

PETERSON, W. S.

INTERVIEW

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

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#9761

PETERSON, W. S. INTERVIEW.

Field Worker's name John F. Dougherty

This report made on (date) January 24, 1938

1. Name W. S. Peterson

2. Post Office Address Roff, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) Pontotoc County

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month April Day 30 Year 1860

5. Place of birth Mississippi.

6. Name of Father James Peterson Place of birth Mississippi

7. Name of Mother Adeline Peterson Place of birth Mississippi.

Other information about mother \_\_\_\_\_

Other information about father, Merchant.

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 \_\_\_\_\_

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An Interview with W. S. Peterson, Roff, Oklahoma.

By -- John F. Dougherty, Investigator.

January 24, 1938.

My parents were James Peterson and Adeline Richmond Peterson, both born in Mississippi, (Dates unknown). Father was a merchant. There were three children in our family. I was born in Mississippi, April 30, 1860, and moved with my parents to the Indian Territory in 1874, settling at Old Boggy Depot in the Choctaw Nation.

At this time this was the most important town in the Choctaw Nation. Later a bridge was built across Boggy Creek and New Boggy came into existence. The stage line from Caddo to Fort Sill ran through here. The government did much freighting over this line. At one time they drove thirty-six thousand head of cattle through Boggy Depot enroute to Fort Sill and Fort Reno. They were issued to the Comanches and Kiowas at these points. The hides of these cattle were later hauled back to Caddo by Government wagons for shipment. There was a stage stand at Boggy and one at Mill Creek. There were very few houses; one's nearest neighbor was usually about ten miles away.

Trail wagons usually worked oxen in the Spring and mules in the Fall. In that way they didn't have to have feed through the Spring and Summer. Oxen could eat the grass and not have to be fed on grain. In the Fall when the grass had died mules were put on because they had to haul feed and they preferred mules; they traveled faster than oxen. Wagons were built at Boggy Depot of bois d'arc and white oak. They used locust for the hub. These wagons sold for about \$100.00 each.

Erin Springs in the Chickasaw Nation was a frontier town when I first went there. I had a cousin living out there and I went to visit him a short time after we moved to Boggy. It was there that I saw the first wild Indians that I had seen. One day we went to a Kiowa camp; a bunch of Indian men were sitting on the ground smoking the pipe of peace. This was a long-stemmed pipe. The bowl stayed on the ground and the long stem was passed from one to the other around the circle until all had smoked. Big Tree was their Chief.

The Kiowas mounted their horses on the run. They ran along by the side of the horse as he ran and leaped

onto his back from the ground.

The Comanches, Kiowas and Apaches hauled their own freight from Caddo to Fort Sill and Reno, having a white man for their boss. They often camped on Boggy when freighting and we enjoyed going to their camp. Sometimes we killed a beef and took it to them, asking if they would have a War Dance that night. They built a fire and danced around it. The beef was eaten in a raw state. They enjoyed having a white boy dance with them. They called him "Heap Good Warrior". When the dance was over they would say, "Tobo, Go Home" and it was time to move. They meant what they said and we would depart hurriedly to our house. Their bread was made of cornmeal and water, patted into cakes and fried in a skillet. They were turned with a long stick. If one went to see these Indians and they went into their tepees and closed their doorways they meant you were not wanted there and it was time to get away from the camp. They were very temperamental. Sometimes visitors were welcome and sometimes they were not.

When we first came to Boggy the Choctaw Capital was at Armstrong, east of Caddo. It was moved by the vote of

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the Choctaws to Tuskahoma after the Frisco Railroad was built in the early eighties. Wilson Jones was Principal Chief of the Choctaws in 1890. He was not an educated man but possessed extraordinary intelligence. He had been a business man for many years prior to his election as Principal Chief. There was very little money among the Choctaws and he took cattle as payment for his sales. Thus he accumulated a large herd of cattle which eventually made him wealthy. The Principal Chief was elected for a period of two years. Next in importance came the four District Chiefs, one for each of the four districts which were Hotubbee, Apuckshanubbee, Mosholatubbe and Pushmataha. Each of these districts was divided into counties, which were presided over by county judges. There were sheriffs and other officers elected by the vote of the people. The judicial power of the Nation was vested in one Supreme Court. There were also Circuit and County Courts. The Supreme Court was composed of three district judges, one of whom was the Chief Justice. The legislature met early in October and continued for five weeks, and sometimes seven. The members of both houses received five dollars a day. The Senate was com-

posed of four senators from each district who were elected for a two year term. The representatives were elected from each county by the voters. There was one representative for each one thousand citizens. Nobody but Indians could belong to this legislative body.

When Oklahoma was to become a state there was much discussion between the Choctaws and Chickasaws about the name. The Choctaws wanted it to be called Oklahoma, meaning Red Man, and the Chickasaws wished it to be named Indianola, or home of the Indian. Through the influence of Gabe Parker, a Choctaw, it came to bear the name of Oklahoma. The Indians passed our house day and night singing songs about Oklahoma and Indianola.

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Ex-Governor Allan Wright of the Choctaws lived in Boggy Depot while I was there. I have heard him preach many times. He was indeed a scholar. He was born in Mississippi. His mother died in Mississippi and he came to the Choctaw Nation with his father in 1833. His father died when Allan was just a baby and Cyrus Kingsberry who was a son of J. C. Kingsberry, one of the first missionaries among the Choctaws, took charge of Allan. He entered Spencer Academy and in four years

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was chosen to go to college in the States. He went to Delaware College, then to Princeton and finally to a Theological Seminary in New York City. When he had completed his course in theology he returned to the Choctaw Nation where he was placed in charge of Armstrong Academy. He was licensed to preach and became an outstanding figure among the Choctaws, giving to the world a dictionary of the Choctaw language. He translated several volumes of the Choctaw and Chickasaw laws into English. He was considered the most useful citizen of the Choctaw Nation.

I helped Cyrus Kingsberry drive his herd of cattle into Oklahoma in 1889. He lost all but a few hundred head and brought those back to his farm in the Choctaw Nation.

I married Kate Anderson at Boggy Depot in 1886. We didn't have a license; we were married by a Missionary among the Choctaws by the name of Hague. He sent our certificate of marriage to Sherman, Texas, to be recorded.

I hauled my wheat to Byrd's Mill in the Chickasaw Nation, a distance of thirty-five miles, to be ground into flour for winter use. It took me all day to make the trip. I camped at the mill all night; they ground night and day.



My flour and shorts would be ready the next morning and I would start for home, arriving there about ten o'clock that night. This was a fifty barrel capacity mill. Occasionally I ate breakfast at the hotel near the mill. In those days there were no screens and their method of shooing flies from the table was rather unique. They had a small water wheel outside the dining room window which moved paper fans back and forth across the table. We moved to Roff in 1910 and have lived here since that time.