

STURDIVANT, L. L.

INTERVIEW

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

STURDIVANT, L. L. - INTERVIEW.

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Field Worker's name Don Moon Jr.

This report made on (date) February 25, 1938

1. Name "Loge" (L. L.) Sturdivant.

2. Post Office Address Guthrie, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 324 E. Harrison Ave.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month January Day 5 Year 1858

5. Place of birth Pulaski County, Arkansas.
near Little Rock.

6. Name of Father Joel Sturdivant Place of birth Georgia
near Stone Mountain
Other information about father Of Dutch descent.

7. Name of Mother Ettabella Moore Place of birth Mississippi
near Holly Springs.
Other information about mother One 32nd Chickasaw.

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 30

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Moon, Don, Jr. - Investigator.
Indian Pioneer History - S-149.
February 25, 1938.

Interview with L. L. Sturdivant.
Masonic Home for Aged
Guthrie, Oklahoma.

I was named Luke but was never called that. I was always "Loge" Sturdivant. My mother was a thirty-second degree Chickasaw and my father was of Dutch descent. We came to Oklahoma in January 1865. I was seven years old when the family moved from Pulaski County, Arkansas, and settled at the Goodland Mission, near Hugo.

My parents and grandparents had started to move to Indian Territory with the rest of the Chickasaws from Mississippi. They met at the mouth of Dancing Rabbit Creek and started from there. Everybody who was able, walked. My grandfather had ten wagons filled with household goods, food, etc., and my father had two wagons. They had many slaves, too.

On the way cholera broke out and so many people died that my relatives decided to drop out. They stopped in Arkansas, bought land and built homes. Then the Civil War came. My father favored the Union but the Confederates made him

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fight for them. He was in the army until Vicksburg surrendered. Then the Federals paroled him and he went to Little Rock and worked as a carpenter for awhile.

While he was still in the army, Shelby's men came up the Little Cypress raiding and burning. We were Confederates, but they burned out many homes of Confederates. We had a cotton gin and about a thousand bales of cotton stored on the place. They burned all they could find, killed our milch cow and her calf, and our hogs for the soldiers to eat, and bayoneted our sheep, leaving them lying on the ground. They hauled off over three thousand bushels of corn to feed their horses.

Jake, the overseer, had stored forty bales of cotton in an old cotton-house out of sight and they didn't find it. This cotton brought Father \$1.00 a pound later. Jake had taken our herd of cattle to the pasture on Gold Creek during the first year of the war, so they were not killed either. He had also hid supplies of corn and meat and molasses in a dugout in the bank of the creek, and in a hollow tree, and Mother and we children lived on those supplies until Father came home. She sent the slaves away because she could not feed them.

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There had been so much bloodshed in Arkansas that Father, in January 1865, decided it would be better to go on out to Indian Territory and join the rest of our people.

When we got here things were in bad shape. Most of the Chickesaw and Choctaw men were away fighting under Kirby Smith. The women were trying to raise enough corn, cattle and sheep to take care of their families.

I had always lived among white people, my relatives were almost white, and so the fullblood Indians were new to me. I was afraid of them at first. Just after we got inside of Oklahoma we camped near a log house where an old Indian couple lived. The next morning Father took me with him to visit them. They were basket-makers. At first I would not go farther than the door, but after awhile I went inside. Father was talking to the man, and asked him how he got the canes for his baskets. The old man pulled out a long sharp knife and I went out the door and down the road to our camp in a hurry. I thought sure he was going to scalp me.

The next day I was going up the road and had to pass a young Indian who was cutting wood just at the side of the road. I could not get out of the road because thick brambles

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and brush grew right to the roadside. I edged along hoping to slip by without being killed. He leaned on his axe and watched me. Just as I was even with him he made a queer hissing sound and I ran for my life.

At first we lived in the abandoned Goodland Mission, but in 1866 the Government made a new treaty with us, and began opening schools all through the Chickasaw Nation.

If we had not come in '65, we would not have gotten on the rolls in '66 and so would never have gotten any allotments.

My sister and I attended a school taught by Ebenezer Pytchlynn, a Choctaw Indian with a College education. There were eighty pupils and we two were the only ones who could speak English. We wanted to learn to talk the Indian language and the others wanted to learn to speak English, so we all got busy and learned a lot.

During the Civil War our money in Washington had been drawing interest and now the Government set aside \$100.00 for each child, to run the schools. These schools were in charge of the Cumberland Presbyterian church.

One of these Missionaries was named Starke. After the war he went over to Paris, Texas, and started Starke's Female

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Seminary. A man named Reed was Missionary at Wheelock, which was twelve or fifteen miles east of Goodwater. About twenty miles east of Wheelock there was another big Mission. There is now a town there called Lukfata which means "forest depot". A man named Hotchins was the Missionary at Garrets Bluff.

There was not a doctor in the Choctaw-Chickasaw Nation until '68 when a doctor came, but the Medicine Men were not such bad doctors. If I had just chills and fever, or rheumatism or something of that kind, I would just as soon have an old Medicine Man now as a Doctor of Medicine. Of course it was the herbs and teas of the Medicine Men that did the good, not their rites. There was a lot of humbug about them. I used to stand around and watch them closely to try to see how they did things, but they were too quick for me to catch on.

The Medicine Men made cascara from the wahoo bush, which was brushy and grew up seven or eight, maybe ten feet high. The bark was pink and the leaves greenish-pink. In May they would cut off the limbs of the wahoo bush and tie them in bundles, then grub out the roots, and peel off the bark of the limbs. They made the medicine from the bark and the roots. It didn't taste good.

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When we were run down, we would go to the Medicine Man, and he would give us a half gallon of this medicine. He wouldn't take money for the Great Spirit wouldn't let him charge for it, but later we could give him a gift.

What the doctors call Potaphalene, they made from May Apple root. They dug the May Apple root, washed it clean, and boiled the root until the strength was boiled out, strained it and then boiled it down to a thick wax. They made pills out of this.

There was an old woman named "Spring" who was considered a witch. Some people were afraid of her, but I wasn't. I was just a little fellow, and would go to her house and hang around her. She petted me and called me her boy. I think she was a mighty good old woman. She had two or three sons and two daughters. People said that black cats talked to her, but I never did see a black cat at her house.

One time Father had neuritis awfully bad. One of Spring's sons told him to go to his mother and she would make him some medicine that would cure it.

Father asked, "You think she would make it for me?" Spring's son said: "Yes, just take her a gallon of lard

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to put in it, and she'll make it." I went with Father and watched. Spring took one root of the bear foot weed, and some roots of the bitter-sweet. She counted these, but I have forgotten the number, and she slipped in some other things but I didn't find out what they were. After this mixture was cooked, strained, and boiled down, Spring added the gallon of lard. It made a gallon of liniment to be rubbed on. Father used it and got well.

One time one of Spring's daughters was taken sick with an awful pain in her head. Spring did not try to cure her, but sent for another witch named Snow. I watched Snow, getting just as close as I could. Snow said that the girl had been shot with a witch-ball, and she would have to get it out. I wanted to see it come out. Snow put some kind of roots in water and boiled them, then strained the liquid through a flour sifter. She put this liquid in a pot on the coals, and fixed a pillow case over the girl's head so that the steam from the pot would envelope her head. After maybe a half hour Snow took this off and strained the liquid again. In the sifter there was left a little bunch of human hair tied with string. Snow told the girl that was the witch-ball she had been shot with, and now she would get well. I

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suppose Snow had slipped it in when she was adjusting the pillow slip, but I was watching closely and didn't see her do it.

A man, Ike Sippi, got sick with a killing pain in his left shoulder. I watched a Medicine Man steam him and rub him. Then the Medicine Man said that the pain was so bad that he would have to suck it out. He sucked on the spot awhile, then spat out a little stick about an inch long, sharpened at both ends and two little pieces of charcoal. This was too much even for me to believe, and I knew the Medicine Man must have had the stick and pieces of charcoal in his mouth.

Paris, Texas, was our nearest town and it wasn't much of a town. I went with Father and a negro the first time Father went to Paris after supplies. We crossed Red River on a ferry boat. The Colbert family had run a ferry there at the mouth of Boggy Creek since 1836. They were Indians, lived on the Oklahoma side, and had about two thousand acres of bottom land and over a hundred slaves.

Things were high at Paris because everything had to be freighted from Shreveport, Louisiana, or from Jefferson, Texas. Father bought four hundred pounds of flour at \$37.50 a hundred, four or five bushels of corn meal and two barrels of salt, at

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\$20.00 a barrel. Salt was very scarce and high. Once a man who had shot two bears and two deer, traded Father one bear for enough salt to salt the other bear and the two deer and that was a pretty high price to pay for the bear, too.

I went to the old Chickasaw Manual Training Academy, three miles east of Tishomingo for four years. It was a boarding school, taught by G. M. Harley. Finishing there I won a scholarship at William and Mary College. Four other Indian students and I went up to enroll, but we didn't stay long. The first morning when we went to the dining-hall, the other students were ganged up outside four deep waiting to gawp at us as we went in. I came home, and explained to my mother, "I can't stay there. They look at me as if they thought I was part grizzly bear".

I watched three Indians shot after they were convicted by our courts. The sentence was always carried out ninety days after conviction, and the condemned man was allowed to go home and spend that time as he wished. At the appointed day and hour he would appear for execution. The three men whom I saw shot were: Itotubbe, a full-blood who spoke no English, Julian Falson, who went visiting, at-

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tended dances, and got religion while at liberty, and Wakum Ephriam.

The execution of Wakum Ephriam made the most impression on me because he was a good friend of ours, and lived only a mile from us. He was nice and well educated, but had taken to drinking, and while drunk had stabbed his wife to death.

The execution was set for eleven A.M. and I was among the hundreds who gathered at the place, which was the District Court house, about thirty miles east of Atoka. The coffin was set waiting, on a blanket, but the victim was not in sight. About fifteen minutes before eleven someone said: "Maybe he isn't coming". One of Wakum's friends answered: "He'll be here before eleven". In a few minutes Wakum walked in, well dressed. He opened his shirt and called for gunpowder. Some one poured a little in the palm of his hand, and he moistened his fingers in his mouth, rubbed them in the powder and made a round mark over his heart. He made a short speech in the Indian language, advising us not to drink whiskey as that had caused his trouble. Then he said that he wanted his best friend, his brother, to fire the shot. So his brother knelt about ten feet from Wakum and fired once. Wakum was killed

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instantly, but never touched the ground. Three men caught him and laid him in the coffin. His brother hauled his body away in his wagon and buried it.

We moved west into the Chickasaw Nation near the site of old Fort Washita in 1871. There was plenty of room and a man could have all the land he could make use of.

When the Government had the bodies of soldiers removed from the cemetery at old Fort Washita and taken to Fort Smith for burial in the Government Cemetery there, I helped with the work. We put the bones in sacks and numbered the sacks to correspond to the number of the graves. There were over sixty of these graves. Most of the bodies were only skeletons as they had died before the Civil War. The bodies had been wrapped in winding sheets and the faces covered with cloths. When we unwrapped the body of one man he

looked like he was just asleep. But as we looked at him, he fell into dust and nothing remained but the skeleton. That was a bit spooky.

While I was taking the bones out of the box, I found a fine gold ring. I had never seen one like it before, but I know now that it was a Masonic ring. I showed it to the officer in charge, and he said: "I'll allow you \$10.00 extra

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for finding that". He handed me a \$10.00 bill and put the ring in his pocket:

I did clerical work for the Dawes Commission when they made up the rolls of the Choctaws and Chickasaws. Our headquarters were at Tishomingo in the Choctaw Nation, and the Indians came in there to register. They had to be able to prove that they belonged to one of the two tribes, and I am sure many were refused allotment who were really members of the Chickasaw or Choctaw tribe but could not prove it.

Before allotment, about 1883, my brother-in-law Lum Phelan and I had built up quite a cattle outfit along the Washita River in what is now Grady County. The law was that any Chickasaw or Choctaw could step off a quarter of a mile from the nearest neighbor and then take all the land he could use.

My brother-in-law found a nice place, but one family, the Moncriefs, were using about sixty acres in the middle of it. He paid Mrs. Moncrief \$1000.00 and built her a better house and she was willing to move. She chose to live close to Cook's store, or Fred, a little trading post on the Chisholm Trail. We stepped off a quarter of a mile from Fred and called that the corner of our land. From that corner we

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measured six miles east, then six miles south, then six miles west. There we tied onto the Rock Island fence. The Rock Island railroad was surveyed but not built then. Then, three miles west to the Comanche line fence, 98th Meridian.

Chickasha was not dreamed of at that time. We raised cattle, hogs, and lots of corn there. We had to drive our cattle and hogs either to Purcell or Pond Creek. I went to Barringer's hardware store at Purcell and ordered fifty thousand pounds of barbed wire and two thousand pounds of staples at one time. Mr. Barringer said it would take about two weeks to get these things for me, for part of them would have to be manufactured. The wire cost three cents a pound. We had to haul it all in wagons to our place forty miles away. We had had a bunch of men down on Hell Roaring Creek cutting posts for some time. That winter was damp and open, and we set posts and hung wire all winter. By spring we had twenty thousand acres fenced. So we became what they called "cattle barons". Our brand was Double O Bar, with a bridle across the nose. I fought allotment. When they passed the Curtis Law, we had a meeting at Tishomingo to see what we could do about it. I got out the Treaty of '66 and read it over tearfully, until I came to the place where

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it said "Congress shall reserve the power to legislate for the good of the Indians". We had never noticed that before. I told the rest of them that we were licked, and it was all settled, for Congress would decide what was good for us. My allotment was on Rock Creek in Grady County and was good bottom land.

I was pretty well fixed until I lost my eyesight, suddenly and completely while staying at a hotel in Hot Springs, Arkansas. I spent a lot of money trying to get my sight back, but unsuccessfully. I have been totally blind since that day in 1910.

The Chickasaws and Choctaws had the same language. Only five words were different. They were practically one tribe, but the Chickasaws had a separate tribal government.

When the Chickasaws accepted the territory west of the Choctaws and moved over there, the Government agreed to protect us from the Plains Indians, but they weren't always able to do it. In '71 a bunch of raiding Indians came through rounding up horses and driving them off. We Chickasaws had good horses, and this bunch seemed to know just where to go to get them. When they came past our place they were traveling fast and did not stop to get our horses which were shut

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up in the lot. We saw these Indians about a quarter of a mile east of our house. A man who was working for my father had gone to a spring after a bucket of water, it was early morning, and the raiding Indians caught sight of him and filled him with arrows. He left two orphaned children. Then they saw my saddle pony and killed it for food. Men were after these Indians and they could not stop to eat, so each man would jump off, cut out a chunk of meat and would get back on his pony and eat as he rode.

I went with my father and the other men who joined the bunch that was following them. I didn't have any gun but I went along.

This band stole thirty-five hundred good horses on that raid and got away with them. We followed them into the Yellow Hills. Part of the marauders dropped back and fought us, while the rest pushed on with the horses. We killed a few of them and they killed one of our men, Edwin Pickins, with a poisoned arrow. The arrow went high, then dropped down and went through Pickins' leg, sticking into his saddle. The men pulled it out, and he thought he was not hurt badly but on the way home he suddenly slumped over and died.

One man, Love, lost five hundred horses in this raid.

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Pickins himself had lost one hundred fifty. We blamed this raid on the Comanches, but I really think the marauders were northern Cheyennes from up in Kansas. At least we heard that there were lots of good horses in that tribe after that, on the Republican or Kaw River, in Kansas. We killed a few of these marauders but raiding Indians always disguise themselves so it is hard to be sure as to what tribe they belong.