

SANDERS, ROBERT S.

INTERVIEW

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James S. Buchanan  
Interviewer  
September 17, 1937

Interview with  
Robert S. Sanders, Cherokee  
Vian, Oklahoma.

I, Robert S. Sanders, was born near Little Rock  
Arkansas in 1865.

My father was E. B. Sanders, half Cherokee and my  
mother was Emma Billingsly Sanders, white. My father  
was born in the Cherokee Nation and left the Nation and  
moved to Arkansas at the beginning of the Civil War.  
He married my mother in Arkansas.

When I was about eight years of age my parents  
moved to the Cherokee Nation and settled on a claim on  
Sallisaw Creek, at Sweet Springs where the old Sweet  
Springs Cherokee School was located. It was a log struc-  
ture and all the seats were made of split logs with holes  
bored in them and sticks driven in the holes for legs.  
My father taught school at that place for twelve years  
and there was where I attained the greater part of my  
education, under the teaching of my father. Later I  
attended the Cherokee Male Seminary at Tahlequah.

This country was the ideal place of an Indian hunters

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dream during my boyhood days. Game in abundance, such as deer, turkey, prairie chicken etc. Wild turkeys roamed in countless droves. On spring mornings the turkey gobbler would greet the break of day and the rising sun. The mighty sound of their gobbling would roll on over the Cherokee Hills, over the shadowy woodlands of the river valleys, to the edge of the boundless prairies and beyond. The swelling wave of jubilant sound sweeping westward with the morning light across the new land of the Red Men. The high forests rang with the noise. The watchword being caught and repeated from one to another for miles around, and the whole country would be for an hour or more in a universal shout. It is hard to believe a thing like that today and there are other facts about the game of the Indian Territory in the early days which are equally hard to believe. We all know in a general way that wild life and game of nearly all kinds were once far more abundant than they now are. However, few of us are familiar with the amazing details of their former abundance. Few realize how tremendous has been the destruction which civilization has needlessly wrought.

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Well do I remember an incident of my boyhood days which happened one morning when I was on my pony looking for some cattle on the prairie near where Vian now stands. It was a very wet morning and the tall prairie grass was heavy with dew. I came upon a flock of wild turkey in a sumac brush cluster. When they flew up, they flew only a short distance. I remembered hearing that a turkey could not fly when its feathers became wet, so I took after a big gobbler. He flew a short distance and began running. I kept my pony after him and he never tried to fly anymore, but ran and dodged through the tall wet grass. My pony ran him down; I leaped off the pony onto him and after a free-for-all tussle in the wet grass, I captured him. It was hard to tell which was the wettest, and the most dilapidated looking subject, the turkey or I, when the tussle ended in that wet grass. The pony and I got him home, however.

On another occasion, one evening after supper, my father sent me to a neighbor's house about one mile distant from our home. I was to ask the neighbor to come to our place the next day and assist in gathering corn. Like all boys, I was fond of dogs, and I had

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three which followed my every step, especially at night. Naturally they were with me on this occasion. When I had conveyed my father's message to our neighbor, he decided he would go home with me so he would be there to go to work early the next morning. On our way back to my home the dogs were running around here and there in the brush along the trail as dogs will. Suddenly there was a great commotion in the brush near the trail and away the three dogs went over the hill in hot pursuit of the object of their chase. I knew it was a large animal of some description by the noise it made running through the brush. Suddenly the howls of the chase ceased and I failed to hear their barks as if they had an object at bay. Therefore, I knew they were engaged in a fight or had captured the object of their chase. We started in the direction they went and had gone only a short distance when we were met by one of the dogs. He jumped and capered about us, then dashed away in the direction of the other dogs. We followed him, and in a thicket we found the dogs with their prize. It was the largest buck deer I ever saw, and a greater set of antlers never adorned the head of any deer. The thick brush prevented his

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escape from the dogs and they had caught him. One leg was badly marked where one of the dogs had caught and held on while the marks on his throat told the grim story of the kill. We tied his feet together, put a stick through the ties, placed it on our shoulders and proudly carried our catch home.

I believe those two occasions were about the most thrilling incidents of my boyhood days.

In 1893 I was married to Mattie Martin, the daughter of Jack Martin of near Sallisaw. Six children were born to us, four boys and two girls. All living except one girl who died in 1929.

My principal pursuit in life has been farming. The last few years I have been truck farming on my place at the city limits of Vian.

Writers Note: Due to the fact that Mr. Sanders is somewhat timid and reluctant in referring to his own virtues, he failed to tell me of his devotion to the city of Vian. The entire block upon which stands the two beautiful brick and stone school buildings that are a credit to the town, were given by him.