

JOHNSON, SARAH JANE

INTERVIEW

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Mary J. Stockton,
Interviewer,
June 22, 1937.

An Interview with Mrs. Sarah Jane Johnson,
Claremore, Oklahoma.

I was born November 19, 1871, at Hot Springs, Arkansas. I am now sixty-five years of age and have seven living children. They are scattered over the United States. I live in Claremore with my oldest son, who is district judge in Rogers, Mayes, and Craig counties.

MOTHER

My mother's name was George Anne Thornton. She was Cherokee and she came from Georgia.

FATHER

My father's name was William Mayes, and he was a full blood Irishman. He came to Arkansas from Tennessee when he was thirteen years old.

HUSBAND

My husband, John Wade Johnson (Indian name was Soso), was born at Fort Gibson, Indian Territory, September 29, 1859.

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MOTHER

His mother's name was Jenny Conrad (Indian name was Terrapin). She was the daughter of Quatie Terrapin Conrad one of the famous old Cherokee families. She came from Texas.

FATHER

His father was Sosoa (Indian name). Goose was his white name. He was born in Spain and came over with a cargo of beautiful wild horses which were sold to the Mexicans and the Texans. He met Jenny Conrad here and married her. He was killed in a skirmish on the streets about eight months after their marriage. His death occurred just before his son was born. She then married Tom Forman, a Cherokee Indian Preacher.

MY EARLY LIFE AND UP TO PRESENT DATE

I can only remember as far back as when we lived on the Ouachita River near Hot Springs, Arkansas. I was about ten years old and attended school near Hot Springs. My parents owned a large farm and the river ran through our

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land. We had a large sawmill called the Thorton Saw Mill which was used for miles around, by different farmers. We owned the only ferry boats which crossed the Washita River at that place. We owned a mill and sold flour to all the people around. We had large wheat fields which supplied grain for the mill.

I remember well a pet bear we used to have. Her name was Dora. My folks caught her when she was a cub and raised her till she got old and began to get mean. One day she tore my clothes off and my mother sold her to a farmer, and he shot her. I always loved the bear and cried for it.

My father liked to hunt and game was plentiful around the river. He killed many deer, squirrel, rabbits, etc. He fished in the Washita River and caught many large fish.

I can remember at night, hearing panthers screaming and sometimes they would catch one of our pigs. They

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would come around the house at night and scratch on the doors. Lots of nights I would be home alone and would be frightened to death. I remember one day while we were in the woods, a man came running and said that a panther was coming. We all ran and hid in a cave. The panther came to the cave, and my father killed it with a gun. Father killed bears and would dress the skin and lay the skin in the house for rugs.

When I was sixteen years old my father's brother wanted him to come and settle in the cattle country up in the Indian Territory. We left Arkansas and went to the Indian Territory, and settled in Maysville, which was ^{named} after my father's folks. The Mayes had large cattle ranges and many thousand head of cattle. When I was seventeen years old I met John Wade Johnson, who then was a cattleman. He had a large range and about one thousand head of cattle. He came over to my house every Sunday for dinner, and on Sunday night we would go to church. One night while returning we heard a panther scream, so

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he took a club and carried it. While passing under a tree, the panther jumped down on him. He fought it a long while, and finally killed it with the club. We were married in 1890 and to this marriage there were five children born.

We moved from here to Tahlequah where we stayed for a number of years. While we were here I sang with the Cherokees in their meetings. I prayed with them, ate with them and even doctored them when they were sick. They called on me to sing at funerals, and I was loved by all the Indians.

From Tahlequah we moved to Locust Grove. When there we traded at the Bryan's Trading Post and received our mail there also. We lived on Spring Creek in the John Ross farm. We stayed there about three years and moved to ~~Copeworth~~ District, still in the Indian Territory, now Rogers County. I have lived here up to present date. My husband died in Claremore, January 9, 1927, and was buried in the beautiful Woodlawn Cemetery in Claremore. My children have had a fair edu-

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cation, my two oldest sons being graduates from Lebanon, Tennessee, my daughters graduating from Dwight Mission School in Sequoyah County, and the other son graduating from Phillips University at Enid.

CIVIL WAR

All that I know about the Civil War is what my father told me. My husband was only two years old when the War ended. Father said at times he almost starved to death because of food shortage. They would boil hard corn from the field, and at one time they had to kill a horse for meat. They sometimes had to grind their own meal to make corn cakes, and at other times they only had parched corn.

MISCELLANEOUS

Both of our mills were run by water power. They were located on the edge of the Ouachita River, the sawmill lying just above the dam on the east side of the river, and the flour mill on the west side. The

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wheel pit was in the river. When the trestle gave way, grandfather, father, and some helpers would put long legged leather boots on and wade down and straighten the wheels and trestle. The flour mill was a lovely view from across the stream. The beams in the roof showed white flour in cracks of the mill box. I remember when I would climb up the ridge and go down the steep incline to our mill on the edge of the river. The sawmill was located across the river on the cliff. Logs were cut and ran down a slide and off the cliff into the water. I remember how I used to play in the sawdust piles. One mill still is there today, and is over one hundred years old.

My father first began business in a blacksmith shop. He was very successful in this line of work and it was the only workshop of its kind within miles around. People traveled exclusively in wagons those days and brought their horses in to be shod. The

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The farmers would bring their plows to be sharpened and would want new axe handles.