

Field Worker, Nannie Lee Burns,  
September 30, 1937.

Interview with Mrs. Lena Robitaille,  
Wyandotte, Okla.

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My parents were Napoleon Robitaille and Elizabeth Robitaille. Both were born in 1842: Father in Montreal, Canada, and Mother in Bellefontaine, Ohio. I was born in Wyandotte, Indian Territory, June 15, 1877.

#### Early Ancestors.

Robert Zane came with the Quakers and William Penn to Pennsylvania in 1682 and brought with him one son. William was a son of Nathaniel and later met an English girl here who was a teacher in Virginia. His marriage was opposed by the Quakers so he separated himself from them, married this English girl and went to live in Virginia. Their children were Ebenezer, Andrew, Silas, Jonathan, Isaac and Elizabeth Zane.

Robert Robitaille from Montreal married Elizabeth, the daughter of Isaac. Their children were, Robert Grant (my grandfather), Robert, James N. and a daughter who remained in Ohio and married an English officer.

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Robert Grant married Julia Barnard and their children were (my mother) Elizabeth, Mary Ann, Wolford and Rosa.

My great-grandfather on my paternal side was Robert

Robitaille who married Elizabeth, the daughter of

Isaac, and their children were, Ebenezer, Nancy,

Sarah, Elizabeth (our grandmother), William, Isaac

and Catharine. My grandfather, James Narcissus

Robitaille, married a sister of Robert Grant Robitaille

and their children were Theodore, Arthur, R. Roch,

Azilda, Earnest, Napoleon (my father) and Ernestine.

Father's father and Mother's father were brothers.

Isaac Zane, The White Eagle of the Wyandottes.

Jonathan and Isaac, children of William Zane, on their

way from school were stolen by the Wyandottes when

Terhe was Chief but Jonathan was ransomed in a couple

of years. Isaac, the youngest, had been born about

1853 on the south branch of the Potomac in Virginia

and was nine when taken. Tarhe's camp at this time

was at Detroit and here Isaac lived till he was

fourteen when he escaped but shortly after that was

recaptured by the Wyandottes when he was fishing in

the river near his brother's home. He remained with

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the Wyandottes till he was nineteen when he escaped the second time and this time he was captured by another tribe who were preparing to burn him at the stake when a white man who was with that tribe carried the word to Taihe's camp but Taihe was absent. Taihe's daughter, Myeerah, took some of her father's warriors and went and demanded Isaac's release and succeeded in having him released to her. She told him that in return for this he should marry her as she had, through the years during which he had been in her father's camp, learned to love him. He replied that he would not return to her people but if she chose to go with him and live among his people, that he would marry her.

She, loving him, consented, so they went together to his brother's home at Zanesville, Ohio, where they were married at Col. Ebenezer Zane's house. They settled here and called this place Zanesfield and lived there till 1916. Isaac Zane had been offered land but instead, purchased from the Government eighteen hundred acres of land on which he made his home.

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## Elizabeth Zane.

The sister of Isaac, Elizabeth, also has a place in the early history of this country, During the days of the Revolution when Fort Wheeling, where they were living, was without powder and in danger she went alone to a nearby garrison and carried back enough powder in her apron to defend the fort. There is a monument at Wheeling today for Elizabeth.

## Tarhe.

Tarhe was an admirer of the brave, strong people who had come among his people and, seeing a girl whom he admired, the daughter of Cavilier Durante, decided to have her so he took both the girl and her mother from their people and took them to his camp. Here he provided them with women companions, protected them and provided for them till the girl was old enough for him to marry. Then he married her and returned her mother to her husband. I do not think that Tarhe took the white people with the intention of being cruel to them but he admired their intelligence and wanted his people to profit from the knowledge of the white people.

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## Robert Robitaille.

Robert, who married Elizabeth, the daughter of Isaac, had come from Montreal, was opposed to war from his Quaker connections and at the time of the Revolution refused to fight but built a fort called Zanestown to protect both the white and the Indian people.

## Robert Grant Robitaille.

Robert Grant, the son of Robert and Elizabeth, after his father's death went to Winnepeg, Canada, to school where he was taught by a tutor and I have a letter from his tutor at the close of his school days written at Chippewa on the 5th day of June, 1818, in which he stated that Robert Grant was free from all vice and of an amiable disposition. Robert Grant returned to Ohio and married Julie Barnard, a lady of French and English descent, and for many years took a prominent part in the affairs of the Wyandottes. In 1842, under James K. Polk, he negotiated the treaty by which the Wyandottes exchanged their lands in Ohio for land in Kansas and received a "float" or grant of land in Kansas of six hundred and thirty acres. On this

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land after Robert Grant Robitaille reached Kansas, he established his home and started to lay out a town. He located a church, school building and play-ground, a blacksmith shop and grocery store and this is the beginning of Lawrence, Kansas. He was opposed to slavery but purchased several negro women and girls to protect them from mistreatment. He looked after them and provided for them. This was about the time of the Missouri Compromise and when the question of slavery arose in Kansas, he told these negro women that they must go and told them that he would not keep them but one of them refused to go so Grandfather built her a one-room, log house on his land and gave it to her. Here let me tell you of a incident that happened when I was at Haskell at school. One evening we wanted some lilacs to decorate the room for an entertainment to be given the next day and I went with some of the smaller girls across to an old cabin that had a large lilac hedge around the yard and asked the women for some flowers but she replied that she would not give us any till every one of us had told her our

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names, so I got the girls all in line with myself last and told the girls, "Every one of you must tell 'Aunty' your name." They did so and when she came to me last, I, in a joke, told her that my name was "Rabbit Tail." She laughed and said that was a funny name, I corrected it and told her that I would not "story" but that it was "Robitaille" and it was then for the first time that I knew that my grandfather had ever owned any negroes as he had never told us and this was the woman, Margaret, that he had built the house for and she was still living in <sup>it</sup> at that time.

Again in 1855, Grandfather wrote the treaty with the Senecas here by which the Wyandottes acquired this land in the Indian Territory. This treaty was written on foolscap paper in long hand. In 1867 he wrote Articles 13, 14, and 15, which adjusted some moneys due the Wyandottes. Trouble and confusion over the townsite of Lawrence led him to see the trend of events and caused him to turn his thoughts towards this country and he received for his compensation in helping to make the purchase from the Senecas here eighty acres of land south

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of Ottawa, which the Wyandottes deeded to him. He came here in 1872.

#### The Council Fires.

The Wyandottes were the "Keepers of the Council Fires" of the Northwestern Confederacy which opposed so long and successfully the settlement of the territory northwest of the Ohio River. The Great Council Fire had been rekindled in the west at a Congress of the Tribes near Fort Leavenworth in October in the year 1848 with the Wyandottes renewed and confirmed as the head of the Confederacy. This Council made it necessary that any movement among the Indians that would affect the interest of the tribes of the Ancient Confederacy should originate with the Wyandottes if it was to receive consideration. I am told that the Wyandottes were considered both virtuous and just in their treatment of others and had encouraged the fusion of French and other hardy pioneers with their members.

#### Origin of the Green Corn Feast.

During the Revolution the Wyandottes had been subject to the English but afterwards the French authorities were appointed agents for the Indians. The

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French taught them the observance of Saint Mary's Day, August 15th, as a day of peace and thanksgiving to the Supreme Ruler. This appealed to them and they gave to the day certain forms and observances that have been handed down since. The Wyandottes were then the most numerous and powerful Indian Nation comprising eleven families or clans, these eleven accepting the celebration of this day of peace and thanksgiving in addition to two independent tribes that are the Delawares and the Pottawatomies and thus the day was accepted by tribes speaking thirteen different languages. This accounts for the similarity of the thanksgiving services of different tribes. The Senecas and the Wyandottes are often called "Cousins." The name of the Green Corn Feast was given because it comes in the season of the green corn, the principal crop of the Indian. The best hunters were chosen to secure the deer meat to add to the green corn which was ready. The feast was eaten with joy and thanksgiving for the mercies from heaven, good crops, life and health. A supplication was also offered for the continuance of these blessings.

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This was followed by a sacred dance. All of the new borns were named at this time. It was decided to continue this observance as long as there remained members of the tribes. Gradually the addition of other ceremonies have been added, such as the bringing of the fruits and crops raised other than the corn, the adding of games, etc. Originally adoptions were confirmed at the Green Corn Feast, now occasionally they are confirmed by the Tribal Council and with no further ceremony than that the person be claimed by the clan and the adoption proclaimed to the assembled people.

#### Early Days of the Wyandottes.

The clan used to be so powerful that each child belonged to the clan of its parents. The original eleven clans were: Big Turtle, Little Turtle, Mud Turtle, Wolf, Bear, Deer, Beaver, Porcupine, Stripped Turtle, Snake and Hawk. All clans were equal in importance except that the wolf was the arbitrator and mediator among the others.

#### Choosing of the Chief.

Anciently the office of the Sachem or Head Chief

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was practically hereditary unless the person was unfit for the office for some reason and then it was filled by the Tribal Council. The last Sachem chosen of the Deer Clan was Half King who died in Detroit in 1788. He was succeeded by Tarhe of the Porcupine Clan selected because of his ability after the battle of Fallen Timbers. The Deer Clan was permanently divested of its hereditary rights to Sachemship at the instance of the Porcupine Clan. The Deer Clan protested and has never relinquished the prerogative of selecting the Sachems.

#### Early Home in Kansas.

The childhood days of both of my parents were spent in eastern Kansas, here they went to school and grew up and married when sixteen and founded their home near Lawrence. My father had a farm and farmed and neither he nor his father nor any of our people took any part in the Civil War. We had a pretty farm home of nine rooms and two porches.

#### Early Days of the Wyandottes.

A painter came through the country and seeing our

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house, asked my father to let him paint it; so he decorated both the living and dining room. On the walls of the living room he painted scenery, using mostly lakes for a background and then filled it in with pretty landscapes, flowers, etc. The dining room featured hunting scenes. People would hear of the painting and would come to the house and ask to see the house. Father paid \$100.00 for the painting. There were ten of us children and the younger ones of us were born after our parents came to the Indian Territory. My parents and relatives came to the Indian Territory in 1873. They came in wagons and brought their horses and cows, etc., with them. After looking around, Father selected the land where Wyandotte now stands as well as some land east of the city, some south running up on the hills south of the present town. The family stayed at the home of Mary Ann Zane till Father built a home. South of the present Seneca Indian School, he built an eight-room, frame house. It was plastered and very comfortable. It was a two-story house. It is still standing. Next he built a double barn, one part of native

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lumber and the other of logs. Extending along in front of the barn was a roof like that of a porch and under this shelter, Father had his workshop where he made many of the things that he used. He mended his own harness. He would buy the leather, cut it as he desired and after the harness was completed he would polish it. He also did his own blacksmithing made his wagon wheels, etc.

There was one ladder that was set up against the barn on the outside and another on the inside. We children would pile up a lot of straw on the inside of the barn and would go up the ladder from the outside and then from the top we would jump down on the straw on the inside. We also had a swing under this porch. This swing was at the edge of the hill and in swinging, we would swing way out over the side of the hill but I was always scared to swing. We would play hide and seek out at the strawstacks after the cattle had eaten the straw out in places in the lower part of the stack and sometimes we would bore our way through the stack. When threshing time came, we would sometimes have fifty and sixty to cook for as Father would ask every

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one to come and stay for dinner when he was threshing and we always had a lot of men there who were not helping with the work.

Did you ever blow soap bubbles? We used to and we would try to see who could get the largest bubble. Did you ever try using a wheat straw to blow bubbles, splitting the ends down a way? You can make larger bubbles that way. Then, too, we made Father's bullets for him. He would buy the lead and we would cut off a little piece of lead and lay it in the hole on the bottom piece. When we had these holes filled, we would bring down the top on this and this shaped the bullet, made it round. We always had a supply ready for Father when he went to get wood and perhaps he would bring us back a nice turkey. We also helped him when it was time to plant potatoes and corn. We cut the potatoes, he dropped them and we covered them, also we covered the corn.

Father bought a Kimball organ for us when I was two years old and we five girls all played and sang. The boys all studied and read music. Two of them have

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served as band-masters in schools and elsewhere. Ernest played the flute and was band-master in Tulsa for a while. Charles played bass and Frank played the violin, the cornet and the clarinet. We always had music at our home on Sunday afternoons. The railroad was close to the house and when we would hear the train coming we would get out in the yard and sing as the train went by, "Good-bye, my lover, good-bye." At night, Father would read from the Bible and then we would have "Family Prayer" and after we went to bed Father would lock us in. But to get back to the farm which Father bought from Henry Charloe, the two hundred and fifty acres that we called home, at \$1.00 per acre. After the house and barn were built he built a native lumber smokehouse, a log poultry house and a log barn for the cows. He set an orchard on either side of the house, one east and one west. The railroad ran through our place so Father fenced one field north of the railroad where the house was and the other field and pasture on the hill south of the railroad and left a road way running east and west. One hundred and sixty acres had been given to the

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Mission School just north of us and soon the folks wanted a road to the mission and a passage to the higher land south along the ridge so my father opened a lane running north and south through his farm, crossing the railroad and connecting the mission with the country south of us.

Our cow-pasture was on the ridge south of us and it was my work to bring the cows from the pasture each evening. I trained my dog to go and get Brindle, the bell-cow. The others would follow her. I stayed at the railroad and watched the cows go across the tracks and then I opened the gate and drove them into the lot. Father went to work and built up the land and planted a hedge between our farm and the Mission Land north of us. We traded at Seneca, Missouri, and sold our apples each fall at Neosho, Missouri. West of us at the railroad bridge there was a post office and store called Grand River. The postmaster was Mr. Watts. The tank was in charge of George Walls. In the early '90's Father and several others began to think of having a town here as the Indian School and the railroad were here. Mr. Cotter suggested Lickskillet for a name,

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Father wanted it called Robitaille and they compromised on the name Wyandotte. Father built a store building and had a store and the post office was moved here and Father was also the postmaster. There being no hotel here, we kept the transients overnight at our home and fed them also. The plat of Wyandotte was accepted and signed November 4, 1896. Alfred Mudeater and John Darrow were the members of the Townsite Company. After that time people began to come in here and the town began to grow.

#### Conclusion.

I attended the Wyandotte Mission School here till I was sent to Haskell where I finished the Preparatory Course when I became hard of hearing, so I returned home and remained with my father as Mother had passed on in 1881. I went into the millinery business in 1904 here and September 12, 1906, I was married to W. A. Furgerson of Scotch, Irish and English descent. Later he and I separated and I have continued to make this my home. We are mostly French and Wyandotte but

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I have heard my father say that through William Zane we were distantly connected with the late Queen Victoria. Father said that at one time Queen Victoria came secretly to Canada and at that time he (my father) shook hands with her when she was visiting at the home of our uncle, U. E. Archambeau, who had married Father's sister, Azelda.