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BURRIS, NOAH.

INTERVIEW

#12763

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BIOGRAPHY FORM

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WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

BURRIS, NOAH. INTERVIEW.

12763

Field Worker's name Pete W. Cole,

This report made on (date) January 24, 1938. 1938

1. Name Noah Burris,

2. Post Office Address Near Centrahoma, Oklehoma.

3. Residence address (or location) Coal County.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month      Age about 50 years Day     , Year     

5. Place of birth     

6. Name of Father      Place of birth     

Other information about father     

7. Name of Mother      Place of birth     

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     .

Investigator, Pete W. Cole,  
January 24, 1938.

Interview with Noah Burris,  
Near Centrahoma, Oklahoma.

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The Chickasaw Indians, cousins to the Choctaw Tribe, did not move to the Indian Territory at the time the Choctaws made the treaty known as the treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek with the United States Government on September 27, 1830, when they were compelled to give up all of their lands in the state of Mississippi. The Chickasaws claimed that their original homes were in the states of Kentucky, Western Tennessee and Northern Mississippi but all claims to their land were surrendered in a treaty with the United States in 1818 and the signer of the treaty was Tishomingo, who was their Chief at that time. When the Chickasaws found themselves oppressed they sold all of their land. They had not traded with the Government in the Indian Territory as the rest of the Five Civilized Tribes had done so that, when they were without a country, they depended on the Choctaws for their help in about the year 1837. It was at this time, abiding

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by the agreement, that Tishomingo began his journey to the Indian Territory and died on the way. In 1833 the Choctaws had arrived in the new country; the Chickasaws came in 1837, after they had surrendered the rights which they claimed in these three states and granted these rights to the United States by Treaty and paid to the Choctaws a certain amount of money for the right to settle in their country, to have a voice in the tribal government. but they soon began to find fault, claiming that they had no influence in the tribal affairs because they were outnumbered by the Choctaws. The Choctaws assigned to the Chickasaws the district embracing the western part of the Choctaw Nation as far as the ninety-eighth and promised that it should be called the Chickasaw Nation, after which they formed their own constitution and set up their own form of government. Negro slaves existed among all of the Five Civilized Tribes.

A few years after the exodus of the Chickasaws and the Choctaws and before the tide of the white emigration had set in, the most prominent feature of their adopted country was its profound solitude, even the days seeming more solitary than the nights; nor did the gobbling of

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the wild turkey, the chattering of squirrel, the chirping of a bird mingling with the tapping of the woodpecker upon the hollow trees, seem to enliven the silent and lonely scene in their new country upon their arrival. The Chickasaws, at the time the missionaries were established among them as <sup>among</sup> the Choctaws, were living in rude, log houses or huts which were furnished with skins and furs which were dressed and finished by the women for their bedding; these women were skilled in the arts of making earthen ware for all domestic purposes. The greatest care was bestowed upon their children by the Chickasaw, as well as by the Choctaw mothers, who never allowed their children to be placed upon their feet before the strength of their limbs would safely permit. The child had free access to the maternal breast as long as it desired unless the mother's health forbade its continuance. It has been known that a child eleven years of age has been known to stand on his knee to nurse. Children were never whipped by the parents but if punishing was necessary

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were sent to the uncle of the child who only inflicted a severe rebuke or imposed upon him or her some little penance or what was more frequent made appeals to the child's feelings of honor or shame.

The art of writing was unknown to the Chickasaws before the advent of the missionaries among them; their history rested alone upon tradition in common with the Indian race, handed down through succeeding generations. They were addicted to one vice, the vice of gambling. They would bet on the proper handling and the skillful shuffling of a Chickasaw's ball sticks, the fleetness of his feet and his power of endurance, while his white brother would risk his money on the proper handling and skillful shuffling of his paper cards. One of the many traits of these Chickasaws was their care for and the protection of their orphans and it is the testimony of all personally acquainted with the various traits and Indian characteristics that there is no record nor have any records ever been found among them or their Choctaw cousin of homeless and friendless orphan children, thrown out to shift for themselves and left to "root hog or die."

The Chickasaws, like the Choctaws, never betrayed any trust reposed in them. The ancient Chickasaws had four laws only; all of which were strictly and rigidly enforced throughout the entire nation. The law for murder, which placed the slayer wholly and exclusively in the hands of the older brother of the slain, who never failed to execute the law whose claims were thus entrusted to his care; thus kept the standing verdict which was "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," death. If the deceased had no brother then one of the next nearest kin, a male, became a self appointed executioner and no one ever dared to interfere or interrupt in any manner to either assist or oppose. If the condemned slayer fled, which was very seldom, his oldest brother or if he had no brother then the next nearest and oldest relative in the male line was slain in his stead. If, after the substitute died in his place, should he return he was ostracised and forever stigmatized as a coward wherever he went. This was a punishment more to be dreaded by all Indians than a hundred deaths. Women were never slain in place of men.



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Second, whipping for minor offenses, after which the culprit was reinstated to favor without any disgrace being attached to his name for his offense or punishment. Third, the property of deceased parents descended to the brothers and sisters of the deceased and not to their own children. This was to us a strange, unjust and inconsistent law, as I was informed by those as told them by Governor Cyrus Harris. The Chickasaw ruler was styled king instead of chief and the chief officer was called Tishu Miko.

The ancient Chickasaws, unlike the Choctaws, buried their dead soon after life became extinct; placing in the grave with the corpse, if a man, his clothes, war and hunting implements, pipe and tobacco, and a few provisions. If a woman or child, the clothes and other little articles which the deceased may have prized in life and a few provisions. A Chickasaw woman or widow mourned twelve months or moons for her deceased husband while the other relatives prolonged their mourning to only three months, at the close of which time a Special Cry was appointed at night, which was kept up until the

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break of day. Afterward the mourners clipped the end of the hair and a string was handed to them with which they tied up their hair which had been permitted to hang loose over their shoulders from the death of their kindred to the end of the three moons, the appointed time for mourning.

Suicide was sometimes committed by the ancient Chickasaws but very seldom. If one had to commit suicide it was invariably done with his own favorite instrument of death, the rifle. Some of the skilful doctors or medicine men were regarded by their people as being not only wise in the knowledge of the medicinal properties of various herbs and roots which their boundless forests furnished, but also gifted with the power of making it rain but they did not make as frequent illustrations of that power by actual experiment as did some of the Choctaws.