



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

Field Worker's name Alene D. McDowellThis report made on (date) January 19, 1938

1. Name George Lee Nicholson
2. Post Office Address 703 S. Virginia, Bartlesville, Oklahoma.
3. Residence address (or location) 703 S. Virginia, Bartlesville, Oklahoma.
4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month January Day 1 Year 1867
5. Place of birth Fannin County, Texas.

6. Name of Father Aaron Nicholson Place of birth Texas

Other information about father Buried near Honey Grove, Texas.

7. Name of Mother Minerva Shaw-Nicholson Place of birth Tennessee.

Other information about mother Died at age of 100 years, buried  
near Honey Grove, Texas.

Notes or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and story of the person interviewed. Refer to Manual for instructions and questions. Continue on blank sheets if necessary and refer to this form. Number of sheets attached 8.

NICHOLSON, GEORGE LEE.

INTERVIEW.

#12889

Interview with George Lee Nicholson  
703 South Virginia  
Bartlesville, Oklahoma

Investigator - Alene D. McDowell  
Indian-Pioneer History, S-149  
January 19, 1938

George Lee Nicholson was born January 1, 1867, in Fannin County, Texas.

Father--Aaron Nicholson was born near Honey Grove, Fannin County, Texas, and is buried 5 miles northwest of Honey Grove.

Mother--Minerva Shaw Nicholson was born in Sumner County, Tennessee, died at the age of 100 years and is buried near Honey Grove.

My parents were both slaves. My mother was brought from Tennessee to Texas by her white owner, Tom Shaw, in 1858, and settled in Fannin County where she met and married my father.

I lived in Texas until I was 20 years old, then came to the Indian Territory. I made the trip from Texas with a span of mules and a covered wagon, in 1887. There were three wagons besides mine. The weather was bad and it took us ten days to make the trip. We went from Sherman to

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Gainesville, Texas, crossed Red River on Watts Ferry near Burneyville, Indian Territory, and settled in Love County, 15 miles west of Marietta. I went to work on a ranch for Bill Washington, a white cattleman, and remained there for six months. Mr. Washington owned three ranches and ran three brands, known as the Dot-O-Dot, Circle G and B. P. Later a law was passed that each cattleman could run only one brand. If he owned more than one ranch the old brand must be blotted out and the cattle branded with his established brand. Mr. Washington shipped about 10 car loads of cattle four times a year.

My home was a one room log cabin built in the side of a hill, faced the east and had one door and no windows. It had a dirt floor and board roof. There was a fire place in one end of the cabin where I cooked. I had a wire rack where the iron kettle hung over the fire and I baked in an iron skillet with an iron cover.

My bed was a bunk made of hickory poles, in one corner of the cabin. I had no chairs, so bored holes in a log and inserted legs, making benches to sit on. I

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secured my water supply from Brushy Creek , a short distance from the house.

Our principal crops were corn and wheat. Our bread supply was mostly corn bread. We raised the principal part of our living and Nature furnished our meat. There was lots of wild game, wild hogs, deer, prairie chicken, turkey, quail, coon and possum. The Texas cattle sometimes drifted across the river into the Indian Territory to graze. They were not branded and nobody claimed them. They would increase until the herd sometimes numbered 100. They were wild by nature and with no one to care for them they became more unruly and were known as wild cattle. The cattlemen would brand them at the Fall round-up, dividing them equally. A prairie chicken resembled a guinea fowl. Our only fruit was wild grapes and plums and a few haws.

Wild animals were numerous, especially in the edge of the Kiamishi Mountains. There were wolves, a few bears, bob cats, coyotes and cougars, in our vicinity. Over in the mountains there were a few Mexican lions.

Marietta was about twenty miles south of Ardmore. At that time Ardmore had one store, a depot and the

stock yard. The store was owned and operated by two Jews, Mernchenhammer and Zugarman, who also took care of the mail. The Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railroad had built through Ardmore and joined the Santa Fe Railroad at Purcell in the late '80s and Ardmore became the shipping point for the cattlemen in that vicinity.

I wanted to move on into the Chickasaw Nation so removed to Sulphur where I worked on a farm for Mamie Couch, a white woman, for two years. I then removed to McAlester where I operated a lunch counter for one year. In 1891 I moved to Fort Smith, and settled in the Cherokee Nation on the west side of the Arkansas River where the bridge is now located. I worked for Dr. Bell, a white man who had intermarried into the Cherokee Tribe. I also had intermarried into the tribe, giving me the right to work with the Cherokee freedmen on the enrollment, testing the Freedmen's rights. J. Milton Turner and R. W. Kurns of St. Louis were the defense lawyers for the Freedmen. W. W. Hastings and W. T. Thompson were attorneys for the Cherokee Nation and T. B. Needles, Clarence Clifton and a Mr. Breckenridge from St. Louis were the judges. It

was the business of Hastings and Thompson to keep the Freedmen from enrolling.

There was a provision in the treaty of 1866, between the Cherokees and the Government for the freed negroes, who either had Cherokee blood or were inter-married into the tribe, to receive their land and payments on an equal basis with the Indians. Trouble occurred when the Strip opened and the Government objected to paying the Freedmen. From the time the treaty was made in 1866, until 1895, when the Strip settlement was made, the population of the Freedmen had increased from about 1200 to 2,500. The Freedmen finally won out and the decision was passed in 1895.

I then settled on my allotment in Nowata County, located on Big Creek between Lenapah and Centralia, near the Rogers Mound where I farmed for seven years. Our nearest trading post was Vinita, about 20 miles south of Centralia.

Bob and Sam Rogers were outlaws and lived near my farm. One night United States Marshal Jim Mayes and several members of the Anti-Horse Thief Association

surrounded their home. Bob was killed and Sam was wounded. He and his two companions were captured after a heated battle. One of the Anti-Horse Thief men, McDaniels, was also killed.

I was in Pauls Valley when Sam Paul, a cattleman of Garvin County, was killed. He had just completed a round-up and shipped his cattle, when he and his son had some trouble. That evening after he returned home the quarrel was renewed and the boy shot and killed Sam. The boy was taken to Paris, Texas, where he was tried for murder. He plead self-defense and after several months in jail and several thousand dollars were sunk, he came clear.

There were several shipping points along the Santa Fe Railroad in the southern part of the Indian Territory, Marietta, Berwyn, Ardmore and Pauls Valley.

We used to go to the salt lake over near Red River where the soil was salty, take the loam and boil it down in water, skim the foam off like we did sorghum and use the salt for cattle licks. This salt was sometimes used in the home but it was not as strong as the manufactured salt.



We held church in a log cabin in the Winter and in a brush arbor in the Summer. Each denomination had its own church. There were two denominations in our community, the Baptist and Methodist. Our services were irregular for we did not have salaried preachers then.

After I left the farm at Centralia, I went to Coffeyville, Kansas, where I teamed. I had a good team and work was plentiful. I helped to grade the Belt Line Railroad that ran from Coffeyville out to the brick yard.

Gabe and Houston Payne operated a steam ferry across the Arkansas River at Fort Smith. There was a toll bridge at this location but the Payne boys soon put it out of operation. The Rogers Ferry crossed the Arkansas River between Muskogee and Fort Gibson.

From 1887 to 1907, I crossed the Indian Territory six times using different modes of transportation, wagon and team, horseback and train.

Our early day farming was slow and our farming implements were crude. We had a walking Georgia Stock,

wood beam ploughs that were built like the steel, factory made ploughs of today but we made them at home. The wood was cut with a broad ax, trimmed down with a draw knife and the holes for the bolts were bored with an auger.

I have seen the Indian Territory grow from a vast, undeveloped prairie, where the Indians hunted buffalo, to the rich oil field where they collect thousands of dollars from their royalties. I am happy to know that I have made my home in the Indian Territory and the state of Oklahoma for over a half century and expect to spend my last days in it.

I have a .38 Winchester I brought from Texas to the Indian Territory, in 1887.