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

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Field Worker's name Marvin G. Rowley,This report made on (date) June 1 _____ 19371. Name Robert Lee Kersey2. Post Office Address Poteau, Oklahoma route 1.3. Residence address (or location) North of Poteau on Highway 271.4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month June Day 4 Year 18705. Place of birth Marian County, Arkansas6. Name of Father Henry Kersey Place of birth Tennessee

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Sarah Payne Place of birth Tennessee

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 6.

Marvin G. Rowley, Field Worker,
Indian Pioneer History, S-149,
June 1, 1937

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INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT
LEE KERSEY, CHEROKEE.

My name is Robert Lee Kersey and I am one-eighth Cherokee Indian. I was born in Marian County, Arkansas, on June 4, 1870. My father was Henry Kersey, who was born in Tennessee and died August 19, 1904. My mother was Sarah Payne, born in Tennessee and died February 7, 1902.

January 10, 1880, our family settled about two miles west of Hackett City on the west side of the Indian Territory line. I went to school at a subscription school costing one dollar per month. The teacher's name was Jim Reamer. The school-house was a box house with puncheon floors, made of slabs, split off of logs and laid as boards. We had split log benches to sit on, without backs to lean against. The logs were split in half and holes bored in the rounding part for the legs to be set in. The windows just had plank shutters without any glass

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panes in them. In fact, I never looked through a window glass until I was nearly grown.

Nearly all the children who went to this school were whites. The name of the school was Walnut Grove.

We moved on November 5, 1890, to the Cherokee Nation, close to Briartown, about two miles north of this place. Our house was a chinked and daubed house of logs. It had clay and sage grass in the cracks.

We next moved November 6, 1891, about two miles northwest of Cameron.

I met and married Ann Brow at Cameron. John Maynard was the preacher who married us.

Some of the Choctaws lived in wigwams made of poles. These covered a circle with a diameter of about ten or twelve feet. Big poles about five or six inches in diameter at the bottom were put together in a cone-shaped circle. In between these large poles, smaller poles were put to fill up the

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spaces, then the whole frame-work was covered with a clay and sage grass mixture and allowed to harden, making it water proof. Of course all of the Indians did not live in these wigwams, some living in houses just like the whites did. A person could get out in the back-woods country and find pretty crude Indians, as he can find the same class of whites now. These wigwams had a packed dirt floor.

The men wore pants like the whites did and moccasins; also they had a red blanket they wore over their shoulders. Their women wore red shawls.

The Indians who did not have a saddle would tie a blanket with rawhide on their horses they rode, or a bunch of furs in the place of a saddle. They would make a loop of rawhide on each side for stirrups. Whenever some of the full-bloods would go to tie their horses, they would take one end of the rope and tie it to the neck of the horse and the other end.

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to a tree or post. The funny thing about it was, if they had a rope five feet long, it was all right; or if they had a rope thirty-five feet long, they still tied it at the end of the rope.

When I lived near Cameron, I used to haul cord wood with oxen to the gin of Bill Lewis and Gran Palmer, who were partners in this ginning business, at Cameron.

Hay Ford was a river crossing on the Poteau River about two miles east of Panama, Oklahoma.

I used to play Indian ball with the Indians. It was really exciting and got pretty rough at times, when some of them were drinking, especially.

The names of the Indians' political parties were Progressive and National.

Levi James, a full-blood, shot and killed Isaac Fulsom, another full-blood Choctaw Indian. This happened in a drunken quarrel. Levi was a mean Indian, and he used to run his wife around the house on his horse and whip her with a horse-

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whip. He did many things when he was drinking. I heard his trial over this shooting of Isaac Fulsom. It was held at the Skullyville Courthouse. I think Jeff Ward was the Judge then and Jim Darnell was the Indian Police. Levi James was sentenced to be shot in two or three months after the trial was over. When the time came, he appeared at the court house. A blanket was spread out on the ground and Levi was carried to the blanket and sat down on it. Levi James was a cripple. He could not walk a step and he had been in this condition as long as I could remember. He may have been born this way. After he was set on the blanket, a red piece of cloth was pinned over his heart. There were three men to do the shooting, just one having a gun loaded with a real bullet, the other two having blank shells. They all shot at the same time and no one knew which one did the actual killing.

Fulsom was what was called a "Red Indian."

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There were what were then called two different kinds of Indians. Some of the full-bloods, who were not so dark, that is not much darker than some of the whites, were always called "Red Indians." The others were known as "Black Indians."

A man by the name of Mat Couch got out a warrant for Floyd Simpson, a boy, for disturbing public worship at the Walnut Grove Church. He got this warrant at the U. S. Court at Cameron. Bud Hill was Chief Marshal and Boley Grady was his Deputy. Grady walked up to the Simpson boy, who was standing about forty yards from where the preaching was taking place. Grady said, "I have a writ for you," The boy tried to jerk his arm away and then Grady took his gun and hit him in the head several times. The boy's mother called to Jasper Simpson, her husband, that they were beating up the boy and were about to kill him. Simpson came up and shot Grady in the back of the neck with a .38 pistol; then someone yelled "Look out be-

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hind you for Hill." Simpson turned around and shot Hill. Grady died where he fell, Hill lived long enough to ask for a drink of water. Simpson left and was out on the scout for about six years, then came back and stood trial at McAlester, coming clear.

The Choctaw Indian Militia, in 1882, ran the whites out of the Indian Territory; that is, until they paid a permit fee to live there. Some of the influential whites talked to the Choctaws who were very powerful in the Tribe and got them to quiet things down. I was run out, too. We had to get across the Arkansas line and wait for things to be settled and quiet down, as lots of ill feeling existed. We did not move everything, just what we needed worst. We were out of the Indian Territory about thirty days, I think. We lived on a farm that belonged to Bill Fulsom, a full-blood Choctaw about three-fourths of a mile west of Jenson, Arkansas. The line between the Indian Territory and Arkansas ran down the Main street then.

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Where Cameron is now was then called Riddle Prairie. I have cut and hauled many loads of hay to Hartford, Arkansas, off of this prairie and now it will hardly grow Ragweed. This was in 1885.

The Choctaws did not raise much in fields, but the women raised small Tom Fuller corn patches. The Indians went in more for hogs, cattle and horses, than for grain.

The Choctaws did not have much tobacco or whiskey, but they liked both very well and would do most anything to get either, especially whiskey.

At one time Tom McMurtrey, a full-blood Choctaw, Tal Fields, Burt Brown, and I hauled whiskey into the Indian Territory to give to the Choctaws, to buy their good will so we could bring cattle in from Hackett, Arkansas, to graze. We made lots of money at this.