

TIGER, LENA BENSON.

INTERVIEW

13336

59

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

TIGER, LENA BENSON

INTERVIEW

1336

Field Worker's name Mary D. Dorward

This report made on (date) March 15-16 1938

- 1. Name Lena Benson Tiger,
- 2. Post Office Address 417 West 7th Street,
- 3. Residence address (or location) Tulsa, Oklahoma.
- 4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month January Day 14 Year 1875
- 5. Place of birth Wetumka, Indian Territory.

6. Name of Father David Benson Place of birth \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other information about father Creek Indian

7. Name of Mother Louise English Benson Place of birth Indian Territ  
 Other information about mother Creek Indian

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 10.

TIGER, LENA BENSON

INTERVIEW

13336

Mary D. Dorward,  
Investigator,  
March 15, 1938.

An Interview with Lena Benson Tiger,  
(Mrs. Johnson Tiger),  
417 West 7th Street,  
Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Lena Benson Tiger, Creek Indian, wife of Johnson E. Tiger, also Creek Indian, was born in Wetumka, Indian Territory, January 14, 1875. The daughter of David Benson and Louise English Benson, both now deceased, she was educated at the Baptist Mission School at Wetumka, at Denton Normal School at Denton, Texas, and at the Baptist University at Ottawa, Kansas.

Mrs. Tiger taught in a neighborhood school near Wetumka, receiving forty dollars per month for her services. She "batched" in a log cabin which stood in the schoolhouse yard, right on the road. Frequently her younger sister stayed with her for company. She would sometimes waken in the night, frightened at the sound of someone passing on horseback, but she was never molested. Later Mrs. Tiger taught in the school at Wetumka after it had been taken over by the Government and was no longer under the Baptist

TIGER, LENA BENSON

INTERVIEW

13336

-2-

missions. One time, the year of Mrs. Tiger's marriage in 1900, an epidemic of scarlet fever broke out in the school. Mrs. Tiger had been chosen sponsor for the Confederate Reunion at Louisville, Kentucky, and was to have gone to Louisville in May but was prevented by the epidemic. The clothes which she was having made for the reunion she used as her trousseau. Her marriage to Johnson E. Tiger occurred in 1900.

Mrs. Tiger belongs to the bird clan of the Creek Indians, and to the Che-ya-hah town. Mr. Tiger belonged to the alligator clan of Creeks and to the Deep-Fork Eufaula town. Eufaula town was divided into two divisions; Eufaula and Eufaula Deep-Fork.

After her marriage Mrs. Tiger taught in the Creek Orphans' Home, which was about one mile east of Okmulgee.

Johnson E. Tiger was a son of Moty Tiger, one-time chief of the Creek Nation. He graduated from Bacone College in 1885, when it was still a university. At one time he was private secretary to Pleasant Porter, Principal Chief of the Creeks. For this Mr. Tiger received five hundred dollars

TIGER, IENA BENSON

INTERVIEW

13336

-3-

annually. After his marriage he became superintendent of the Creek Orphans' Home east of Okmulgee.

Johnson Tiger served as interpreter for the Creeks in the courts and was considered the best interpreter in the Creek Nation. He used to receive as much as twenty-five dollars a day for his services as interpreter, especially in cases involving some of the large oil companies.

He was for many years presiding elder of the Creek Methodist Church and was active in church affairs until his death, June 16, 1936.

Mrs. Tiger's mother, known as Louise English before her marriage, never knew what her rightful name was, English being the name of her stepfather. Her own father, a Frenchman, had married Louise's mother before the removal from Alabama, but for some reason was not permitted by the Government to accompany the tribes across the Mississippi. Louise was not as yet born at the time of the removal, but her father plead with his wife to remain with him, at least until the child should be born. The wife, however, would not be separated from her people, so, in

TIGER, LENA BENSON

INTERVIEW

13336

-4-

spite of her husband's pleading, they separated forever at the Mississippi.

Afterward, some time after the tribes had been settled in the Territory, Louise's mother heard in a roundabout way that a letter containing money, presumably from her husband, had been received at Fort Gibson, but by the time word had reached her it had been so long after the letter had been received that it had had to be returned to the sender, or Dead Letter Office, before she could get to Fort Gibson.

Louise was educated at Asbury Manual School near Muskogee and then before her marriage she taught in a neighborhood school.

Mrs. Benson often had to stay alone with her children while her husband went to market. Dick Glass, a notorious outlaw, used often to see her light and knew her to be all alone with her little ones, but he remarked to someone, "I wouldn't think of harming her, alone there with her children."

During the Civil War Mrs. Benson's stepfather sympathized with the South. Her brothers were in sympathy with the North

TIGER, LENA BENSON

INTERVIEW

13336

-5-

and went north, probably to Kansas with the Creeks, and died there.

Wetumka, where Mrs. Tiger spent her girlhood, was just a little country town with two stores, one of which was owned by her father, David Benson. His store was also a trading post. The other store was owned by a man named Thomas H. Scales, who also had the post office.

The town was named by Mr. Benson for a town in Alabama. The word Wetumka in the Creek language means flying water. At the time Mrs. Tiger lived there Wetumka was about one mile east of its present townsite, the move having been made when the railroad came through.

Mrs. Tiger recalls that in those days game was greatly abundant in the vicinity of Wetumka. Prairie birds literally covered the prairies west of Wetumka. There were great numbers of quail and deer also. She has seen her brothers go out and bring in a deer many a time. She remembers one time when early in the morning an old man came into her father's store with fresh venison to sell him.

The old whipping post still stands just outside Wetumka.

TIGER, LENA BENSON

INTERVIEW

13336

-6-

Before Statehood Wetumka was a county seat, but after Statehood the courthouse was moved to the new town and whether still standing or not Mrs. Tiger does not know. Before the coming of the railroad mail was brought to Wetumka by stage from Eufaula, coming only every other day.

The little church built by Moty Tiger still stands about a mile west of the old Tiger farm, and is known as the Honey Creek Church. When Moty Tiger was building the church, which stands close to a creek, a tree which was cut for the church fell across the creek and honey from a beehive in the tree ran out into the water. Because of that Moty Tiger said, "We'll just call this church, Honeycreek Church," and the name has always stuck to it.

Camp meetings were frequently held in the little church, music being furnished by an old man, John Coffey, who played an accordian while the congregation sang.

#### INDIAN WARS.

Mrs. Tiger recalls the Isparhechâr or Green Peach War which occurred when she was a child. The night before

TIGER, LENA BENSON

INTERVIEW

13336

-7-

the worst scrimmage the forces of Isparhechar camped near her father's store which was not far from the Benson residence. She recalls the leader haranguing his men to "be brave and do your duty", but whether or not this leader was Isparhechar himself Mrs. Tiger does not recall. The next day she stood and watched the little band depart, each on a pony and riding off two by two into the prairie.

That evening Mr. Benson, somewhat uneasy as to the safety of his family, said, "We better go south," and south they went across the Canadian River. Mr. Benson hitched his team to the covered wagon, which he had stocked with provisions, and in it he placed his wife and children, while he rode horseback alongside the wagon. They stayed away about two weeks, then returned without having been harmed in any way.

The Snake uprising came after Mrs. Tiger's marriage. Her husband, Johnson Tiger, was interpreter for the United States Government forces and was away with them for several weeks. Old Crazy Snake, Chitto Harjo, died a few weeks after the uprising was put down. He died and was buried among the

TIGER, LENA BENSON

INTERVIEW

13336

-8-

Choctaws in the Kiamichi Mountains.

Mrs. Tiger never attended any of the Indian ceremon-  
ials. They were not attended by Christians. There was  
much drunkenness and many people of a rough character  
were there and Mrs. Benson did not permit her children to  
attend them.

Members of the Dawes Commission stayed with the Benson  
family when enrolling the Indians. The Bensons maintained  
a kind of hotel for the accommodation of travelers, since  
there was no other hotel of any kind nearby. Among the  
members of the Commission staying at the Benson home were  
men by the name of Bixby, Cannon, and Hopkins, there being  
about five in all.

The old Chisholm Trail crossed the Moty Tiger farm,  
which was about nine or ten miles southwest of Okmulgee.  
The trail went southwest to northeast and is still quite  
distinct, having deep gullies in many places.

Mrs. Tiger and her husband both were well acquainted  
with the late Alec Posey, poet of the Creeks. She has a

TIGER, LENA BENSON

INTERVIEW

13336

-9-

copy of his poems, presented to her by Alec Posey's wife.

Mrs. Tiger has the following books all in the Creek language: a Bible, religious tracts, first and second readers, dictionary of Creek and English, and a song book, the songs of which her husband, Johnson Tiger, helped to translate.

#### RECIPES FOR INDIAN COOKING.

##### Apuskey (Cold Flour)

Take roasting ears when nearly hard and can be shelled, mix with clean wood ashes and parch to a light golden brown. Sift and clean with cheesecloth or canvas; it is then ready to be pounded into meal or flour with the mortar and pestle by the use of the sieve. Put a tablespoonful of this meal in a large glass of water, adding sugar if desired, and ice if a cold drink is desired. It beats any fountain drink.

##### Char-tar-haka (Blue Dumplings)

Take shelled white corn, treat it with wood ashes or lye as for hominy. Wash it clean, pound it into meal in a mortar with pestle, or have ground into meal the modern way,

TIGER, LENA BENSON

INTERVIEW.

13336

-10-

As it is being pulverized shake into it a little coloring to give it the desired color and flavor. A sieve is used when pounding it. The meal being ready take boiling water and stir it into a stiff batter with a spoon, roll into small balls with the hand. Drop into a pot of boiling water and let cook twenty or thirty minutes. Be sure to have plenty of water. Stir with wooden spoon after they have cooked long enough to avoid mashing up.

Coloring is made from clean bean shells or corn cobs burned in an iron pot. The ashes are then kept in a bottle or can and used as needed.

Blue dumpling is eaten as bread and will keep for days without getting stale, when heated in hot water or sliced and fried. This meal can be baked and its flavor is better.