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Chickasaw Nation
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Fish Fries

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JAMES, ARTHUR

INTERVIEW
BIOGRAPHY FORM

4612

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WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

Indian-Pioneer history Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name Maurice R. Anderson

This report made on (date) June 24 1937

1. Name Mr. Arthur James

2. Post Office Address Pauls Valley, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 8 miles east

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month _____ Day _____ Year 1882

5. Place of birth _____

6. Name of Father Sowell James Place of birth Chickasaw Nation

Other information about father deceased

7. Name of Mother Josephine Brown Place of birth Chickasaw Nation

Other information about mother deceased

Note 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 4.

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Maurice R. Anderson,
Interviewer,
June 24, 1937.

An Interview with Mr. Arthur James.

I was born in 1882, eight miles east of Pauls Valley, in the Chickasaw Nation. I am a full-blood Chickasaw Indian.

My father was a farmer and raised lots of cattle and had about a hundred ponies. If you had lots of ponies you were counted rich; that was the way we counted our riches by the number of ponies we owned; and when a Chickasaw Indian boy grew up, his father would give him so many ponies and he could put his own brand on them. When one of our people got sick we would have a sick dance. The Medicine Man would go to see the sick person first; then, four men picked for the watch job would go to the house and watch four days and on the fourth day at noon, they would cook up a pot of meats of all kinds and also cook a pot of medicine made out of different kinds of herbs; then the bunch would gather for the dance and if anybody crossed in front of

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the door of the room where the sick one was, the four men would catch whoever it was and duck his or her head in this pot of medicine. If they failed to catch the one who crossed in front of the door, the sick one would die. That was what we were taught to believe. Then there would be two girls with terrapin shells tied around their knees and ankles with buckskin strings. These two girls would come out of the house and start keeping time with the drum which was made out of a deer hide stretched over a block which had been hollowed out and which took the place of a drum. As soon as these girls had danced around the ring, we would all be in a big circle and the two girls would dance around keeping time with the drum and as soon as they went around the circle again, then everybody would start dancing and anyone could go in front of the door or into the house and it was all right after the girls danced around the big circle of people.

We would dance until everyone was about worn out, then we would have the feast and after we had all eaten

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we would start the dance again.

The main thing I liked when I was a boy was to go on the big fish fries. Some of the men would get the roots from the buckeye bushes, and put them in sacks and beat them up well, then about midnight they would take these sacks to the lake or the place where the fish fry was to be and put the sacks of pulverized

buckeye in the water. Then early the next morning everyone would meet there and we would have a big fire going and the fish would be swimming around with their mouths stuck out of the water. These buckeye roots beaten up would make the fish sick and all we had to do was pick out the big fish and the women would start the fry. Sometimes the women would have a long green stick, sharpened on one end and after the fish was cleaned, this stick was stuck through it and put over the fire and roasted. I liked fish fried the best.

When one of our people died, we would bury his saddle and what things he owned with him. Not his horses, for sometimes the man who died might own forty or fifty ponies.

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When an Indian died, his ponies would go to his squaw and his children, but in later years we have stopped this way of doing.

My father and grandmother are buried on my place where I now live, and where I was born, eight miles east of Pauls Valley.