

DWIGHT, BEN.

INTERVIEW

10293

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BIOGRAPHY FORM

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

DWIGHT, BEN

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Field Worker's name Amelia F. Harris

This report made on (date) March 23

1938

1. Name Honorable Ben Dwight

2. Post Office Address Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 5th Floor Key Building

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month November Day 24 Year 1890

5. Place of birth Old Mayhew (Now Boswell)

6. Name of Father Simon T. Dwight Place of birth Choctaw Nation

Other information about father Full blood Choctaw

7. Name of Mother Janey Hunter Dwight Place of birth Mayhew,
Choctaw Nation

Other information about mother One-half blood Choctaw

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 5

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Amelia F. Harris
Journalist
March 23, 1938.

Interview with Honorable Ben Dwight
5th Floor Key Building, Oklahoma City.

My great grandparents sold their possessions back in Mississippi to the Government and came with the Indians to the Territory in 1832. They took up their residence near Skullyville and began their home-making with a skillet, an ax, a pig and a sled and immediately set about improving their land. They first ran a furrow around eighty acres of fine land, then later they took up more as the Indians could hold more land during Indian Territory days. Their first home was a double log house, located near a big spring of water which formed a small running branch; this is true to the Indian custom to select a home site near water. There was an old family graveyard about a quarter of a mile from their house which is about eighty-five years old. My great grandparents, their children and many of the grandchildren are buried here. This was also a custom among all Indians to have their own burial ground near their homes. My uncle, Judge Tom Hunter, raised a full blood Choctaw boy, Henry Wilson, who allotted my maternal grandfather's old home place

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which includes this old burial ground.

Mother was one-half blood Choctaw and her education was attained at Tuskahoma and Caddo.

My great Grandfather and Grandmother Dwight lived on their farm near Mayhew (Boswell). They were full blood Choctaws from Mississippi and they, too, had their own family burial ground.

When Grandfather Dwight grew to manhood he took his land near Pigeon Roost, Jackson County, Choctaw Nation, at which place my father was born and grew to manhood. He attended the neighborhood schools until he was ten years old, then attended Spencer Academy six years and after finishing here he was sent to Center College, Danville, Kentucky, from which school he was graduated with honors finishing at the age of twenty-one. In 1886 he was elected representative of Jackson County and held this position until 1888.

In 1889 Father was married to Miss Janey Hunter and they established their home near Grandmother Hunter near Mayhew post office and Father was active in farming and stock raising.

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I was born here and we lived for fifteen years in this vicinity.

In the little town of Mayhew at the courthouse grounds stood an old whipping tree where the guilty were whipped for minor crimes and as a child I had a horror of that old tree and was afraid to go near it.

My uncle, Edwin Dwight, was sheriff before statehood and he administered many of these whippings and used to tell us children about whipping with rawhides which often brought the blood.

I went to school for four years at Armstrong Academy during which time Father died in 1901.

In 1903 Mother was married to U. C. King and they moved to Durant and bought and managed the Atwood Hotel and I was sent to Honey Grove, Texas, where I attended high school until I finished. I then went to the University of Michigan for one year after which I spent four years at Columbia University graduating with an A. B. degree. I then returned home and attended Oklahoma University one year, then one year at Stanford University, finishing there with Juris Doctor Degree.

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My people were not very superstitious, and if there were any legends in the family they never told them.

I never attended an Indian dance or Indian cry, but I did attend an Indian ball game between Jackson and Blue Counties in which Jackson County lost. This was a hard fought game and the players were very rough with their ball sticks.

I knew a few of the Snake Indians; Solomon and Able Belvin and Chitto Harjo who lived about nine miles southwest of Boswell with a full blood Choctaw friend of his, Daniel Bilbo. This was after the Snake uprising in the Creek Nation. These Indians didn't mix much with the other tribes, they were extremely full blood and always maintained a hostile attitude toward statehood. The Snake Indians were non-progressive and many had to be forceably allotted. Chitto died in the Choctaw Nation.

I was appointed Principal Chief of the Choctaws by President Hoover in 1930 and kept this appointment until 1936, when I resigned to accept my present position as

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organization field agent in the Department of Interior, Indian Service.

During my six years of service as chief of the Choctaws I did everything possible for the advancement of my people. I got as many Indians in public service as I could, I collected all back royalties on coal lands and collected practically all past due money from segregated surface sales and timber lands from the bondsman of leases and from the lease district court of Claims. This money went into the General Funds of Tribal business funds used to readjust contract schools.

We have a combination where Indian girls finishing high school can live at the Presbyterian College Dormitory at Durant and attend the Southeastern Normal through tribal funds. Through the collection of the funds I assisted the schools at Goodland, St. Agnes Academy at Antlers and St. Elizabeth Academy, Purcell.

I am very proud of the Indian health facilities. I started the project for a \$1,000,000 Hospital at Talihina where seventy-five per cent of the help used on this building are Indians. I am still working for the betterment of my people, the Indians.