

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

DEVINE, TOM

INTERVIEW.

13329.

Field Worker's name Gus Hummingbird.

This report made on (date) March 14, 1938

1. Name Tom Devine

2. Post Office Address Westville, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month December Day 24 Year 1861

5. Place of birth Flint District, Cherokee Nation.

6. Name of Father James Devine Place of birth Georgia

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Lou Harlan Place of birth Georgia.

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 seven sheets.

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Gus Hummingbird,
Investigator,
March 14, 1938.

Interview with Tom Devine,
Westville, Oklahoma.

I was born in what is now Adair County, then known as Flint District, Cherokee Nation, December 24, 1861. My father was James Devine, a permitted white man, and my mother was Lou Harlan, a Cherokee woman.

Early Life.

Most of my early life was spent on a small farm that my father operated near the Oak Grove School in Goingsnake District. The farm was a small farm and our family lived most of the time in destitute condition. The Civil war had broken everybody and work was scarce at that time.

Father was mostly a laborer and worked for wealthy farmers in the community. There was not much machinery for farm use at that time, most of the farming being done by oxen. The principal crops were corn, oats and a little wheat. Not much wheat was raised in this part of the country for it was very difficult to separate the seed from the chaff,

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threshers being unknown in this country.

School.

There was a school at Oak Grove at that time, but I did not attend on account of the conditions at home. However, I learned to spell and write my name after I grew to manhood.

Church.

Several years afterwards our family moved to the northern part of Goingsnake District, in the neighborhood now known as Union Hill, about three miles southeast of the town of Westville. Later we moved to the neighborhood of Wright's Chapel which was at that time on Barren Fork Creek. Above this old school was at one time an old mission known as New Hope Mission. It was also in this particular community that the first grist and saw mill was established. The operator of this old mill was Eli Wright, an old Irishman who had married a Cherokee woman.

Among the early church workers were the Wrights and the Harlans. Several white preachers from Arkansas would come to

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this place to hold services and a great number of Cherokees would also attend. The Cherokee preachers who would preach at this old church were Nelson Terrapin, Reverend Shell and Swimmer.

Camp Meetings.

I remember only one camp meeting that I ever attended at Wright's Chapel; this was about 1870. The meeting continued for about ten days and people from miles around came. Food was furnished mostly by the Wrights who were wealthy. The Old Wright Chapel was a frame building.

Politics.

I was eighteen years old when I first voted in an election that was hotly contested in the race for chief and I cast my first vote for Dennis W. Bushyhead. I never held a public office but I was appointed a deputy sheriff under Ben Knight in 1889 and was with Ben Knight at the time of the arrest of the two Dunowose boys for killing Wash Lee, a former sheriff of Goingsnake District. My voting precinct was at the court house at Peacheater Creek

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about five miles west of Westville.

United States Marshals.

I was never appointed as a marshal but I cooperated with them in making arrests several times. Among those I helped are Tom Johnson of Siloam, Tom Hugh, Henry Martin and Gus York. At that time these men were called Fort Smith Marshals because all they could arrest in the Cherokee Nation were whiskey cases. Fort Smith at that time was a whiskey town and all of the whiskey that came to the Cherokee Nation came from this town.

Trading Point.

The early day trading point for the Cherokees in this part was Dutch town, Arkansas, which was only four miles over in Arkansas. This was already an old town and among the early merchants at this place were C. Evans, Thin Blake and Felix Kimbrough.

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Cattle and Cattlemen.

There were plenty of cattle in the Cherokee Nation, that is in the eastern part of Goingsnake District at that time but there was no market for cattle in the nation. Most of the cattle that reached the eastern markets had to be driven through the country. Most of the cattle were driven to Southwest City, Missouri, which was the only railroad point that could be reached easily. Everybody owned cattle at that time.

Among those who owned hundreds of cattle were the Clynes family. Ed and Tim Clynes, who lived just across the Barren Fork Creek from what is now Baron Post Office, were the leading buyers in the country.

Financing Farmers.

Later in years I borrowed from a neighbor, John Clynes, a sum of \$500.00 and from Joe Starr I borrowed \$500.00 and went into the cattle business. I did not make a note or mortgage for this money. I agreed I would pay this money back in five years, so much a year. Starr said that would be his bond. He would rather give a man that much to learn what he was. If you did not pay your debts at that time the news spread like

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wild fire and everybody knew that you were not to be trusted. So it was a custom that you had to be honest or move out of the Cherokee Nation.

Railroads.

Most of the people around this particular community were in favor of the railroads. It was a very strong issue in the election of 1892 and people who farmed on a large scale and stockmen were in favor of them. It was such men as Lock Morton, Jonathan Whitmire and others who caused this to become a law. They at that time argued to the Cherokees that it was time for them to learn the ways of the white man for it was coming sooner or later that they had to live as white people. So just eleven years afterwards the Indian Territory became a part of the state of Oklahoma.

Allotment.

My family was in favor of the allotment. There were many acres of land claimed by full bloods who would not use it to their advantage, and many Cherokees that would make a showing did not have any at all. For this reason we were in

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favor of the allotment.