

POWERS, MIKE

INTERVIEW

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

Worker's name Nannie Lee Burns

Report made on (date) May 20, 1937

Name Mike Powers

Post Office Address Baxter Springs, Kansas. Route 2.

Residence address (or location) \_\_\_\_\_

DATE OF BIRTH: Month April Day 8 Year 1869

Place of birth Washington County, Illinois.

Name of Father \_\_\_\_\_ Place of birth \_\_\_\_\_

Other information about father \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Mother \_\_\_\_\_ Place of birth \_\_\_\_\_

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

For complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and story of person interviewed. Refer to Manual for suggested subjects and questions. Use on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 16.

Interview with Michael Powers, White Pioneer,  
By Field Worker, Nannie Lee Burns,  
May 19, 1937

My father, Michael Powers was born in Kenny County, Ireland, in 1832 and came to this country when quite young. My mother, Mary McDonaldson, was born in the same place crossed the Atlantic and met and married my father at Jacksonville, Illinois. She came to marry him and was six weeks in crossing. My parents had eight children and all have passed on except a sister in Kansas City and my youngest brother John (a bachelor) who makes his home with me.

I was born April 8, 1869 in Washington County, Illinois.

#### EARLY LIFE.

My father came west many years ago and stopped and lived near Kansas City where he helped to lay out and make the streets as he had been a road-maker.

He came to Baxter Springs in 1872 and began in a small way to be interested in cattle in the Indian Territory and when the whites were forced out

by the soldiers he continued to live in Baxter Springs. For so many years my father had been closely associated with the Peorias that Ed Black, the second Chief came to him and asked him to allow the tribe to adopt him so that he could return to the Indian Territory. My father refused saying "I am not Indian and have no Indian blood." Black replied "We fix that. I give you some my blood, then you be Indian too." My father asked him how and he said "I cut my arm" (indicating the inside of the wrist) "and cut yours, then I put some of my blood in yours." My father refused, so, Black then went to the Indian Agent and secured from him a permit for my father to return and came with my father to the agent and also came across the line with Father when he moved here. So my father was the first white man allowed to settle in this part of the state.

## FIRST HOUSES.

My father had, before settling in Baxter Springs helped to build the first houses for the Peorias. The first frame houses were built in 1860. The Den Abner house was a two story frame house with three rooms below and three above and no fireplaces. The sleepers of this house are of walnut logs. The house is still in good condition and is owned by Walter Alexander and is one mile north of the Coleman ranch and due east of Commerce about eight miles.

The other house was the home of Peoria Baptiste, the Chief, also, a two-story six-room frame house, without fireplaces; it had eighteen inch oak studdings and the frame was of hard pine. This house was one-half mile east of the Peoria school-house in District twenty-one. This house burned about five years ago.

Ed Black's house was a double log house put together with wooden pins with an entry between the two rooms and this house had a fireplace.

We lived on the Felix Waddle homelace, a one room log house, and then we lived in one built of native lumber at first but later we lived at the place built by Den Abner.

A school-house was built about thirty by thirty feet. It was built of logs and stood one mile west of the Ed Black place and here in 1875 I started to school. My first teacher was George Limley though he had taught there in '74 the first year of that school. He was blind in one eye.

One incident, I remember well. There had been a heavy snow and we boys went ahead in single file making a path for the girls to follow. There is still living near here one of my classmates of those days, Miss Florence Wade, the daughter of Dr. Wade, known as Long Jim, because of his height.

Miss Florence Wade and I are about the same age.

## DOCTORS.

Dr. Wade and his family had been adopted by the Quapaws and he was the first physician in our part of the country. He went on horseback at first and later rode in a two wheeled cart. Florence often went with him. He used one room of his home for his office. Doctor Leman also was here at an early day but he stayed down towards Miami. He also went on horseback.

## EARLY LANDMARKS.

The first ferries on the Neosho were - the Jim-Charlie, the Pooler and the Mudeater.

We attended church at the Mission Church at Ottawa.

The first name of the fort on Eddy's or Abram's hill which I remember, was "The Ponca Hill."

The Military Road came almost due south from Baxter Springs and crossed Rock Creek at the big spring just south and east of the Catholic Mission.

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The place of the ford is still very plain. Here at an early day you could always find a big camp of people as the big spring was the first water south of Baxter Springs.

## MODOCS.

My father helped to move the Modocs when they were brought to Baxter under guard of the soldiers. They came in box-cars. In moving, only a few at a time were released and placed in wagons and taken to the place selected for them. They were first taken to the west bank of Spring River, west of the Jim-Charley Ford. The soldiers had to search these Modocs and remove any knives that they might have. Here they were supplied with round government tents about a hundred in number I should think and they were policed by some men who lived near as well as by the soldiers stationed on the Eddy or Abram's Hill. My father, Joe



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Bigknife and Charles Welch all served as police and later helped to build houses on the Modoc Reservation. They also helped to move and settle these Modocs on their reservation. The Government issued rations every three months. The fresh beef was supplied by local cattlemen but the government furnished the beans, meal, etc.

The abrupt change in climate did not agree with these Modocs and a great many of them died during the first summer and by the second summer most of the survivors were established in houses that had been built for them on the Modoc Reservation. The place where they first located was nine miles southeast of Baxter Springs.

## PONCAS.

Later when the Poncas came they were settled and looked after in the same way. They were furnished tents and were policed and rations were issued to them.

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The Poncas were a fine looking race. The men were tall and well developed and the women had smooth features. They certainly liked milk. They would trade for it. Many of the women made moccasins and a woman would come to the house and want to trade moccasins for milk. We liked these moccasins and would wear them. I liked to plough wearing a pair of moccasins. Sometimes, we would tell a woman that we had just got a pair and perhaps she would say, "Hers no good, it elk, mine buckskin."

When the Modocs first came, they wore little clothing. The men only the breech clout and the women blankets and moccasins.

#### CEMETERIES.

The Peoria Cemetery is the old tribal cemetery and Peoria Baptiste and many others of the early Indians are there, beside some of the earliest

white settlers who are buried there. I have always lived close to this cemetery and I know the location and the name of most of the graves. In fact, I am often asked now to locate the grave of someone. Only last week a family came for me to locate the grave of a relative.

The Modoc cemetery is on their reservation and it was filled up rapidly. I often noticed how willing the Modocs were to adopt the ways and customs of the people here and how grateful they seemed to be for being placed in comfortable homes and for having the advantages of the Mission Schools for their children. They have been willing to learn and from the first were interested in the teachings of the early day missionaries. "Steamboat Frank" one of their number after he was married was made a speaker, that is, he was granted the authority to travel as a speaker and after the death

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of his wife "Steamboat Frank" and his only child, a son who was now grown, were sent by the Friends at Steamboat Frank's request to the Oak Grove Seminary in Maine, one of their seminaries for advanced instruction. He was given the name of "Frank Modoc" by the Indian Department.

We lived near the Peoria cemetery and one day some Indians came by our place carrying the body of an Indian in a rude coffin. They stopped and asked for tools to dig a grave with. Father loaned them the tools and they went on and dug a very shallow grave and deposited the body in it. This grave was so shallow that Father and some other men had to remove the body and dig the grave deeper. This to me showed their desire to imitate and follow the ways of those that they came in contact with.

The Modocs were fortunate in having a man, Hiram Jones, for Agent. Mr. Jones took a real

interest in them and they made rapid progress and seemed to enjoy being taught to farm. The Agency then was about two miles south of the Modoc cemetery. It was a large one story frame building.

Tom Bone was the first Shawnee to be buried at Peoria. When Charley Jackson died (a Modoc), the Modocs built a fire and danced and sang and rang bells for three days, till the agent interfered. This was their way of driving away the evil spirits from him. Charley Jackson was called Scar Face Charley because of the many scars on his face. It was almost a solid scar.

#### FIRST SETTLEMENTS.

The Shawnees, I think, settled first almost east and just a little south of Ottawa on Little Shawnee Creek.

The Quapaws settled east of Lincolnville by the Promenade. A band of Quapaws from Pineville,

Arkansas came first: those from the west came later.

The Nea Perces were quartered at the present Jeff McCleery place southwest of the Ponca location.

#### EARLY MANHOOD DAYS.

I was a cowboy; I worked and rode for different men interested in cattle. I never made the trip from Texas but in 1885, Walter Billings and myself went to meet a drove of cattle coming from there. We met the herd south of Wyandotte. There were 1,800 head of cattle in the herd and there were five herders. I worked for some time for the Baker Brothers six miles east of Miami. One year I worked four miles south of Miami and I also worked south of Chetopa. We always had cattle thieves. We couldn't find out much about who they were and it was just as well. I remember William Peery losing twenty-five head of cattle at one time.

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The country was wild then; there were no fences except that a few small fields and patches were fenced. You just rode in any direction that you wanted to go. We had high prairie grass. It seemed after I was about grown that there were cattle in every direction and cowboys were numerous but the cowboys did not like the soldiers and the soldiers did not try to make friends with the cowboys.

#### AMUSEMENTS.

We had dances in those days. Uncle Pete Labadie had a dance hall about where North Miami now stands. The soldiers would come driving across the prairie to the dances in wagons, driving four to six mules to a wagon. The soldiers wore short jackets of dark blue, pants of light gray with red stripes down the legs. These jackets were trimmed with brass buttons.

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A quarter-mile race track was established on the Den Abner place in about 1885. Here horses were brought from Baxter Springs and Joplin, besides the local horses. We had a big bald-faced sorrel horse. There was another track at the Jim Palmer place, three miles north of Miami.

## LAW.

We were near the state lines of both Missouri and Kansas and excepting for the soldiers, were without law, except for the tribal laws which did not affect those who came across from Missouri and Kansas but conditions were not as bad as they were pictured. We have lived here longer than most people and never but once did we encounter any desperadoes. That was the day the bank at Baxter Springs was robbed. Two men on horse-back stopped at our house and asked where they could get pasture for their



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horses. Mother told them that our stock was mostly on the range and we could not take their horses but told them that William Peery might let them leave their horses with him. They went to his house and engaged pasture for their horses and left the horses there together with their saddles. Then, these two men started walking towards Spring River. They never came back for the horses and later we learned that the bank at Baxter Springs had been robbed earlier in the day. We never knew who these men were.

#### MARRIAGE.

On September 15, 1894, at Lincolnville, I married Edna Powell and from that time gradually, I became more interested in farming but I was still interested in cattle and the range and I have never lived outside of Ottawa County since my marriage and I still live about four miles west of Peoria.

While I live on the farm, I have not farmed for some years. My youngest brother John who lives with my wife and me has charge of the farm.