

Northwest Arkansas Oral History Project
Dorene Wills Interview Abstract
August 10, 2019

Interviewee	Dorene Wills
Year of birth	1934
Place of birth	Benton County, Arkansas
Interviewer	Barbara Knotts
Interview date	2019-8-10
Interview location	Civic Center; Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas
Keywords	<p>Wills, Dorene Walton, Sam Knotts, Barbara Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas Benton County Fair; Bentonville, Benton County, Arkansas Holiness School; Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas Gravette Day; Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas Canning and preserving Carnivals and fairs Farming Quilting Schools September 11 Terrorist Attacks, 2001 Small town life World War II World War II Rationing Stamps Program</p>
Description	<p>Those who grow up in Gravette look forward to reconnecting with friends at the annual Gravette Day celebration. Doreen Wills made the trip from her current home outside Tulsa Oklahoma, ready to ride in the 2019 parade and spend time swapping stories with friends. She shares those stories in the interview.</p> <p>The interview was conducted after Wills and several of her classmates finished riding in the parade, throwing candy out to spectators. Wills commented that they used to walk, but now find it better to ride. What fun to see all the spectators and wind through the city where she grew up. Later, she and her classmates plan to get samples from the Dutch Over Cookoff. Then it will be back to the motel where they gather each year. Good times at Gravette Day are a tradition for Wills. As a child she, her brother, and their parents came to town from their farm to attend the activities. There were rides and hot dogs to enjoy. Attending the Benton County Fair as a child and later as Fair Manager is another tradition for Wills. The Fair is now held the same weekend as Gravette Day. That allowed Wills to combine both traditions on this trip. She spent time walking through the barns, talking with the grandchildren of people she knew when she was Fair Manager (1994-2003). She recalls being involved</p>

	<p>with the Fair when the 911 terrorist attack occurred. Wills' mother was born near Gravette. Her grandfather donated land where the Holiness School is located. Her parents married when they were in their teens, moving to farm 'back in the woods'. Wills spent her childhood there. In Wills' words, she and her family 'lived poor, but never knew it because everyone was in the same boat...I had everything I needed...we don't think about needs now, we think about wants...wants and needs are a lot different.'</p> <p>Living on the farm meant milking cows, tending chickens, going to school, playing baseball, helping Mom can vegetables from their garden and 'putting down' sauerkraut. Sometime neighbors paid her to help pick beans. The house had a tin roof and no insulation except for the newspaper her mother added. In the winter the family slept upstairs near the chimney for warmth. Twice a year the family visited Bentonville to attend the Benton County Fair and to pay taxes. Some of the visits included time to buy something at Walton's Five and Dime. Before consolidation, Wills attended the Donovan school. High school was in Gravette, graduating in 1943. It took a while for the students from Gravette and those from the Hiwasse and other outlying schools to become friends. Today these are the friends who gather together for Gravette Day.</p> <p>During World War II Wills remembers seeing her first airplane as it flew over their home. These years were ones where families used ration stamps. Her parents would trade their coffee stamps for shoe stamps. Ration stamps for tires were particularly hard to get.</p> <p>Wills attended business college in Joplin, then worked in Bartlesville where both of her children were born. Time in Houston followed before she returned to Arkansas to work for the Extension Office. It was this position that led to her being named Fair Manager. After heart surgery in 2004, Wills began quilting. Her son-in-law loves the quilt she made using his ties. Stories shared, it was time for Wills to get back to friends and the Gravette Day 2019 festivities.</p>
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Questions or Comments	https://nwaoralhistory.org
Interview sidebar	Wills shared "back then when you brought chicken or cow feed, they came in printed sacks. When Daddy got ready to get feed, Mom and I would go with him and pick out two or three sacks

	alike so we could make a dress." [00:31:34]
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