

DAVIS, J. E.

INTERVIEW

#4489

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

DAVIS, J. E. INTERVIEW 4489

Field Worker's name Ethel Mae Yates

This report made on (date) June 18, 1937

1. Name J. E. Davis

2. Post Office Address Elk City, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) B Avenue 925

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month December Day 17 Year 1866

5. Place of birth Rush County, Indiana

Name of Father M. M. Davis Place of birth Ohio

Other information about father Was a farmer

Name of mother Louisa Place of birth Indiana

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 9.

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Ethel Mae Yates,
Field Worker,
June 18, 1937.

An Interview with Mr. J. E. Davis,
Elk City, Oklahoma.

I was born in Rush County, Indiana, in 1866, and came to Cook County, Texas, with my parents in 1876.

Farming was my father's occupation. We lived near a little trading post called Dexter and as there was no court house they held court under a tree. We lived there until 1880, and then came to the Chickasaw Nation. Our trading post was Jimtown and it was made up of a gin, a post office, one store and a school house, all built of logs. Our seats were split logs. We came to the Territory in covered wagons; crossed Red River at Mad Creek.

We brought with us two milk cows, some hogs and a few chickens and settled on a small lease in a small two-room log house and cooked on a stove which Mother had brought from Indiana.

This little log house at Jim town is where we children went to school and we studied the old McCuffey's Reader and the Blue Back Speller. We lived here

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for two years; had some trouble with Indians over our hogs as it was free range and the Indians decided that they wanted the white people to put the hogs up.

We left here and moved sixty-five miles north and our trading post was Erin Springs and the next year we built a post office. A man whose name was Mr. Volma located the post office and called it Wild Horse; this post office was of log construction also. Here my father took a nine years' lease under captain Bill Baldon.

The reason Mr. Baldon was called Captain was because he had been a captain of the Indian militia. Our home here was a dugout 14 x 16 feet, dug down in the ground with two logs above the ground. The fire place was dug back in the bank with a dirt chimney. For our horses and grain we had a log crib with a shed on one side. My father traded our horses for oxen and here we farmed with oxen. We worked four yoke of oxen and used a grub plow; we put a front wagon wheel on the side of the plow. We fixed an axle on the side of the plow with a stick that ran back to the beams.

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The grass was tall in those days. It was called sage grass and would grow as tall as a man's head when he was on horseback.

We had to fix fire guards to protect us from prairie fires that sometimes broke out and the way we would fix these guards was to plow four or five furrows about twenty feet apart.

About this time we had some trouble with the Indians, too.

Our lease belonged to the captain of the militia who was an Indian; his name was W.H. Baldon.

The law allowed a man to lease land one year at a time and this was called a "running lease". Five cows and calves were all that a white man was supposed to own, and for more than that number the Indians tried to collect \$1.00; as they couldn't do that they called out the militia and tried to compel the settlers to pay this fine. Mr. Bennett came out with the soldiers and put the whites out and took them to Texas. Texas refused to take them and then the officers started to Kansas with these men. An Indian agent investigated

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and found out that the Chickasaws were breaking their own laws. So they disbanded the soldiers and let them go back home.

Denison, Texas, was our nearest railroad town; this was eighty-five miles away and we had to haul our cotton there for sale. My father, in coming West, thought that he would quit raising cotton and would raise sugar cane and make sorghum to sell. I remember one trip that my brother and I were making to market with a mixed load of syrup, sweet potatoes and turnips. We had two wagons and to one we were working a team and the other was drawn by a yoke of oxen. We were going to Fort Sill to market and we would camp out at night, feed our oxen, hobble them and put bells on them. But before we got to Fort Sill we met two Comanche Indians and they wanted to buy some syrup and didn't have anything to put it in and one of them saw our ox bell in the wagon and wanted to fill it full.

There were deer in herds and turkeys in droves and lots of wild fruit such as grapes, plums and

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currants; the wild turkeys would just cover the grapevines like the crows after the grain, and there were plenty of wild "varmint".

I remember one real scare we had; my sister, her husband, two children and I had been away and were coming home in a wagon and I was sitting in the back end. The dog came running to the wagon for the second time. at first I thought a polecat was chasing him but the second time I could see what it was; it was a panther and was chasing us. My brother-in-law wanted me to knock it in the head with an axe but I took the lines and he got back there and said that he would knock it in the head. When I took the lines the horses wanted to run; my sister told me to let them run so I did and this panther followed us for about three miles. When we got to the corner that turned in to the house it went on the main road and missed us and when it discovered that we had gotten away it began screaming just like a woman in distress and kept this screaming up until its voice died away in the distance.

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I was married in 1891 to Mary Ann Bush at Black Bear Creek on the old lease. We lived on the same lease as my parents did but in a new log house without a floor which had one slide window and one door and a fireplace.

We left there in the year of 1892 for the Cherokee Nation. We were driving a bunch of cattle and we heard that there was an inspection law in Oklahoma. We drove our cattle on a sand-bar between Purcell and Lexington, then we had Doctor Johnson come out and inspect the cattle. We gave him 5 cents a head for inspection. Then we went from there on to Tecumseh; there we were quarantined. After the officers found out that we had had the cattle inspected, they told us to stay there, and if none of the cattle died nothing would be said about the matter. We secured a pasture for the cattle and got the job of putting up cord wood for the Shawnee Mission which was a Shawnee Indian school.

I have known times when the school officers would

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set fire to the prairie so they could catch the Indian children to put them in school.

We left there and went to Dale and I went to work in a sawmill. We lived in a plank house made out of cottonwood lumber; our first child was born in this lumber camp in 1892. We named him Grover Lee for the President, Grover Cleveland, who was serving his second term.

We left there and went to Birds Prairie on Clear Boggy Creek in 1893.

I traded a horse for a crop. The Indians stole our horses and drove them off to get a reward. My brother-in-law said if I would go to the run with him he would move my family back to Dale and then we would come back in the wagon and hunt my horses. I did this and when we crossed the South Canadian River there was no water in it. We were gone eight days and we found our horses.

When we got back it was impossible to ford the river and when we struck the bank of the South Canadian and started to camp, my brother-in-law saw a family

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coming across on our side; he hollered "Put the harness on the horses and let's go." We went down to the river and met the folks as they were coming out; they had two by sixes under the wagon on the holster. We put them on our wagon and crossed, although the water come up in our wagon.

We left there then and come to Stillwater and registered there for the strip run. I heard at the registering booth that they were selling drinking water five cents a drink so I bought a barrel and had it filled with water. The water and barrel cost \$1.50 and after I got there and saw the condition of things I sold enough water to get my money back, two drinks for a nickel; then I gave the rest of the water away. I registered and when going back to camp I saw a horse trough by a well and I was so dirty that I began washing in the trough, but while I was washing a man came out and made me leave.

We then moved to Pawnee, got a tent and lived in camps and I went to freighting and freighted until my

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horses were stolen. My brother-in-law, John Sheckels, and I started out with his horses and put our things in the wagon and went back to the Choctaw Nation and it was here that I met one of my sisters whom I had not seen for twenty years.

We stayed there for awhile and I moved up to Newburg in 1894 and made a crop there.

We milked "outlets" cows and we would have to tie them up and throw them down to milk them.

We moved a short distance over on Big Creek where there were many wild hogs and turkeys. The wild turkeys would come up in the yard and fight my tame turkeys and my tame turkey tom ran off with the wild turkeys so we had to kill him for we could not drive him back home.

While we were living on Big Creek a friend of mine came up from Newburg and wanted us to move down there so my family could go to church and my boys would not grow up to be wild, so we went and lived at Newburg until 1903.