

BIOGRAPHY FORM
 WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
 Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma
 HAMBY, ROBERT E. INTERVIEW #7853

Field Worker's name Johnson H. Hampton

This report made on (date) October 15th, 1937. 1937

1. Name Mr. Robert E. Hamby

2. Post Office Address Dunbar, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month October Day 17th, Year 1870

5. Place of birth Watervalley, Mississippi.

6. Name of Father _____ Place of birth Mississippi

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother _____ Place of birth Mississippi.

Other information about mother _____

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

Field Worker, Johnson H. Hampton,
October 15, 1937.

Interview with Mr. Robert E. Hamby,
Dunbar, Oklahoma.

I was born October 17, 1870 at Watervalley, Mississippi. I was about eleven years old when we moved to this country. My mother died on the way here. We had to stop in Arkansas on our way when my mother died and we lived there for a few months. We then came on into the Choctaw Nation. My father lived for several years after we came here. He finally died and is buried at Dunbar, Oklahoma, a small sawmill town on the Frisco Railroad, where I now live.

When we left Mississippi we came to the river to cross over on a boat. A small steamboat came over and we got in this boat with what we had and started to cross over. When we got about half way across the river, the engine went dead so the current carried us about two miles down the river. I thought sure that we would all get drowned in the river but we finally landed and got out on the banks all right. We then camped on the bank of the river and it took us two days to get out of the bottom of the river. The cane

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there was about thirty feet high on both sides of the wagon road. The cane was just as thick as it could stand and you could not see ten feet ahead of you. It was sure a scary looking bottom.

When we landed on this bank we had one yoke of bulls and a Tarpaulin wagon that my father had made for the trip and all we had was on this wagon. We finally got out of the bottom and on the hills where we stopped and camped. We could hear panthers screaming in the bottom in the night and I was scared at night.

We left there and started to the Nation. It took us nearly two years to get over to this country. We had to stop along the road and hunt and fish and some times we had to stop and work for a time in order to get supplies for our trip.

After about two years, we finally landed in the Choctaw Nation at what is now known as McAlester. We put up our tent there and went to work for the coal company. South McAlester was not known at that time. A man by the name of J. J. McAlester was the head of the coal company mining

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the coal at this place at that time. I don't know but I think that this town was named after him. He was the biggest coal man there at that time. We cut props for the mine, these props being used to prop the earth to keep it from caving down on the miners that were digging the coal. It was not a very big mine at that time but it did get to be a pretty good sized mine after a while.

When we first landed and located at this place there were not very many white people there. The coal miners were mostly Negroes or in other words Italians. They are the best coal diggers any where. I have seen the mine explode and kill men and burn some. The biggest explosion we had at that time was in one of the mines near the railroad. It killed a good many miners and burned a good many others.

We got a good price for our props, that is at that time it was a good price, and we could live on it all right and make some money out of this job.

I don't know just why my father wanted to move over to this country, but I guess that he had lived among the Choctaws back there and that my grandfather lived there

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among the Choctaw Tribe was his reason for wanting to come to this country and live among them the balance of his life. We did well; we made money just like the other people but spent it just as they did.

At that time this country was a fine country, anyone who would just half try could make a good living for his family and lay up some money.

We came over in a covered wagon just like we started and the bull team and the same old wagon. I don't know what became of the wagon we brought here with us. I wish I had the old wagon now but it got away from us some how.

We left the Choctaw Nation and went to the Creek Nation and lived there for about a year; then left there and went to the Chickasaw Nation, locating at or near where Pauls Valley is now on the Washita River where we worked at a sawmill cutting cottonwood lumber. We ran the sawmill for about three years, cutting all the big timber that was along the river. We then moved back to where Antlers, Oklahoma is now.

I think that we went to Antlers in 1887, just about the time the Frisco Railroad was being built through this

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country. We lived here a while, then we moved up to Kosoma, a small sawmill town on the Frisco, and went to making ties for a contractor who had the contract from the Frisco Railroad Company to put out ties. After making ties for this company for a while, we moved out to Pine Creek where we worked at a sawmill. I cut logs for this mill for several years then I ran the mill for them for several years. At that time there were lots of fine yellow pine timber in this country. The timber was just as good as could be found anywhere in the United States. They were supposed to pay the Choctaws royalty per thousand feet on this timber but I don't think the Choctaws got but very little royalty out of it. It was mostly stolen from them and then the big lumber companies moved out of this country after they had gotten the best timber they could get out of the mountains.

I remember when we were coming over we stopped at Skullyville and pitched camp for the night.

When we got our camp pitched Father went to an Indian's house to buy some meat and when he got there he found out that this Indian had some bear meat, so Father bought some of this bear meat. It surely was fat, and the meat was

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just fine, the first bear meat I had ever tasted in my life. This Indian could not speak a word of English but Father made a trade with him for the meat. I don't see how he made the Indian understand what he wanted.

Back in those days this country was full of wild game; deer, turkey, fish, and lots of bear in the mountains. Not only that but wolves, panthers, cougar, wild cats, and, of course, lots of big rattlesnakes. We could go out and kill a deer and turkey in a little while, and fish; the creeks were just full of them. There were not many white people here then, but after they began to come in and started to open up farms, the game disappeared to some unknown parts.

I don't know much of any thing that happened in this country for the Choctaws never did have any dances nor anything else like the Western tribes. About the only thing I can say is that I went to see an Indian ball game where they played ball with another county but I don't remember what county played the game. They sure had a hard game, I guess, from the way they fought over it. They did have some fights in this game. I have attended some Indian camp meetings but I never was at one of their cries. They

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take good care of you and feed you all you can eat when you go to one of their camp meetings. I was at the council house when McCurtain and Hunter had their trouble over the office of Principal Chiefs. It looked very much like those Choctaws were going to have a good battle, but before they got ready the negro soldiers came and put a stop to it. I guess that if the negro soldiers had not been sent to stop the trouble they would have had a good battle. All of the Indians were loaded down with guns and pistols, ready to go to war when they were called on.

I did not see the Locke & Jones war but I was not far from here when that took place. The soldiers were sent down to stop that fight. Locke had his men stationed across Kiamichi River, about 200 Indians, all loaded down with guns of all descriptions. Locke was feeding them. Of course, Locke had lots of cattle and hogs in the woods so they would go out and kill them as they wanted it. He fed all those Indians himself. The Jones men were stationed at Old Goodland; they were ready to fight. They were the militia sent by Governor Jones: he was governor at that time. If it hadn't been for the soldiers they might

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have had a bloody battle, but it was averted by the soldiers.

When we were at work in the mines at McAlester, J. J. McAlester had a small store that he used for the miners and those who worked for him, so we had to do our trading with him at this store. He was a fine man to work for; I can say that for him even though he is dead.

At that time there were no schools nor churches, but the people finally got together and got up a subscription school. I did not have the chance to attend the school so I am you might say an ignorant white man. They also built a church house. I don't know whether this church house is still there or not, I have been away from there so long it might of been torn down long ago.

I have lived among three tribes of Indians, and in my rounds I have come in contact with lots of them. I have found that they are all good people, never bothering anybody. Among themselves they would kill one another but never would bother any one else. They are all honest and law-abiding citizens and upright as far as I know and I have been with them ever since I came to this country, a small boy. I guess I will live among them until I pass from this world

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to another one. I now live at Dunbar, about 28 miles north of Antlers, Oklahoma. I am right where my father died and is buried.