

POTTS, J. B.

INTERVIEW

#9037

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

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Field Worker's name Robert W. Small.

This report made on (date) October 21, 1937.

1. Name J. B. Potts.

2. Post office Address Colbert, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) Colbert, Oklahoma.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month February Day 3 Year 1856.

5. Place of birth Colbert, Indian Territory.

6. Name of mother J. B. Potts. Place of birth Alabama.

Other information about mother _____

7. Name of father Rhoda Gunn Potts. Place of birth Mississippi.

Other information about father Half-Breed Chickasaw Indian.

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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Robert W. Small,
Investigator
October 21, 1937.

An Interview with J. B. Potts
Colbert, Oklahoma.

J. B. Potts was born two miles southeast of Colbert, on February 3, 1856. His home has been in Colbert and vicinity from time of his birth to the present.

His father was an Englishman and his mother, Mary Gunn Potts, was a half blood Chickasaw Indian.

As a boy he grew up on a stock ranch which his father owned near Colbert; this ranch was stocked with horses and cattle, mostly horses, as they seemed to be the more profitable stock to raise in the early days in that section of the country.

Mr. Potts learned to ride in early life and spent much of his time in helping his father with the stock.

He was six years of age when he attended his first school at Preston Bend, Texas. There was no school near his home in the Territory at that time.

He next attended school at Bloomfield Academy; this had been a school for girls before the Civil War

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but during the War the school was disrupted and torn up so badly that it was used as a neighborhood school for two or three years after the War ended. The building burned down after it had started up the second time as a female academy and was rebuilt and continued as a school for girls for some years but is no longer in existence. It was located eight miles southeast of Colbert.

Mr. Potts' father did not get along well with the Indians when he lived among them. When Mr. Potts was seven years of age his father enlisted for service in the Civil War and never returned to his home again.

After Mr. Potts' father went to war the family went to live with his aunt who lived not many miles distant and who had no children of her own. Her place was across Red River in Grayson County, Texas. The war had torn the country up so badly that many of the inhabitants moved from the Indian Territory across Red River into Texas, but they experienced some difficulty in keeping their stock on the Texas side as the stock would go back to the Indian Territory at every opportunity.

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People had plenty of meat to eat during the war as hogs and cattle were plentiful and no one starved but the general turmoil and disrupted conditions brought about by the war were responsible for many people moving out of the Indian Territory at that time.

Cattle stayed fat almost all the year round and there were no big ranches at that time but at later periods big ranches were common.

The early settlers went to the timber sections and cut logs to build houses; they lived in the same community most of their lives and when a son grew up and married the family would help him to build his house: all lived quietly in the early days.

When a new cabin was built it was a custom to not to build closer than a quarter of a mile from the house of the nearest neighbor.

Spinning wheels and looms were used by many of the early settlers to make their clothing and household articles of cloth. About fourteen yards of cloth was used in making a woman's dress and the women wore their hair long and braided and sometimes wound the

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strand of braided hair up in a ball on the back part of the head and held it in that position with tucking combs which had teeth three to four inches in length and usually had some ornament on the top part. Bonnets were most generally worn.

People tried to build their houses as near to springs as they could conveniently, but many times they were unable to build closer than a quarter or a half mile from a spring and in such cases they carried their water in buckets to the house; buckets made of cedar wood were in common use.

Mr. Potts married and went to work raising cattle, horses and hogs and a garden patch. Not much of anything in the way of farming was done in the early days. Mr. Potts took an interest in the politics of the Chickasaws.

The Chickasaw Nation was divided into four counties. He lived in Panola County, of which Colbert was the county seat. Rock Springs was the first county seat of Panola County but later the county seat was established at Colbert.

Court was held at different towns; each county had a judge, sheriff and two constables, all elected by the native citizens. Residents of other than Indian blood were not allowed any voice in political matters.

A law was passed by the Indian Government called the Permit Law, which required white people coming into the country to pay a fee of a certain amount to entitle them to live in the country and this fee was payable each year; the amount was usually \$5.00 per year but at one time it was as high as \$50.00 per year, but the Permit Law finally fell into such disfavor that it was abolished or not enforced.

There were two parties in politics, known as Progressive and Non-progressive, and each party had candidates for all the different offices at each election and when a voter desired to cast his ballot he merely went up to the clerk of the election and told him the name of the person or persons he wished to vote for and the Clerk so entered his choice, or at least was supposed to have done so.

A treaty was made in 1866 by the Indians in which they agreed to allow their slaves and the descendants of the slaves forty acres of land each as a homestead.

White men could marry native women under the tribal law and by doing they would become entitled to all the privileges of Indians by blood. The chief requirement in complying with this law was the payment of a fee for marriage which was only \$50.00 at the beginning but later was raised to as much as \$1000.00. White men could marry under this tribal law and become eligible to every benefit and privilege of the Indians and many white men married in this manner and separated from their Indian women soon after marriage, but their citizenship was not destroyed by separation or divorce.

Mr. Potts' father came to the Indian Territory with some of the Indians from Mississippi and soon after his arrival he was married to Rhoda Gunn, about 1835. Some of the Chickasaws had come to the Indian Territory prior to that time.

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The town of Colbert started when the M.K. & T. Railroad built to that point in 1873.

The town of Colbert derived its name from the family of Colberts who lived in that vicinity. J. A. Colbert was County Judge of Panola County for many years. A brother of Judge Colbert owned the Colbert Ferry on Red River in the early days. Ben Colbert, a son of Judge Colbert was with Theodore Roosevelt in the Rough Rider Regiment of the Spanish-American War, and afterwards President Roosevelt appointed Ben Colbert United States Marshal in Indian Territory.

Mr. Potts was quite successful in early life and accumulated a considerable fortune. He raised a large family of children. A daughter is now matron at the State Penitentiary, McAlester.

In Mr. Potts' boyhood days Sherman, Texas, was their trading point; they had to cross Red River at Colberts Ferry in going to Sherman. The town of Sherman had a population of two or three hundred at that time and was fifteen miles distant from the Potts ranch home. Mr. Potts now lives at Colbert.