

ROSS, S. W.

INTERVIEW

12611

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BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRES, ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Bureau History Branch, Oklahoma City

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Field Worker's name Elizabeth Ross.

This report made on (date) January 3, 1938

1. Name S.W. Ross.

2. Post Office Address Park Hill, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month _____ Day _____ Year _____

5. Place of birth _____

6. Name of Father _____ Place of birth _____

7. Name of Mother _____ Place of birth _____

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 _____

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Elizabeth Ross.
Investigator,
January 3, 1938.

• An Interview with S.W. Ross.
Fark Hill, Oklahoma.

Principal Chief.

The highest official of the Cherokee Nation was the principal chief. The constitution which was adopted in 1839 in Indian Territory, says that the principal chief of the Cherokee Nation should serve for a period of four years following election by vote of the people. At the end of his term of service a principal chief could succeed himself in case a majority of the voters gave him their support.

The title, principal chief of the Cherokee Nation, remained unchanged during the period of the existence of the body politic in the Indian Territory. Persons unfamiliar with the fact that the title was the legal designation sometimes referred to the principal chief as governor. And there were others who probably considered that the term, governor, was more dignified than that of chief or principal chief. But

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a change from the title of principal chief to that of governor was never considered by the Cherokee national council. Nor did any of the principal chiefs ever suggest such change. The title therefore remained unchanged.

During the years of the Cherokee Nation in Indian Territory there were ten men who were elected by vote of the people, or by joint vote of the senate and council, to the position of principal chief. Those who were elected by joint vote of the two legislative bodies were William P. Ross, in 1866, as successor to principal Chief John Ross, who died August 1, in that year. And again, in 1872, upon the death of Lewis Downing, the senate and council selected William P. Ross as the successor of Principal Chief Downing. Then in 1891, Principal Chief Joel B. Mayes having died, the joint action of senate and council resulted in the election of C.J. Harris as Principal Chief. All the other were elected by vote of the people.

The constitution of the Cherokee Nation provided that none except a native born citizen should be eligible for the highest office. No one under the age of thirty-five years

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could become a candidate for the position. Good moral character was stressed as a requisite, and no one who denied the existence of God, or disbelieved in a future life was considered eligible.

The desirability of the principal chief making his home at Tahlequah, the capital, during his term of office was emphasized. During the earlier years, Principal Chief John Ross was in his office daily, except on Sundays, or when away on national business. His home was at Park Hill, a distance of about four miles southeast of Tahlequah.

Later principal chiefs made their home in Tahlequah during portions of the year, except D.W. Bushyhead and C.J. Harris, who became permanent residents. There were intervals when the affairs of the chief executives office could be transacted by the secretaries, and at such times several of the principal chiefs spent a portion of time at their homes some distance from the capital. During sessions of the national council, however, the principal chief was invariably present. Before the legislative bodies proceeded to the transaction of national business they listened to the message of the principal chief, in which the condition of

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the nation was referred to, and suggestions and recommendations made. Upon the passage of acts and resolutions by the senate and council they were placed before the principal chief for his approval and signature.

at one time the erection of an official residence for the principal chief, a "Cherokee White House" was suggested. But no definite action was taken by the National council.