

PATE, GEORGE WASHINGTON

INTERVIEW

5853

~~BIOGRAPHY FORM~~
~~WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION~~
 INTERVIEW
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 PATE, GEORGE WASHINGTON
 Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name Bradley Bolinger,
 Report made on (date) May 18, 1937

Name George Washington Pate,
 Post Office Address Panola, Oklahoma
 Residence address (or location) 1 mile south of Panola Post Office
 DATE OF BIRTH: Month September Day 20 Year 1864
 Place of birth Tuscaloosa County, Alabama.

Name of Father Henry Jefferson Pate Place of birth Tuscaloosa County, Alabama
 Other information about father _____
 Name of Mother Sibbie Melissa Pate Place of birth Tuscaloosa County, Alabama
 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 7.

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Bradley Bolinger,
Interviewer,
May 18, 1932.

An Interview with Mr. George
Washington Pate, (age 73)
Panola, Oklahoma.

Lived in this county since he was
about six years of age.

I was born in Tuskaloosa County, Alabama. My father, Henry Jefferson Pate, and my mother, Sibbie Malissa Pate, were born in Tuskaloosa County, Alabama. My mother died at the age of seventy-four and father and she were both buried in Baldwin Cemetery, in the southeast part of what is now Latimer County.

I was moved with my father and mother from Alabama to the Indian Territory in the year of 1868. We traveled all the way from Alabama to the Territory in an ox wagon. We had a very large home-made wagon with everything we possessed in it and two pair of oxen hitched to it. We were five months making this trip from Alabama to the Territory. We camped along the road when night came, especially when we came across a good place to graze our ox team and where there was plenty of good water.

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The Government moved the Choctaw Tribe from the south some time before the Civil War. They were scattered around over this country living in cabins and in settlements.

There were hardly any white settlers living in this country when I moved here. There were no roads went ~~except one which/through this country and that was built~~ by the soldiers at that time stationed at Fort Smith.

Fort Smith, in the days when we moved to this country, was a very small town. There was the United States fort there and a trading post or two. The Government kept soldiers in this fort for the purpose of protecting the Five Civilized Tribes who had moved from the south to this country as West Texas and Western Oklahoma had other tribes of Indians who were continually on the warpath. There were several out-posts located throughout this Indian country.

When we first moved to the Territory we had to make a trip to Fort Smith when we needed supplies. We would travel on this road made through the country by the soldiers in an ox team and wagon on our way to Fort Smith.

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and it would take us about a week to make the round trip.

The Choctaws, when they were first moved to this country just settled down on patches of land which did not require very much clearing, and built a cabin. They were peaceable in those days, However, in my experience with them they were not inclined to be what you would call neighborly. They seemed to want to let you alone wanted and/you to let them alone.

The Indian men were not inclined to do any of the work. They did not try to do any farming. They only raised what they called a Tom Fuller patch, a kind of corn which they used in preparing what they called Tom Fuller Pashofa. All of this little crop was raised by the Indian women. The women worked this crop and gathered it and fixed wooden blocks with a hole burned in the middle of the block so the corn could be beaten for food. All the cooking and all the work was done by the women. The Indian men did not seem to take any responsibility/ ^{except} in doing the hunting.

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The Choctaws when they first came to this country, did not have a community burial ground. When a member of their family died he was buried in the yard or under the floor of their cabin. Later, when the white settlers began to come to this country they picked places where they buried all their dead. Then the Indians chose graveyards and they built log houses over each grave and buried all of each Indian's personal ornaments with him. Many of these Choctaws were then buried at a place in this county called Degnon, and also at Salonia.

My experience with Choctaws was that they were more or less religious. I am unable to say ^{to} just what denomination they adhered but at least once a year, and sometimes more often than that, they would all gather in the yard of an old church house and where their dead were buried and have great meetings which would last for as long as a week at a time. They would all get together and have their services and gather around the graves of their dead, and have what they called Indian Cries.

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About all the sport I ever saw the Choctaws have was in what was called the Indian Ball game, played with two sticks that had been cut while they were green and had a sort of a cupped place at the one end. They were a very attractive instrument of the game as they were trimmed and laced with deer hide, strings and all. Then they would have what they called the stomp dance, which would last sometimes all day and night.

As best I remember, directly after I was moved to this country a Choctaw Indian by the name of Green McCurtain, who had been educated before he was moved from the south to this country, was made Governor of the Choctaws, and later I remember his son was made the Governor. These McCurtains were pretty well liked by the entire tribe.

In the days when the Government made the Indians in this country a payment every three months at what was then called Sullyville, by the Indians, they did quite a bit of celebrating. They would gather there for their pay, and of course every Indian was looking for

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some whiskey to drink and some of the white men from Fort Smith generally made it a point to let them have plenty during the days that they were to get paid. However, this was watched closely and they were fairly well controlled.

I can remember when they would start for home after this payment. They were a noisy bunch and traveled in large groups on their way home. However, as the white settlers were very scarce in the Territory in those days there was no one to be disturbed and after the soldiers out of Fort Smith started them on their way home it did not make much difference how they behaved.

The white man's law when I was a young man growing up in this country had nothing to do with what ^{the} Choctaw Indian did. The white law took no part in their affairs. They had a Choctaw governor, Choctaw peace officers, and a Choctaw court. They had three great log court houses scattered around in this county, which was then called Gaines County. The trials in these courts were held by the Indians alone. The white settlers were allowed to

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come and listen if they cared to, but the Indian
law did not affect the white man.