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CAPE, J. J.

INTERVIEW

10163

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

CAPE, J. J.

INTERVIEW

10163

Field Worker's name John F. Daugherty

This report made on (date) March 4, 1938 1938

1. Name Mr. J. J. Cape

2. Post Office Address Mill Creek, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) Route 1

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month November Day 23 Year 1867

5. Place of birth Texas

6. Name of Father Thomas Cape Place of birth Texas

Other information about father Doctor in Territory

7. Name of Mother Mary Gillem Place of birth Illinois

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 4.

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John F. Daugherty,
Investigator,
March 4, 1938.

An Interview with Mr. J. J. Cape,
R. I. Mill Creek, Oklahoma.

My parents were Thomas Cape, born in Texas and Mary Gilliam Cape, born in Illinois. There were fourteen children in our family. Father was a mechanic, and a doctor after coming to the Territory. I was born November 23, 1867, in Texas. I came to the Indian Territory with my parents in 1881, settling at Redland in the Cherokee Nation, in Sequoyah County. We lived near Foreman's Ferry for ten years.

Zack Foreman was a Cherokee freedman who had no education, being able neither to read nor to write. He was a friend to Indians and whites as well as to colored people. He was very wealthy. The story of how he got his start is interesting. His father died when he was small. He went to work when a very small boy to support his widowed mother.

He worked on farms or ranches, at anything he could get to do, receiving in return for his labor about fifty cents or a dollar a day. Some cow buyers came in there one

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day and bought a herd of cattle where Zack was working. One of the cows got her leg broken and could not make the trip to no Mam's Land with the rest of the herd, and they left her with Zack. He cared for her and she finally recovered. Later she had a heifer calf. He worked hard and bought heifer calves with the money he earned. Before he was fully grown he owned quite a herd of cattle, and he finally became the wealthiest cattleman in the Cherokee Nation.

One day Mother became seriously ill, and although father was a doctor it was necessary to take her to Fort Smith for treatment. Father didn't have enough money to pay for her medical treatment and Zack heard about his predicament. He got on his horse and rode to our house and loaned father the money. He was a greatly beloved character. He married a negro school teacher and built a nice home for her to live in. Then he built a store and finally a gin. This was in a negro settlement near Redland and they finally got a post office there and called it Foreman. His wife took care of the store and

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post office while he rode after his cattle and looked after the gin.

In the nineties the Kansas City Southern put a road through Redland from Kansas City to Port Arthur, Texas. They missed Foreman by three miles. Zack dressed up, got on the train and went to Kansas City to see the Kansas City Southern officials about letting him have a railroad. They agreed to lay the steel if he would make the road bed. He came home and gave the negroes work. Those who owed him, paid their debts by working on his road. They graded it with teams and scrapers and laid the ties and the railroad company put the rails down for him. Then when he wanted to ship cattle or cotton he called the agent at Redland and a car or any numbers of cars were dispatched to Foreman. He was the only negro in the United States at that time who privately owned a railroad.

One day father took his cotton to Redland, and about the time he got to Foreman, it began raining. Zack invited him to stay at his home. Father said they had a table set for him alone. And he was taken to a room to sleep where no colored people ever slept. This was reserved for white people.

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Each year on the fourth of August they held an Emancipation Proclamation Picnic at Foreman. There was always barbecue and games and dancing. Also stands to sell red lemonade. Zack and his wife were always crowned king and queen of the festival. They rode a pair of black horses and passed in review before the crowd after the crowning. Everybody loved Zack and Mrs. Foreman.

Father was very busy as a doctor. Doctors were few and anybody who practiced had more than he could do. Father used to slip off for several hours at a time so he could rest. The principal diseases were pneumonia, chills and malarial fever, and bilious fever. When outlaws were shot they called father, and told him to keep his mouth shut about the affair. He always went. He was afraid not to. He received good pay from them, but he never told anybody about dressing their wounds. He always rode horseback and carried his medicine with him. There were no drug stores then.

I married Mary Hicks at Mill Creek in 1902, and have lived near here since that time.