which they had sealed bids. Rabbit wanted my husband to bid and buy his land and told my husband to go ahead and bid that it would not make any difference what the bid, that he could have his land for two thousand dollars.

Rabbit said that they could go inside of the house and settle it and that it was nobody's business what went on inside the two walls.

While we were here my husband was over in Holdenville one day and the sheriff asked him if he did not need a hand. There was a Creek Indian who had been thrown in jail for being drunk. My husband paid this Indian's fine and brought him out to the farm to work his fine out. This Indian had the name of being lazy but he was one of the best workers I ever saw. When he had worked his fine out he was sorry that he had to leave us.

We lived here near Holdenville for three years and made good crops but sickness overtook us as the children had chills and fever most of the time, and my husband's health gave way so we left there and moved over into Old Oklahoma and bought a farm, fifteen miles north of Stroud, and built

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a nice house, put out a large orchard and planted flowers. Our crops made good and we sold them for a good price and it seemed that I never was happier in my life. We lived here for two years but my husband's health was not good and we saw that he could not live here. We sold out every thing that we had and went to Mexico. My husband got well and we came back here to Elk City and he lived to be seventy-eight years old.

My husband died here last December and was laid away in the Fair Lawn Cemetery in Elk City.