

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

DAVIS, HENRY ALEC.

INTERVIEW.

10133.

Field Worker's name Anna R. Barry,

This report made on (date) February 17, 1938. 1938

1. Name Henry Alec Davis.

2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 706 South Gresham Street.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month January Day 8 Year 1866.

5. Place of birth Weakley County, Tennessee.

6. Name of Father Mark Miliam Davis. Place of birth Weakley County, Tennessee.

7. Name of Mother Sallie Barr Davis. Place of birth Weakley County, Tennessee.

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 _____.

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Anna Barry,
Journalist,
Feb. 17, 1938.

An Interview With Henry Alec Davis,
El Reno, Oklahoma.

Henry Alec Davis was born in Weakley County, Tennessee, January 8, 1866, a son of Mark Milliam Davis and Sallie (Barr) Davis. His father was a Civil War veteran having served three years during the last period of the war and was a wood-workman by trade, spending much of his time in his little log work shop building looms, wagons, spinning wheels, and bedsteads.

When a lad of ten years, Henry hauled wood with a team of Tennessee steers to his father's home-made wooden molasses mill. His father had also a grist-mill which was run by waterpower where he ground corn and flour for the settlers. Henry's father did the grinding only as the farmers brought in the grain and waited while it was made into meal and flour for the family needs. These small mills ground the grain into a form suitable for the home consumption and were not manufacturing enterprises. They ground more corn than wheat, and Henry's father charged a

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toll ranging from one-sixth to one-twelfth of the grain. Other millers ground the patrons' grist for sums of 25 to 35 cents a bushel. In the former case the customer got all the bran and shorts which his share of the grist made. In custom grinding a man was expected to place his grist at the hopper and take his meal sacks to the spot where they were filled. Mr. Davis later established what was known as an exchange mill where he exchanged flour for wheat. They usually received thirty-two to thirty-five pounds of flour for each bushel of wheat.

Army overcoats left over from the Civil War were prominent and comfortable articles of wear for some years following the war. Boots when obtainable were purchased a size or two too big in order to allow for shrinkage when they were wet. Since many people did not have the money to buy boots, shoes were sometimes made by tacking leather "uppers" to wooden soles, and children shod with these shoes, clacked across the bare wood floors of houses and schools like a troop of cavalry.

All the clothing for the Davis family was made at home. Men's trousers were made of duck, jeans, or denim.

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Their shirts were of hickory, blue or checkered. This family kept a few sheep and made homespun jeans for the two boys and linsey dresses for the five girls in the Davis family. This homespun cloth was usually dyed from walnut or other natural dye made of barks, gathered in the woods. A suit of homespun would last a year.

When Henry Davis' mother was quite busy at night spinning cloth and the children did something mischievous, Mrs. Davis would place each child on the floor near her, give him or her a bunch of cotton and tell the children that before they could go to bed, they each had to pick every seed from their bunch of cotton. If a child went to sleep on the job, Mrs. Davis quickly tapped him or her with a hickory and told that child to get to work.

In the fall of 1877 Henry Davis's father sold his holdings in Tennessee, as his brother, Henry's uncle, had come to the Indian Territory during the Civil War and this had made the Davis family anxious to leave the old home for the Promised Land and as preparations were made, there were days and weeks of delightful dreams of the new home where life would take on a new meaning. Henry's parents

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lived in imagination on the frontier where land was very plentiful and opportunity beckoned to all. The Davis family arrived in the Territory on November 8, 1877.

This family came on the M. K. & T Railroad the only railroad in the Territory at this time, and located on Lynn Creek, near Pencee in what is now known as Chickasha.

Pencee consisted of two or three stores and eight or ten families in and around it. At this time there was no market for agricultural products more than their own needs except at a few places along the trails so during the first winter in the Territory, the Davis family hunted and also trapped furs for a livelihood, they traveled here and there always locating near a creek or river where game was very abundant.

In the spring of 1878 Henry Davis' father purchased one hundred head of steers from his brother paying him \$10.00 a head for these steers and early in the summer Mr. Davis slowly started grazing this herd of cattle up the Chisholm Trail and as he traveled along he purchased more cattle, meanwhile, the family lived in a half dugout which was located about two miles north of Pencee.

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Henry was just a lad of twelve years of age at this time. All his life ^{he} had wanted to be a cowboy, and before his father departed Henry had begged his father to let him go along and help herd the cattle, but his father flatly refused to do this, saying that Henry was too young and was needed at home with his mother. One of the mother's greatest trials was remaining alone with her five small children in the isolated dugout for weeks and even months while her husband herded their cattle to the market.

The danger of Indian attacks was ever present and every object seen approaching their hut was looked upon with fear. At such a time a visit from a stranger was unwelcome. One time Mr. Davis had been away from home for several months, provisions for the family were running low and one day as Mrs. Davis looked out she saw an ox team approaching. The driver, a powerful man, got out and carried a quarter of fresh deer meat to the Davis dugout. In answer to this man's inquiry as to whether Mrs. Davis would like some meat she replied, that they needed it but that her husband was away and had left her no money. This

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man replied, "Oh that's all right, we have more meat than we know what to do with," and left the meat. It was some years before the Davis family learned the identity of the hunter.

After Mr. Davis' departure in 1878, a friend of the family, Ed Parrish, came along looking for work as a cowboy. Soon young Henry had made plans to go with him in search of work. Their first work was for the Circle G. Cattle Company owned by Jul and Jot Gunter, twin brothers, whose ranch was located in west Texas. Their first work with this outfit was in helping to move their cattle from west Texas to what is now Gaddo County. The Gunter brothers had secured a beef contract to supply the Kiowa and Comanche Indians with beef which was issued by the Government; they also furnished beef for the soldiers at Fort Sill and also at Fort Reno, and a few heads of beef were sent to the beef issues at Darlington for the Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians. After young Henry had worked a month and collected his \$20.00 wages, he at once purchased a pair of high heeled boots and a ten gallon hat and borrowed a pistol from his friend, Ed Parrish, and after

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he secured these things he thought he was a grown man, at thirteen years of age, and a real cowboy. He was called "The Kid"; by the many cowboys who worked for the Circle G Outfit and all his life he has been known as "The Kid" to his many friends.

In the spring of 1879 Henry made his first trip up the old Chisholm Trail and they aroused a herd of twenty-five hundred cattle from their bedding ground on the morning of April 3, 1879. In this outfit were fourteen cowboys, the cook who had charge of the chuck wagon and the horse wrangler whose duty it was to care for the forty horses. They slowly traveled with these cattle grazing them as they went, and when they reached the market at Caldwell, Kansas, the cattle were fat and in good shape for shipping. During these trips the cowboys encountered many hardships, such as prairie fires, storms, blizzards and Indians. They had to swim raging rivers, undergo cattle stampedes and maybe had to work two or three days and nights in a downpour of rain without any sleep. During these storms and rainy spells Mr. Davis would vow that he would quit the life of a cowboy when they reached

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their destination, but just as soon as the sun came out and the birds began to sing he wouldn't have traded places with a king.

The cowboys never had much trouble with the Indians; when they came upon a group of Indians who demanded beef they always picked out one or two "drags" and gave them to the Indians. Usually on a trip like this they gave the Indians about fifteen head of cattle, but if you didn't give them a beef they would slip around at night when the herd was bedded down for night and cause the herd to get stampeded and ⁱⁿ some of these stampedes as many as fifty head were lost.

The cowboys naturally caused some trouble in the drowsy little towns and their vicinity for after having sold their stock at the markets, they usually put on a spree and determined that everyone in the vicinity should celebrate. Those who did not want to drink were obliged to hide. Sometimes a cowboy crazed with drink would go wild and shoot up the town. Oftentimes it was a trying task for the foreman to get his cowboys rounded up and started down the trail toward the ranch.

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Henry Davis worked as a cowboy on this ranch for thirteen years or until 1891, when he and a man of the name of Albert Green took to traveling as horse traders and also engaged in horse racing. In the days before the automobile, horse trading and horse swappers existed everywhere. They usually started out about the last of April or the first of May, when the weather grew warm and there was grass for the animals. The first law with a horse trader was always to get something "to boot". It was said no men were honest when trading horses. They always owned two or three good horses, and when they made a town to trade horses, before they left they usually managed a horse race. Someone always got up a race between two horses which were thought to be fast. Each horse had its backers. Usually the horses were from different towns and the local people showed loyalty to the horse from their town. Sometimes such a race would be arranged on the spot and the whole town would close their stores and go out to a smooth spot on the prairie to watch the race. The three judges lined up with tree or post or even the end of a wagon or some other available object. The starting was by

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the "ask and answer"--"Ready"? "Yes!" "Go"! or by the "lap and tap", where the horses were walked, trained to whirl and break quickly. Often an assistant led the horse by the bit to keep the spirited animal from whirling too soon in spite of the rider. The riders, having turned, rode toward the line, attempting to keep even as they crossed the startling line. If this was the case (that is, if they were in lap) the judge tapped them off. The distance was short, usually from a quarter of a mile to a mile. Henry Davis generally bet from \$25.00 to \$100.00 and sometimes he won and sometimes he lost.

In 1898, he married Sallie Belt; they had one child a girl; in 1899 he moved to Arkansas for his wife's health and in order that she could be near her parents. In the winter of 1899 Sallie Belt died and was buried at Pullman, Arkansas. In 1900, Mr. Davis married the second time; his wife was Norah Starr, a girl whom he had known from a child. They are the parents of three children, two boys and one girl.

Mr. Davis speaks the Comanche language and was well acquainted with Quanah Parker. Mr. Davis has had many

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experiences with the Kiowa and Comanche Indians and many times while passing along the road he would stop his team, seeing an Indian with a broken plow who did not know how to fix it and Mr. Davis would help the Indian fix his plow and also show him how to plant certain kind of vegetables so that he has many Indian friends as well as white. Mr. Davis name is enrolled among the pioneers of Oklahoma of which he feels very proud.