

SIMMONS, J. H.

INTERVIEW

7048

182

- 8 -

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

183

SIMMONS, J. H.

INTERVIEW

7048

Field Worker's name Johnson H. Hampton,This report made on (date) August 3, 19371. Name J. H. Simmons,2. Post Office Address Antlers, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month February Day 14 Year 18775. Place of birth Nashville, Tennessee.6. Name of Father _____ Place of birth Tennessee7. Name of Mother _____ Place of birth Tennessee

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 8.

SIMMONS, J. H.

INTERVIEW

7048

Johnson H. Hampton,
Field worker,
August 3, 1937.

Interview with J. H. Simmons,
Antlers, Oklahoma.

I was born in Nashville, Tennessee, February 14, 1877, and moved from there to Texas, and then to what is now Oklahoma in 1892. I was about fourteen years old when we moved to this country and located between the two Boggys, Clear Boggy and Muddy Boggy.

When we moved here we rented a farm from an Indian of the name of Charlie Vinson. We lived on his farm for about two years then we moved to a little town, a sawmill town, by the name of Clayton. This Indian was rated high among his tribe; he had held several offices under the Choctaw Government, and was one time the Attorney General for the Choctaw Nation. He has been dead for several years.

We moved here in an ox-wagon. There were three of us who moved here, my father, my step-mother and I. We came over in a covered wagon; we had no furniture, except what we brought in the wagon. When we rented the farm we lived in a four-room house but we did not have any furniture to go into the house. We did the best we could the first year.

SIMMONS, J. H.

INTERVIEW

7048

-2-

With the help of Mr. Vinson we did all right. We made a good crop and when we were not doing our own crop we worked for this man. He was not a rich man but had plenty around him, and when we worked for him he would pay us in money. Sometimes we would get a cow or a hog from him; in that way we had a few head of cattle and some hogs. We had to pay him a part of the crop we raised on his farm but we made plenty of corn and cotton so did not mind paying the rents. We paid him one-third of the corn and one-fourth of the cotton and a third of everything else we raised on his farm. The land was fine land and it made good crops. After we lived there two years we moved to Clayton.

When we moved to Clayton, we went to work at a sawmill that belonged to Mr. Hurd. I hauled lumber for him with oxen. We did not get much for it but we made good money. Then I went to logging out in the woods and I used the same oxen for logging. The sawmill was cutting yellow pine lumber, which at that time was selling for \$5.00 per thousand, so we did not get much for our work. I sometimes used mules but most of the time I used my oxen for logging. There were

SIMMONS, J. H.

INTERVIEW

7048

-3-

several sawmills in the country at that time and it did not cost them anything to get the timber. They were supposed to pay some royalty for cutting the timber but most of them did not pay anything; they stole the timber from the Indians instead of paying them royalty. Those who worked with teams had to pay a permit of \$5.00 per year and single hands paid \$2.50. This money had to be paid to the county in which we were working. We would buy their scrip at half price and gave it to them at full price for it was good as money to them and entitled us to graze our stock on the grass just as the Indians; that was the non citizen's tax to get to stay and work and use the grass or let the stock run out on the commons.

I then quit the lumber business and went to Tushkahoma, where I hired out to take care of a livery stable for Bill Gardener and to run his hack. I used to have a lot of fun with the Indians who attended the Choctaw Council. The Council House was about two miles from Tushkahoma. The councilmen had no way of getting out there, except for the hack as they would not walk, so I would have to drive my

SIMMONS, J. H. INTERVIEW

7048

-4-

hack and take them over there. Some of them would get drunk and want to fight. They would hold the Council for about 30 days and they sure used to have some great times at the Council.

The Indians had a Female Academy out about three miles from Tushkahoma. The girls had to have some way to get out to the school so my hack was ready at all times to take them out. When the school closed for the Summer I would have to make several trips to get them all to the train. I sure did make a lot of money for my boss when I ran the hack for him.

When we moved here my father had heard of this country so much and the opportunities it offered that he wanted to try it out. It was a good country then. There were no wire fences anywhere; the country was all open where the stock could run out and get fat. There was plenty of grass and a lot of small cane on the creeks; there was no need of feeding other than the work stock.

I remember when Hunter and McCurtain had their trouble at the Council. They had met there and canvassed the votes to see which one was elected Principal Chief of the Choctaws

SIMMONS, J. H.

INTERVIEW

7048

-5-

and when the votes were counted Hunter claimed that he was elected by the voters, and McCurtain claimed he was elected. Then Hunter claimed that the McCurtain forces stole the election from him (Hunter) and they were about to have a war between the Hunter forces and the McCurtain forces.

The Indians began to gather there with their guns, getting ready to put their man in office but before they got ready to pull their fight the Indian Department sent about two hundred negro soldiers to quell the hostile Indians. They took charge of the place and put it under the military rule; took up all the guns they could find, and told the Indians that they had to settle their differences in a peaceful way or the soldiers would use their guns on them. They finally settled their differences by seating McCurtain as the elected Principal Chief of the Choctaws.

We white people who lived there did not take sides with either one of them for it did not concern us in the least, but we did not want them to fight one another which

SIMMONS, J. H.

INTERVIEW

7048

-6-

they would have done if the negro soldiers had not come when they did. I think that that was one time the negroes did well.

The Choctaws had two payments at Tushkahoma at the Council House and they came there from all over the country to get their money, and, of course, I put my hack into service again and made right smart money while that was going on; some of them spent all that was coming to them by coming after what they would get for they came from a long distance. Now they send it by mail.

When we moved here there were but few white people in the country and most of them were in town and around saw-mills. They were not out in the country but the country is full of them now.

When we first moved here the country was full of wild game, deer, turkys, fish and a lot of wolves, bears and some panthers in the mountains. All we had to do to get wild meat was to go out a few hundred yards from the house and get what we wanted, and if we wanted fish we would go down to the creek and catch all the fish we wanted in a few minutes. Sometimes we would buy venison hams and other

SIMMONS, J. H.

INTERVIEW

7048

-7-

things from the Indians, such as turkeys and beans, potatoes, and things raised in the gardens. The people around the saw-mills did not have a garden, or most of them didn't, so they would buy things from the Indians. We used to buy the things just to help them out for we could get out and kill the deer and turkeys if we wanted to but we would buy them from them to help them out. We would pay them cash sometimes or we would trade with them, for they did not want money but most of them would take flour, coffee, and things to eat.

I have lived among the Indians ever since I came here. I have worked for them, in fact, I have raised my children right with them, and they have gone to school with them. I never did have any trouble with any one of them; they are all our friends. They are all good people and if the other people were as good as the Choctaws are we would have a good country; for they won't bother any one. They won't meddle with anybody nor talk about anybody, and they are just as honest as they can be. I am glad to say that all the full bloods are my friends. They would fight among themselves; they would kill one another; but they wouldn't bother the white people at all.

SIMMONS, J. H.

INTERVIEW

7048

-8-

When I left Tushkahoma I came to Antlers. There was no school here at that time, but after a while a preacher who was a Presbyterian of the old school by the name of Dr. Erskine Brantley came and built a church and a school-house where he taught. It was called the Brantley school. It was a subscription school and ran until the town built a high school, then the Brantley school was torn down for a new up-to-date school building.