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INTERVIEW

#7506

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**BENSON, JOHN**

BIOGRAPHY FORM  
~~INTERVIEW~~  
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

**7506**

Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name \_\_\_\_\_

This report made on (date) Johnson H. Hampton 1937  
September 14

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_

**John Benson, a Negro.**

2. Post Office Address \_\_\_\_\_

**Antlers, Oklahoma**

3. Residence address (or location) \_\_\_\_\_

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month March Day \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_

**27 1862**

5. Place of birth \_\_\_\_\_

**Alabama**

6. Name of Father \_\_\_\_\_ Place of birth \_\_\_\_\_

**Turner Benson**

**Alabama**

Other information about father \_\_\_\_\_

7. Name of Mother \_\_\_\_\_ Place of birth \_\_\_\_\_

**Mary Benson**

**Alabama**

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 \_\_\_\_\_

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Johnson H. Hampton,  
Interviewer,  
September 14, 1937.

An Interview with Mr. John Benson,  
Antlers, Oklahoma.

I was born in Henry County, Alabama, on March 27, 1862, I came to the Choctaw Nation, Indian Territory when I was a young man; I do not know how old I was when I landed in this country, but I was a young man.

My father's name was Turner Benson, and my mother's name was Mary Benson; they lived in Alabama; they then moved to Arkansas and while they were living there I was in the Choctaw Nation working for an Indian named Joseph Everidge, I lived and worked for him for several years, he was not a full blood but a half breed Choctaw Indian and he surely was a good man to work for.

When the Dawes Commission was enrolling the Choctaws I went back to Arkansas and got my parents and moved them to the Nation where we expected to get on the Choctaw rolls as my grandfather was a Choctaw Indian. We tried to get on the rolls but the commission rejected us. If Grandfather

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had come over here I think that we could have gotten on the rolls as Choctaw Indians for my grandfather was a Choctaw Indian but on account of not having sufficient proof, we were rejected. The reason we came over here was to get on the Choctaw rolls. We have lived here ever since.

I located my parents near what is now known as Grant; we lived out in the country from Grant; we lived there for several years renting land from the Indians and farming their land; we paid them a third and a fourth of the crops we raised. We made lots of corn; we did not raise much cotton for it was too far to the gin where we could get our cotton ginned but we had some cattle, hogs and a few ponies, it was a great country to raise any stock a man wanted for the country was open and nobody bothered the stock at all at that time for there was fine grass and cane on the creeks, where the cattle got fat and did fine without feed.

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I came over on the train and no one came over with me, but when I went back and moved my father and mother, we came over in a covered wagon and located near Grant. Grant is near Red River and there used to be good many full bloods in the country then, and some few mixed breeds.

This part of the country was fine land; it was near Red River, and the land was fine but was not in cultivation like it is now. It was all in woods, mostly thickets at that time.

The Indians had only very little farms, about five to ten acres, but they would make enough corn to make their bread and that was about all they needed, then. I have seen the Indian women make meal out of corn by beating the corn in a block of wood with a hole on the end of it; they sure could make good meal and hominy.

I used to attend their meetings when they would camp and feed the people who came to attend the

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meeting; they would kill hogs and beef, and have plenty of the corn meal that they made and they would have hominy. They called the hominy, tanchiposhofa; it was corn boiled with hog bones cooked together and it was fine eating. They would hold the meeting about three days or four then they would break and go home and these meeting were held about four times a year. I used to help to wait on the table; when we got to the table to eat it would be about three o'clock and just as soon as we got through eating we would have to start to cooking again. This was kept up until the meeting was over; they certainly did have a great time at those meetings. This church was called Ellis Church; it was a Methodist Church; it was then a log house made of split logs; they then tore it down and built a house out of lumber; it is still there and it is still used as a church.

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Down in the bottoms and out on the hills there were lots of wild game, deer, turkeys, fish, and there were lots of ducks on the river and in the sluices and all the Indians had to do was to go out and kill what they wanted; they did not have a camping ground they did not have to go out camping to kill what they wanted. An Indian just had to get his gun on his shoulder and go out and he could kill a deer or a turkey in a little while.

I never saw any Indian war dances; I did hear of them having war dances but I never saw one. I used to see the Indians dance but it was called a square dance; they have quit that; they have had no dances for a long time.

I saw an Indian ball game once where they fought from the time they met until after the game. I do not think that they finished the game. They played all along; they would fight awhile, then would play ball awhile and when the sun went down, they finally quit and went home. They certainly did use those

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ball sticks in their fighting; there was no one killed but a good many were bruised up; they would drag the one that was hurt out and go right on with their ball-playing.

I was a deputy marshal for several years before statehood; we did not have much trouble with the Choctaw Indians; the most trouble we had was among the white people who came in to get out of the way of the officers from other states. Our nearest Federal Court was at Fort Smith, where we took our prisoners; we had to take them in wagons and we would put some twenty or thirty prisoners in this wagon, tie their feet together and handcuff them together and then start to Fort Smith with them. We did not lose any of them for we had them handcuffed to the wagon. At night, we would handcuff them to the wagon and one of us would sit up and guard them all night; it would take us several days to get to Fort Smith with our prisoners.

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Finally the United States Court at Paris took over a part of the jurisdiction that Fort Smith had had so we then took the prisoners to Paris, Texas where they were tried in that court. Some time in 1898, United States Court was established in Antlers; then we had to take our prisoners to the Atoka jail where they were held in safe-keeping until court was in session at Antlers; then we would bring them from Atoka to Antlers for their trial.

We never had any trouble with the Choctaw Indians, if we had a warrant for one of them, all we had to do was to send him word that we had a warrant for him and he must come in and he would come in and give himself up and make his bond and go back home.

The country was infested with white outlaws coming in from other states, so when the marshal went out after an outlaw he did not know whether he would "get" his man or the man would "get" him but

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the marshals were very lucky for not many were killed in this part of the country. Several outlaws were killed; they would rather be killed than give up to the officers. I have lived among the Choctaw Indians ever since I located here and have gotten <sup>acquainted</sup> with lots of the full bloods, but I never did have any trouble with any one of them. They are all good people and whatever they told you was true for they were honest in every way and all the Indians I came in contact with are my friends to this day.