

MOSS, SALLY HENDERSON.

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James Russell Gray.
Investigator,
April 15, 1938.

Interview with
Sally Henderson Moss
Hartshorne, Oklahoma, Rt. 1.

My maiden name was Sally Henderson. My father was Hardy Henderson. I know very little about him, as he was killed two months before my birth. I have been told that he was "bushwhacked" by two outlaws named Cash Ellis and Bill Colbert. Colbert was part Indian, Ellis was a negro. Mother said that Father's horse came in home one day, riderless. People didn't know where Father's body was until a few days later when the buzzards showed them the body. He is buried near High Hill.

I was born June 2, 1882, close to the old Indian church at High Hill, in the community south of the church. There was a good-sized community of negroes and Indians there. Most of the negroes were freedmen and owned land. The community was scattered out over a lot of territory, the log cabins all being hollowing distance apart. The people there made a living by hunting, raising small Tom Fuller patches and gardens, and by raising a few cattle and hogs. It wasn't hard to make a living, and everyone had plenty to eat and wear. My mother's

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maiden name was Betsy Lewis. I don't know exactly where she was born, or when, but she must be about eighty something now. She lives up close to Quinton.

When I was five or six Mother married again and we moved into the eastern part of the Choctaw Nation, over close to Brazil Station. We were south and west of Skullyville, and I think the county was called Skullyville then. Of course, it is in Le Flore County now. And the present town of Calhoun is close to where Brazil Station was then.

My step-father's name was Robert Wright. He was a freedman and had the right to land under the Choctaw laws. He took us to a place about twenty miles or so west of Brazil Station. We settled back in the woods and built a cabin and cleared up fifteen acres. Fifteen acres was considered a big farm then among the Indians and freedmen.

Our cabin was made of logs. It had one room and a side room. We had two windows; there wasn't any glass, but we had wooden shutters that we could close over the windows in bad weather. The cabin had no ceiling; it was open to the roof and the roof was made of home-split clapboards. Our cooking

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Was done at a fireplace.

We raised vegetables and corn, and a little cotton. There was a gin at Brazil Station, though we usually marketed our cotton at Fort Smith, Arkansas.

Brazil got its name, I suppose, from Brazil Creek that ran near the little town, or village. Brazil Station was originally a place where the stages stopped on the old Fort Smith to Springtown route. I think the stage coaches were no longer in use over this route by the time we moved to the vicinity of Brazil Station; I never saw any stage coaches, I know.

A man named L. L. Ragans had a general store at Brazil Station. If you were making a crop you could trade at Ragans' place on credit; he would take a mortgage on the crop and you could pay him when you gathered your crop in the fall.

There weren't many schools then. Most of the schools then were run on the subscription plan; each student had to pay so much, say anywhere from \$1.00 to \$2.00 every month that he attended school. Usually the schools were little one-room log buildings; sometimes school was held in a

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church house, sometimes in private homes. We would have about three months school in the summer and maybe three months more that winter. It depended on conditions and was an uncertain business. Some of the schools, back before Statehood, were Federal; the United States Government paid the teachers' salaries.

There was a school at Shady Grove, about thirty miles from my home, right close to Brazil Station. A white woman named Russell was the teacher. I boarded with her and went to school there at Shady Grove when I was nine years old. I think the school lasted two months that summer.

There was another school on Dog Creek, about two or three miles up the creek from Brazil Station. This school was for the Indians and freedmen. My sister stayed there with a negro family named Franklin and went to the school. A negro woman was the teacher.

About the only church I remember going to in that neighborhood was the one at Dog Creek. It was a Baptist church, and both Indians and negroes attended. We met under an arbor. John Perry and John Simpson, both Choctaws,

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were preachers. Simon Pusley and Dick Trayon were Indians who used to attend. I can't remember them all, but that church had a big membership.

In the summertime they had their big meetings. Sometimes a hundred or over would come to the church grounds and camp and have meetings for two or three weeks. Although the Indians and negroes were sincerely religious, they enjoyed those camp meetings, too. It brought people together and gave them something to do. It was a relief from the monotony of their every day life. Life could get lonesome when you didn't have anything to look at but rocks and trees, and when your nearest neighbor might be two or three miles away.

An Indian or negro would take his entire family, in the summertime, and go and camp at the church. People took food along and cooked and ate right at the church, somewhere on the grounds. Everyone usually cooked and ate all together, like a big family. They would spread the food out on long tables under the trees and all eat together. People were friendly and hospitable; visitors were welcomed.

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These Indian camp meetings were something interesting to see. You won't find many of them now if any. I have heard that a few Indians back in the mountains still have their camp meetings, but personally I haven't seen any for years. Just imagine a hundred or more people, Indians and negroes, gathered together around a big brush arbor. There were horses and dogs and children, wagons and hacks. People would be milling around talking or eating or gathered at the arbor for services.

The Choctaws had a custom of crying over the graves of their dead. Usually there was a graveyard near an Indian church and sometime during the day the Choctaws would leave their camp meeting and go and cry at the graveyard. I've seen the Choctaw women fall down flat on the graves, crying and sobbing. They were sincere about it, too. The Choctaws were sincere about everything they did.

At these camp meetings there were usually three services a day; about eleven in the morning, at three in the afternoon and at night. We sang songs, different preachers and leaders prayed. Our leaders also made speeches and preached. The

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preaching was done sometimes in Choctaw and sometimes in English; maybe the preacher would preach in Choctaw and if there were many whites present an interpreter would repeat the sermon in English. Most of the services were carried on in Choctaw though; nearly all the negroes could understand that language then.

When I was eleven years old my mother and step-father and I moved westward to the vicinity of Wilburton. We settled back in the hills to the south at Damon. That was a community of Indians and negroes then, with cabins scattered over a radius of maybe five or six miles. It was mountain country, rough and hilly, and game was thick. That was about the year 1893. The woods were full of deer and turkeys and wild hogs. There were some coyotes, too.

We didn't have a store at Damon; we had to go to Wilburton for supplies. Wilburton was a good little town then; there were coal mines and strip pits in operation and the land thereabouts was good for farming. The town had a post office and some general stores.

A white man named John Shaw was a well-to-do rancher who lived in our vicinity, closer to town. He had a big

herd of cattle and lots of land. Another couple named Hoyt, Allie and John, lived close to us. Our next-door neighbor was a Choctaw named Simon Pusley. There was a graveyard just outside his yard fence, where his family and kinfolks were buried.

In 1894 I went to Wilburton and went to work for a colored woman named Brown. I was only twelve, but I could do housework and cooking. I have made my own living from then till now. This Mrs. Brown ran a rooming house for miners. If I remember right she charged about \$3.00 a week for room and board. I swept floors, made beds, waited table, and washed dishes. Then I got a job with another colored family named Hawkins. Mrs. Hawkins was a distant cousin of ours. Andrew Hawkins was some sort of a boss at Strip Pit No. 5 west of Wilburton on the prairie. I worked there until I was sixteen.

The colored people used to have picnics on the 4th of August. They would have big barbecues, with lemonade, stick candy and everything. They were celebrating the freeing of the slaves. The Choctaws freed their slaves, you know, on August 4th. We would kill hogs and beeves and have dances and general good times.

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Sometimes the colored people would take sacks full of an herb called "devil's shoestring" and put the stuff in the creek, the way the Indians taught them to. This devil's shoestring made the fish drunk and the fish floated to the top of the water and could be caught. We would have fish fries for our picnics.

When I was sixteen I married a man named Gill Mosley, a man nearly twice as old as I was. He was from Alabama. I didn't stay with him long; about a month. Then Mother and I went to Sedalia, Missouri. We were there three years. He came back to the Territory about the year 1901. We settled this time at Lutie, east of Wilburton, and we were there until after Statehood. There were coal mines around Lutie and the land was good for farming. Maybe all this will give you a picture of those early days as I saw them.