

POSTON, J. T.

INTERVIEW

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Interviewer, Johnson E. Hampton
September 16, 1937.

Interview with Mr. J. T. Poston.
Antlers.

Born June 16, 1870,
Overton County, Tenn.

I was born June 16, 1870, in Overton County, Tennessee. I was about thirteen years old when I came to Indian Territory. I ran away from home. I had heard that Indian Territory was a good place for young men to get a start, so when I ran away I came straight to the Indian country; the first place I landed was at Wagoner in the Creek country. I got a job there where I worked for a while. I then left there and went to a small town in the Cherokee country. I do not remember the name of the town.

The stage line ran through this town. I worked there for a while then I left and went to the place down where Madill is now. At that time there was no Madill. The town where I lived was in the Chickasaw country. During this time I was working on the different ranches. I then left there and went to Ardmore. It was a small place then; there were a few houses and a post office there when I landed in Ardmore.

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I went to work on a ranch. That country was a good cow country then, it was all open and the cattle ran out on the range with no wire fences to bother them. I worked there for a while; I then left there and came to the Choctaw country. The Frisco Railroad was under construction between Paris, Texas, and Fort Smith, Arkansas so I went to work on the road. I think that this road was built in 1887 or 1888. I worked on the grade, grading the road with a pair of oxens until the railroad was completed, then I went to Montana where I worked in a livery barn but it got too cold for me so I came back to the Choctaw Nation and with me came four or five boys from Missouri. We located near Caddo, where we worked for an Indian by the name of Wilson Jones. This man had lots of cattle and horses out on the range. Wilson Jones ^{was} once governor of the Choctaws. While he was governor he had a fight with V. M. Locke. That was in 1893; we worked for him about one year and then quit and the boys and I separated there ^I have never seen nor heard of them again.

When I left there I came to Clayton, which is on the Frisco Railroad and I went to work making ties for the Frisco.

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They paid us 70¢ per tie for all 6x8 ties. I do not remember what we got for the switch ties but they paid more for them than they did for cross ties.

I quit working there and went to Texas, where I married and came back to the Choctaw Nation. I then rented some land in what is known as John's Valley and went to farming. The land which I rented belonged to Dixon Johns; I lived there for several years and on this farm I made lots of corn and other stuff.

This valley is named after Amos Johns, who lived there years ago. He raised several boys; they all lived there until they all died out. This valley is surrounded by mountains; it must be about three miles around it and in this valley there is some fine land. It is a fine country. There were not many Indians in this valley then, but the Indians there were all full bloods. At that time I was about the only white man living in that valley, which is mostly prairie country. There are two creeks running through it, Pig Caney and Little Caney. In this valley the grass was as high as a man's head. We used to go out and cut hay for the winter anywhere on the prairie. After a while a

sawmill came into the mountains near the valley. Later, white people began to come in there and kill the deer and turkeys. They would not kill just what they wanted but they would kill all they could. They wasted the game, and, of course, the deer and turkeys did not last long after the white people began to come in. I have seen as many as a hundred turkeys in one flock and that many deer in one herd. We could go out on the prairie in the spring and see deer and turkeys all over the prairies and there were lots of fish in the creeks. There were lots of rattlesnakes there too, and some were big ones. My wife killed ten copperhead snakes in one place under the shade of a tree in our yard. Rattlesnakes would come to our yards every once in a while and it was very dangerous to go out after night. I know of two Indians who were killed by the bites of rattlesnakes.

We had one Indian who was a bear hunter; he would go out in the mountains and kill a bear and very often he used to tell me how to hunt bears and how to find them in their dens but I never did try to hunt one for I was not a bear hunter. I have killed lots of deer and turkeys but no bears.

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I farmed and ran sawmills after the sawmills came in and I have made lots of corn. Corn was about all we could raise in the valley for we could not get out to sell any cotton so we did not try to raise anything but corn. I used to see the Indian women beat their corn into meal and hominy. They used a block of wood with a bowl at the end. They would put the corn into this bowl and beat it until meal was made.

We had a good many cattle and hogs but no ponies; in fact, most of the Indians had cattle, hogs and ponies but they were not worth anything at that time. Yearlings would bring about \$5.00; the cows would bring from \$10.00 to \$12.00 apiece and big steers would bring from \$12.00 to \$15.00 apiece. The ponies were not worth anything at all; the hogs were sold according to age but they were not worth anything either.

The stock did not have to be fed at that time for there was plenty of grass that stayed green all during the winter and lots of small cane stalks on the banks of the creeks. The only thing we had to do was to gather the stock up in the spring and brand the cattle and

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ponies and then mark the hogs and turn them loose until fall when they were gathered again and turned loose again until the next spring.

I used to attend Indian camp meeting in the valley where they had built a church house out of logs and had made seats out of split logs; this church was known as the Big Caney Presbyterian Church and they used it for a school as well as a church and this house is still standing. The logs are pretty rotten but it still holds together.

This school was an Indian school but my children went to this school with those Indian children. They had a white teacher but I do not know how this school was conducted. They used to have a good school back in those mountains. I think that my children were the only white children who attended this school. They got along just fine with those Choctaw children. They played together, they ate together; in fact, were just the same as one big family.

I saw one Indian ball game played there. I saw a man killed while the game was going on. The Indians fought from the time they got together until the ball game started then they fought during the game. I don't think that they

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finished the game at all. They played until dark, then they all fought a while and went home. Only one was killed but they called it a pretty good game; I thought so too when it was over.

I have lived among several tribes of Indians, but to my way of thinking the Choctaw tribe is the best tribe of Indians to live by. They are good neighbors, they are honest and they would not bother any one who lets them alone and attends to his own business. They would fight and kill among themselves but they never did bother the white people. It seems that they were all friends to the white race of people. All the Choctaws with whom I have come in contact are my friends.