

DAVIS, De 'LESLAINE R.

INTERVIEW 8871.

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Interviewer, Anna R. Barry,
October 11, 1937.

Interview with De' Leslaine R. Davis (Colored)
M. Reno, Oklahoma.

Born September 28, 1860.
Sumpter County, South Carolina.

Parents Langdon Davis, South Carolina
Matila Davis, South Carolina.

De'Leslaine R. Davis was born in Sumpter County, South Carolina, near the little village of Sumpter on September 28, 1860, the son of Langdon C. Davis and Matila Davis.

In 1887, or when he was twenty-seven years of age, he left South Carolina and came to Wichita, Kansas. He worked at odd jobs, receiving small wages for his labor, but during this time he met another colored boy, Peter Oliver Flinn, and his mother who influenced him to come along with them to Oklahoma for the opening in 1889.

On April 22, 1889, De'Leslaine Davis and Peter Oliver Flinn were on horseback on the line located north of the Canadian river among the thousands of others who participated in the Run. He made the race for land and succeeded in driving his stakes

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on a claim joining the North Canadian River four miles northeast of El Reno in Canadian County. Peter Oliver Flinn located on a claim joining the Davis claim on the north. They are the only two negroes who made the run for land in Canadian County in 1889.

This land was in heavy timber and it took years of hard work to get even small patches of it cleared. Davis cut and saved wood all day, then at night he would burn brush so as to make a light to see to cut wood at night. He hauled this wood and sold it in Reno City for fifty cents to seventy-five cents per load. He also raised corn and sold it for fifteen cents per bushel. Hogs sold for three dollars per hundred.

De'Leslaine Davis' first home was a little log shanty, eight by ten feet with one window and one door. When he first settled on his claim he built a home-made bed in one corner of the room and his next problem was to secure a stove; as he had very little money he decided he could not buy a stove so the first year he lived on his claim he cooked on an open fire.

He baked his bread by patting it out thin on a green cottonwood slab and holding it close to the fire until the bread cooked. During this time food was very cheap. He paid fifteen cents

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per pound for coffee and seventy-five cents for a forty-eight pound sack^{of} flour; but he had very little to buy, only sugar, coffee and flour as game was plentiful. In the early days he has smoked as many as eight opossums out of one hollow log and it was on his claim that he saw his first deer. Most of the wild game at that time were wild turkeys, prairie chickens, squirrels, rabbits and quails were also plentiful. On his farm he raised small patches of corn, melons, pumpkins, sweet potatoes and almost every kind of vegetable, if he was lucky enough to get the seed. The first settlers would exchange garden seed and swap melons and sweet potatoes for home-made molasses. People in those days were very kind to one another. When Davis first came to Oklahoma the negro was given a fair chance and in later years more colored families came to Canadian County and some of them settled on claims about four miles northeast of the Davis claim. Some of the early day negro families: John Jennings, Walter Penn, Mattie Carrol and George Johnson. The children of these families attended school at the Elm Glenn School along with the white children.

When Davis first settled on his claim he received his mail at Fort Reno. He usually made a trip once a week to get

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his mail and his nearest trading point was Heno City, located on the north side of the Canadian River about two and one-half miles from his place.

De Leslaine Davis' first well of water was a dug well and walled up; over this hung a bucket and rope. The water was pulled up by means of a pulley and near this well stood the old black wash-pot. All these years De'Leslaine has never owned a wash board, but has washed his clothes with the old battling stick and the bench. He cleans his clothes by beating them on the bench after they have been soaped good, occasionally turning them. He then puts them into the wash-pot and boils his clothes for about thirty minutes, then rinses them and hangs them up to dry.

De'Leslaine Davis has never married. He has lived on his farm forty-eight years, alone. He has never owned a car and has only ridden in a car a few times.

In summer he can be seen almost every day selling water-melons that he raises on his farm. He never has any trouble with boys bothering his melons because he is always good to divide his melons and when night comes and he has a few melons left he always gives them to children as he goes along on his way home.

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Today he lives on his claim in a little frame hut. He has never made enough money to build a house or to go back to South Carolina on a visit. He had not seen any of his relatives for forty-seven years until last summer when one of his sisters from Tampa, Florida, made him a visit.

Peter Oliver Flinn and his mother, Sarah Flinn, are both dead and buried on the farm that they filed on. Their graves are unmarked, but De'Leslaine Davis is sure that he could locate their graves.