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BLAND, JOHN

INTERVIEW

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Tribe-Wyandotte  
Indian Removal  
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School-Wyandotte Mission  
Ottawa Indians

Interview with John Bland  
Miami, Oklahoma Rt. #1  
Nannie Lee Burns, Interviewer.  
August 11, 1937.

I, John Bland, a Wyandotte by blood, was born February 24, 1867, eight miles west of Wyandotte, Kansas.

My mother, Eliza Armstrong, was born in Ohio, from whence her parents, the Armstrongs, came when the Wyandottes moved to eastern Kansas. My grandparents are buried in the Wyandotte Cemetery at Kansas City.

My father was John Bland, a white man, who met and married my mother while they were living in eastern Kansas. They continued to live about eight miles from what is now Kansas City. Mother went to school in Ohio and later attended the Shawnee Mission.

#### Removal to the Indian Territory.

In November of 1872, six covered wagons left their Kansas homes for the promised home in the Indian Country. My father had two wagons, my uncle, two wagons and a neighbor the other two. My father stopped just the other side of the Long's school House which is three miles south and one east of Ottawa, and rented a room for his family from old Henry Hicks till he could build a home.

South of Ottawa in the Wyandotte Country near the river, he built his family a home. The house was a single room of hewed logs, twenty foot square, and had windows of glass which came from Seneca, Missouri. He

also, that winter, made a log barn and a log chicken house and the following spring began the task of trying to support his family by farming. At first we did not have oil lights but used the grease lights and found that 'possum oil gave the best light. Here we children, five girls and two boys, grew up, (although I am the only one living now) lived, played and worked.

Father would send us to the Wyandotte Mission to school. At that time the Superintendent was Dr. Kirk. The food was plain and I never suffered for want of it but sometimes we had poor cooking.

My schooling there ended when I was mixed up in a gang fight and Fred Long broke a slate over my head.

#### Early Manhood.

My life was spent here but when I thought I was grown, I had a desire to be a cowboy and went to the mountains of Colorado in 1887 and remained there till December of 1888, when I was called home by the illness of my father, who died. So dreams thrust aside, I settled down at home to help my mother and remained at home till I married Allie Ormsbee, a white woman, born near Lincoln, Nebraska, June 17, 1872, and reared in Nebraska.

## Tribal Affairs

The young men of the Wyandottes were required to attend the councils and for many years I served as "Mosassin," my duty being to notify the members of the tribe of meetings and to carry messages. They have wanted me to run for chief but I never wanted to be chief but I am still a member of the business council, and we have had our disturbances during my time. One time Smith Nicho's got himself adopted into the Seneca tribe and he did it wanting to be made chief of our tribe. Hanna "Lac", a Wyandotte Indian, went to see him and was talking with him and he told her of his wishes and told her to tell John and Tom (My brother) to come to see him. He thought that we could help him, but he never became chief.

Oh yes, you remember Jerry Hubbard? He was the first man that ever whipped me. What for? When I was going to school at the Wyandotte Mission, one day I was chopping wood and had a fight with another boy there.

I never liked school very much, it seemed to me that they had favorites. I helped to build the first laundry buildings at the old Mission before it was moved on the hill and Mart Crotzer, who lives west of the mission, helped build the railroad through Wyandotte.

## Bland Cemetery

Mr. Bland, I have had so many different stories of the old Bland Cemetery. When did it start? "I do not think any one can say when. You know it was on my place, don't you?" Old Anthony Hatt a fullblood Wyandotte Indian, told me that there were graves there in the early part of the Civil War. When he first came to this country before that, there were six graves there that were piled over with rocks and no one knows whether they were Indians, Spaniards or who, and we have never known. I have at different times had persons come to my home and want me to show them the graves, and people have come from a distance and taken pictures of them and asked many questions, however we have never known any more about them and they are there today piled with the rocks, as they have been since I first saw the place.

That was the beginning and later after we Wyandottes came the graves already being there, several of the neighbors buried their people there and that is how it started. Today I should say there are one hundred graves on the two acres.

When I sold my place to Henry Witty, it was specified that he was not to plough over this section of the farm but

after he went there to live, he began to grumble about the waste land. Some of us who had folks there talked the matter over and finally decided to try to raise the money to buy the two acres from Witty, and a committee was appointed to raise the money. After five weeks they only had raised thirty dollars so I got into it and with the help of my old neighbors, the Dawsons, and others, raised the money.

We purchased the two acres from him and it is held for cemetery purposes. Since the roads are put on section lines, it is not so easy to get to it and no care has been given to it for many years. Oh, occasionally some of us get together and do a little weed cutting, but I mean no regular care is given to it. My parents, the Dawsons, and quite a number of the older people are buried there, but of late years few except those whose folks are there take any thought of it.

#### Dan Clay's Early Life

Dan Clay's parents were Ottawa Indians. His father was married three times and Mary, his second wife, was the mother of Dan. He had two half brothers and four half sisters. The Clay home at that time

was one mile south and one half mile east of Ottawa, where Roy Davis now lives. Dan was sent to school and in his teens was at Carlisle University and, growing tired of school, ran away and came home. He was afraid that they would come after him from there, and so he began hiding in the neighborhood. He and Lewis King, the son of Joseph King, were close friends and he stayed at the King home much of the time. In the daytime, he would stay around a cave just back of the King home, and Lewis saw that he had something to eat. He would sleep with Lewis at their home at night, oftentimes in the King barn, which was a fine one. He would go on the quiet to visit his friends among the Ouspaws and often borrow a horse of them.

Sometimes if he wanted a horse to use and if they did not happen to be at home, he might ride one of the horses but he would return it later. This practice led to the story that he was stealing horses and hiding out. One day I was tearing down an old log house for a neighbor, named Zane, when Dan came up to the place where I was and I got to talking to the boy. He seemed worried and I finally got him to tell me why and he said that he was accused of robbing two men. I said to him, "Dan did you do it? Tell me if you did." He replied that he did not. I then told him that he was an Indian and entitled to protection and advised him to go to the Indian Agent but he seemed averse to this so I

suggested that he go to Baxter Springs to the United States Marshal, who was a friend of mine. He did, and the man took him to Muskogee, kept him a while and then brought him back to Miami. Dan stayed around there awhile till he grew tired and just walked away from them. Later a Marshal who knew him met him and started to shake hands with him. When he took his hand the Marshal intended to hold him and Dan struck him over the head with a gun and left. After this he stayed among his friends here and to our knowledge never did any of the robbing and stealing of horses of which he was accused. I know that my friend, old Joe King, the father of Lewis, had enough faith in the boy that after he came back from school, and while he was with Lewis, offered to send him to Canada to his mother's people if he would go. The boy told him that he had not done anything and was not going to be run out.

The next affair was when he was shot on the road by Lewis and Teel, officers from Miami. I never could understand why they should kill him for after they had shot him, they did not know who he was, so they waited there till persons came along the road who knew him, and could identify him. Jerry Hubbard knew him when he came along and when they asked him if he knew the man, he said, "Why, it is Dan Clay." Also Ben Grove identified him. He was then brought

to Miami where he finally died but Mr. Bland tells me that he did not die for some time, not until after he had had a long talk with Lewis King, his friend.

(Refer here to the script by Jane Edwards an Ottawa for other details).

Here I am inserting a bit told me by Mrs. Annie King, the wife of Joseph and the step-mother of Lewis.

Dave Geboe, Dan and my son, Lewis, were pals. Dave was an orphan and I kept his sister much of the time and he stayed with us a great deal of the time when he was out of school. The boys would drink some but never did anything or disturbed anyone.

My son, Lewis, was always ready to help anyone to go for the doctor, get medicine which oftentimes his father would fix, and so Lewis was nicknamed "Dr. King." He had a blooded horse and he surely used it going places for the other fellow, getting caskets, etc.

Just after Dan's death, John Lane, who was a peace officer and who had a ferry boat near Wyandotte, came to our house and ate dinner with us. Afterwards my husband asked me to fix him a lunch to take with him. After I gave him the lunch, he turned and arrested Lewis for being drunk and took him to Muskogee. Just at that time we were short of money and we dug up and sold our last bushel of potatoes to raise money to board him while there, so he would not

have to stay in jail.

After he was freed and returned home, he felt the injustice of it, and the treatment of Dan. He left home and went to Colorado and joined a construction gang where two years later he was killed by his own train at Tennessee Pass, near Leadville. It was a blow to us for he had written that he was coming home on a visit and Pa had bought a new buggy and the girls and I had set aside every exceptionally nice glass of jelly and everything else saying "that is for Lewis."

He came about the time we expected him, but in his casket. I am an old woman and I can't see the reason for somethings. There's Dan driven to trouble and Lewis trying to keep out of it, both dead. Once I remember a friend of his stole from Lewis a fifty dollar set of harness and Lewis left home to keep from appearing against him.

#### Other Items

Here I asked Mr. Bland if he had any articles of value and he continued, "Jim Bigbone used to make Indian jewelry. He made me a big silver ring in the shape of a large heart. I gave him two biscuits, butter and jelly for it. Henry Stang tried to buy it from me but I told him my souaw had wished it on my finger. Someone finally did get it. I had an Apache pouch and pipe, also a valuable pair of moccasins but some of the children now have them.

Did you ever kill a deer? I shot at one in Judeater Bend two or three times and later Alfred Judeater shot at it and we found it later near the spring; I think my shot killed it.

#### Later Life

After we sold our home we moved to the Judeater Bend and lived some years, when my wife went blind. So during the years that followed I spent my money with the various doctors and finally one at Fort Scott was able to restore her sight. We have raised our family of one boy and seven girls. Five of the girls are still living and Mother and I do not have much left, but she has her sight back and we are happy together.