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BATTIST, HENRY INTERVIEW

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FIELD WORKER. JOHNSON H. HAMPTON
Indian-Pioneer History Project S-419
September 20, 1937.

INTERVIEW WITH HENRY BATTIEST,
Antlers, Oklahoma
Born September 16, 1873, near Antlers.

Father's name Jack Battiest.
Mother's name Jane Battiest.

I was born September 16, 1873, in Kiamichi County, Choctaw Nation, south of Antlers, what is now Pushmataha County. At the time I was born this country where we lived was a wild country, no one lived in there but a few full bloods and a few negroes.

My father's name was Jack Battiest and my mother's name was Jane Battiest. My father was raised in this country and lived and died in this country, but my mother came from the Cherokee Nation during the war and moved to this country, and has since lived here. She is still living. She is about one hundred years old or over. Some say that she is one hundred and five years old but she does not know, and I don't think there is any one that could tell just what her age is. She was a slave with her parents, and owned by an Indian Cherokee, by the name of John Lowery,

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some time during the war mother moved to this country, married here and never did go back to the Cherokee country.

My father, Jack Battiest, was an Indian but my mother was not. She was a negro woman that this Indian married when she landed in this country, so when the Dawes Commission came down to this country to enroll the Choctaws I came to enroll with them as my father was an Indian, but the Dawes Commission did not put me on the rolls as a Choctaw Indian but put me on the rolls as a Freedman, so I selected forty acres of land as a Freedman.

When I was a boy we had a small farm that we farmed. We made corn—that was about all we raised, there were no gins in the country so we did not raise but very little cotton, that was for our home use in making quilts and the like. This country then was a fine country, plenty of grass in the woods. It was high as a man's head all over the country. The cattle grazed out on the range, no wire fences to bother them. The country was an open country.

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We traded mostly at Paris, Texas. Then when the Frisco Railroad came through this country about 1887 or 1888 we traded at Antlers, Oklahoma. It was a very small town then. We would dig snake-root and sell them to the merchants. They would give us 30¢ to 40¢ per pound for the snake-roots and blackroots. They did not give us much for the blackroots but we had to dig them and sell them to get flour, sugar and coffee. We had plenty of corn for our bread and plenty of meats but we could not buy the flour and other things, so we had to dig these roots and sell them for the things we wanted.

We had cattle, hogs and a few ponies. We did not have much stock but had enough for our use. The stock ran out on the range. We did not have to feed them during the winter. The Choctaws had good many cattle, hogs and ponies; in fact there were some Indians that had lots of stock. They could not sell them for anything much so they just kept them and raised them. They did not have to feed them anyway during the winter so they just let them go and run out on the range.

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Mother had a spinning wheel she used. She would spin the cotton we raised and make threads out of them; then she would take the thread and make socks and mittens for us, and she would sell some of them. She would dye them with some roots but I don't know what they were. She can tell what they were I guess if she has not forgotten. She never made any cloths, but we had one in the community that did make them, but I don't know how she made them for I never saw her.

Back in those days nearly all of the Choctaws used to carry pistol of some kind on their saddles. They were not bad to fight with them. They did not bother anybody only among themselves. They would kill one another once in a while, but they did not bother us negroes and they did not bother the white people that lived here then. They were not many white people in the country then. What few there were lived in town or around sawmills. They did not live out the the country then but they finally did come out in the country on the farm.

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There were a bunch of us negroes lived out about twelve miles from Antlers near what is known as Beaver Dam. This creek is a small stream, it is called Beaver Creek. The beavers a long time ago built some dams across this creek. They tell me that there used to be lots of beavers on this creek at the time, and this dam is out about twelve miles southeast of Antlers. There is a little sign left yet where the beavers built this dam, so we negroes are known as Beaver Dam negroes. What negroes that lived out there are mostly Choctaw Freedmen who allowed land out in that part of the country. There used to be good many negroes there then but they have all died out and there are just a few left to tell the tale.

The Choctaw Court ground was between the two Boggys, Clear Boggy and Muddy Boggy. They finally moved this court ground to Mayhew just before Statehood. They held a few court terms before the Federal Government, took the jurisdiction of the Choctaw Court. Under the Choctaw laws the offender would get thirty-nine lashes on his bare back for small^a offense, but for stealing a horse he would get one hundred lashes

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on his bare back. There were not many Indian got whippings for they all obeyed the law pretty well. One time they whipped a negro Indian. He was not a full-blood negro but mixed with Choctaw blood so they got him up for stealing hogs and he got thirty-nine lashes on his bare back. I think that he was the only negro got whipped by that court.

Out near where I live there used to be a tanyard where some man tanned hides. It is still called Tanyard but there is nothing there to show that there was a tanyard out there. I never saw him tan any hides but I have been told that hides were tanned there, by whom, I don't know. I used to attend Choctaw Camp Meeting. They had a church out near where I lived so I would go and attend the meeting. They would kill beef and hogs, get everything ready then they would go to the church house and camp there. They would feed everybody that came there to attend the meeting. There used to be a good many Indians attend the meeting, and I have attended the cries. They would have their cries at the church house or at the grave where

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the body is buried. They would kill hogs and beef and get all the bread-stuff ready, then they would get out and notify the people that they were going to have the cry on a certain date. When the date arrived they then would come and camp at the place, stay all night, then at about eleven o'clock they would preach his memorial. They would eat their dinner and go home. When they get at the grave all his friend and kinfolks would gather around the grave and cry. That is what the white people call crying, and it is, but it seems that they just making fun out of it when the Indians are very solemn about it.

The Choctaws had one Principal chief that they elected by their votes, and then they elected three District Chiefs in each district. The Nation was divided in three district and each district had a chief. The District Chiefs then would appoint their Lighthorsemen. They appointed as many as they wanted. The Lighthorseman would serve without pay. The District Chief got \$25.00 for his services.

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I went to school at Atoka for three terms and then I went to a neighborhood school for two terms, I did not learn much but I guess that ^Iwill get by with what I got, for I don't think that I will stay here very much longer any way.

I am now living about twelve miles southeast of Antlers.

EDITOR'S NOTE: (The Interviewer is a full-blood Indian and the wording is left practically the same as submitted in order to retain the "color" of the story).