

Notice of Copyright

Published and unpublished materials may be protected by Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S. Code). Any copies of published and unpublished materials provided by the Western History Collections are for research, scholarship, and study purposes only.

Use of certain published materials and manuscripts is restricted by law, by reason of their origin, or by donor agreement. For the protection of its holdings, the Western History Collections also reserves the right to restrict the use of unprocessed materials, or books and documents of exceptional value and fragility. Use of any material is subject to the approval of the Curator.

Citing Resources from the Western History Collections

For citations in published or unpublished papers, this repository should be listed as the Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

An example of a proper citation:

Oklahoma Federation of Labor Collection, M452, Box 5, Folder 2. Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

INDEX CARDS

Choctaw Nation
Nashoba County
Living Conditions
Trading Post-Fort Smith
Native Foods
Preacher

6177

175

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

Field Worker's name Johnson H. HamptonThis report made on (date) June 9, 19371. Name Ben Benjamin2. Post Office Address Snow, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month Don't know Day _____ Year 18675. Place of birth Near Nashoba, Oklahoma6. Name of Father Lawton Benjamin Place of birth Near Eagle Town, Okla.

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Jane Benjamin Place of birth Near Eagle Town, Okla.

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 _____.

Johnson H. Hampton,
Research Field Worker,
June 9, 1937.

1-26

Interview with Ben Benjiman
Snow, Oklahoma

I was born in Nashoba County, Choctaw Nation, Indian Territory, some time in 1867, I don't know just what month and the day I was born but I have been told that it was in the year 1867.

Father's name was Lawton Benjiman, and my mother's name was Jane Benjiman. My father and mother did not come from Mississippi, they were born and reared in this country.

My father was not in the Civil War. I don't think he was as he never spoke of it nor he did even talk about the war to us kids, nor I don't know whether my grandfather was in the Civil War. My grandfather was from Mississippi and when he came over he located in what was known as Eagle County. He lived there until his death, he and my grandmother both died there.

After my grandfather died my father moved from there and located in Nashoba County, where I was born. He lived there until his death.

That country at that time was nothing but wilderness. There were a few Indians who lived in that part

of the country, but it was at that time far away from anywhere. There was no post office there then but after a few years they established a post office there and named it Nashoba. It was Indian Territory yet when this post office was established.

All of the Indians lived in log houses with puncheon floors. There was no lumber they could get so they would go out and split logs and make floors out of them.

My grandfather's name was Yammitubbee. That was his Choctaw name. He did not have a surname, I don't know what my grandmother's name was. I have forgotten it.

We had a hard time making a living. We had a little farm like the rest of the Indians in the country and we raised corn enough for our bread, and made some garden stuff to eat, but we did not have any flour, coffee, and sugar. There were no stores in the country so we had to go to Fort Smith to get our groceries. My father would go and get the groceries maybe twice a year, for it was too far to make the trip too often. We had corn that mother made meal out of for our bread. She would put this corn in a Tom Fuller block, as it was called

by some Indians, it was a mortar. She would beat this corn and make meal out of it. That is what we ate all the time. When we got some flour, we ate it only on Sundays, then for mornings only. We had to be saving with our flour, sugar and coffee. When we got out of coffee, mother would parch some corn and make coffee out of it and it was good to drink. It was not as good as coffee but it answered the purpose.

Mother would go out and dig up some roots that she called Lokchok ahi or mud potatoes. She would boil them like they boil Irish potatoes now. They were round like Irish potatoes and we would roast them in the fire and eat them like potatoes and they were good eating.

We did not have many cattle, hogs and ponies. I think that every Indian had some stock but it was not worth anything for there was no market for them, but they would sell some of them to live on. They would get about \$5.00 for yearlings and \$10.00 for cows, and the ponies were not worth anything at all.

My mother had a spinning wheel and we raised a little cotton and at night we would pick the seeds out of it, and then mother would spin it into threads. She would make a big ball of it, then she would put in the weaver and weave

cloth out of which she made our shirts and breeches, and she would make socks and mittens which she sold to the Indians who wanted them. She used some kind of a weed, and bark of trees and Bois d' arc chips for dyes. How she fixed them I don't know, but she would dye them and they looked like the clothes that are bought out of stores now. She would sell them to the Indians, but what she got I don't know. I don't think she got much for them for the Indians did not have much money with which to buy anything.

I was appointed County Ranger and served for several years. The appointment was made by one of the District Chiefs, just the same as the Light Horsemen were appointed and I had like power and authority as they to make arrests when necessary. After my time expired I never was appointed nor elected to any office.

I never played in the Indian Ball games but I have seen them play. The older heads would not let us younger boys play. They said that we would get hurt so I did not get to play at all.

I never attended school so I am not able to read or speak the English language, but I can read and write in my own language just about as well as other Indians.

I am a full blood Indian, Choctaw, and lived among

them all of my life. There used to be lots of Indians but many of them are dead. There are now a few full-bloods, and the way it looks they won't last very many more years unless something unforeseen happens.

We used to have some old Indian relics years ago but we did not take care of them. We did not know that they would be worth something in the future. We used to have some pots and pottery that an old Indian woman made for us, that we should have saved and given them to the Historical Society, but we did not know, so we didn't keep them.

The Indians in this country did not have a burial ground. When one died, he was buried near the house. No markers were put over his grave, but they would build a little house or a shed over it to keep it from getting rained on, and to keep it preserved until they had their memorial or the cry. Of late years they began to have cemeteries for their dead, and these are mostly at the church grounds now.

I am an Indian preacher, belonging to the Methodist church. I have preached all over the country to the Indians, preached to them in our own language, for I am not able to speak any other language, only Choctaw. They generally camp-
ed at these meetings, maybe two or three camp houses/^{would be} built

for that purpose. The meeting lasted about three days. The campers would feed all Indians who came to the meeting, or white people, who came. No one was turned down when the time came to eat.

I am now living north of Snow, about twenty-five miles northeast of Antlers, Oklahoma.