

JACK, ELIZA

INTERVIEW

#10001

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

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Field Worker's name Pete W. ColeThis report made on (date) November 11193 7

1. Name Mrs. Eliza Jack
2. Post Office Address Bentley, Oklahoma
3. Residence address (or location) 2 miles east
4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month _____ Day _____ Year 1876
5. Place of birth In Mississippi

6. Name of Father _____ Place of birth _____
Other information about father _____
7. Name of Mother _____ Place of birth _____
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 0.

Eliza Jack, was born in the state of Mississippi. She is a full blood Indian woman, who can neither read nor write. She came to Atoka County, with the rest who came here in 1902.

She is about 61 years of age according to her enrollment; being born in year 1876.

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Pete W. Cole, Interviewer
November 11, 1937

An interview with Eliza Jack, a
Mississippi Choctaw Indian woman,
Atoka, Oklahoma.

Eliza Jack who came to Indian Territory in 1902 was with some of the last of the emigrants who migrated to this country. She has lived in this country since her removal. She states:

When we lived in Mississippi, we lived on what we considered was our country, our property, had our own form of government; that we had the privilege to move to a new location should we decide to do so, which this custom had been our way for ages. Time came when the white settlers began to move in on us and began to crowd us out and claim all of the country and its improvements until we were cornered off in a little spot, or moved out on some island or on the banks of some creeks or at any place available. Here we lived in a settlement, cleared off a piece of land and raised our garden and feed stuff, and when convenient, we worked for wages for the white "so called" land owners. Some hands were hired and were paid \$12.00 per month while the daily workers were paid

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fifty cents a day with dinner, although we were not allowed to eat with the members of the family, but were given a hand out at the door of the kitchen and we would go out to the wood yard or under a shade tree to partake of our dinner. We started working at the rising of the sun, took out at twelve o'clock for lunch, back in the field at one o'clock and remained at work until the land owner came and told us to take out, which was at sun down.

There were several of us living in a community. As I remember there were three of us orphan sisters, my uncles, their wives, grown sons and daughters with their wives and husbands and their children were living nearby besides the other families in the settlement. This was in Nashoba County (Wolf County in Mississippi), a Choctaw name, near Hahcha Creek and it was known as Hahcha Creek Clan or community.

Here we lived, farmed and raised crops. After our cotton was picked and ginned, the nearest cotton market town was about fifty miles and as it would not be worth the time to haul one bale at a time, as there were no other means of transportation but wagons and

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yoke of oxens, we usually would wait until we should have about four to six bales ginned, before undertaking such an extended trip which took about four to six days.

At corn thinning time, we thinned out from one to two in a hill with a sharp hoe by cutting them off level with the dirt and another man with a plow came immediately behind us ^{to} cover up the fresh thinned out corn, and by so doing prevented the "suckers" to come up. This was all that was needed be done. We knew that digging up the surplus corn in thinning would injure the roots of corn to be saved in each hill, would stunt the growth, so that we did not consider it advisable to dig up by its roots but to chop them off and cover up with fresh dirt immediately was the best and only way. After corn was made there were large fine ears. This was our one way of farming.

News broke out in the community when we were told that the government had sent men to move us to a new country in what is now the state of Oklahoma. The whole community was glad to hear the news and began to make preparation for the trip that was to be made at a certain date. Some of

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us were more anxious when we got this message because there had been some families of our acquaintances and relatives who had already left for Indian Territory.

Those who owned stocks sold their cows, horses, hogs, and some household goods, while others who had mortgaged their belongings turned them over to their creditors, while others were glad that they were going to make a trip so that they broke some of the kitchen utensils, dishes and pans and what belongings that they had that they did not sell and which they had no way of bringing with them.

An incident happened to my older sister and myself one time. There were men folks going on a hunt several miles from home and several of the girls wanted to go along. My older sister was to be the chief cook and the rest of the girls' chief duty was to cut and strip canes for basketry work. Not knowing the location of a cane patch, the hunters went ahead and blazed trees, cut down branches and bushes here and there to show the way ahead and we followed this sign until we came to a lake when we lost trace of the men.

We went deeper into the woods until we found a grove of cane and began at once to cut down. I wandered around until I came to a large sand bed and noticed large tracks what I thought were dog tracks. At another place there appeared heaped bushes, and cane brush heaped about two feet high and about six feet square. Thinking that it was beaver's home I walked around to find the entrance to the cave, when to my surprise there were two young lion cubs. They came out and upon seeing me they were frightened and tore through the woods. My sister arrived and seeing the track said that it was a lion's track and that we must make haste and get away.

We started; we ran and ran until I was out of breath and could not run any more. My sister who was in lead rushed me and was so excited that she came back to where I was and whipped me because I couldn't keep up with her. We started again and came to a deep lake and she plunged in the water and told me to follow her. I stopped on the bank and refused to follow. She swam back to where I was and whipped me again and told me to hang on to her apron string. This I did and she plunged into

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the water again with me hanging on to her apron strings and this was the only way that I reached the bank and did not drown or be killed by the angry lion.

We continued on our^{run}/until we arrived home safely. When nearing home, it was getting dark and we could hear the scream of a lion behind us in a distance but we had arrived home. We told the family that lion was after us. We put out the light, fastened the doors, and did not dare to make any noise. When the lion came to the yard, she roared, scratched on the side of the house for several minutes until she disappeared into the woods. Undoubtedly she missed her young cubs and noticed the fresh scent of our tracks and being angry took chase on our tracks. After this narrow escape we did not care to go after more cane strips with the hunters.

In my young days hunters used to tell us that when a bear is chased up in a tree by dogs it will not come or jump down unless shot at and crippled or if shot at while on the ground will not climb up a tree but would sit down at the bottom of a tree or large rock and fight until killed.

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Women used to play an important part in a bear hunt. Of course it took plenty of nerve for a woman to play her part yet when a bear is sighted, two women would be posted at a certain place. Likewise others at two or three other places. When the bear approached near the couple, the women will yell or "holler" in the opposite direction which caused the bear's attention to go in that direction and continue in a circle until the hunters would come in a shooting range and kill him. Or if a bear is in his den, unknown to the hunter, he would take his poodle dog and let him follow him in the den. The cave being dark, the dog will be the only one to see the bear or get the scent and would be frightened and run out of the cave yelping. This was one way of finding bear in their den.

Everything imaginable has been tested and tried for remedies and various other things. When an Indian medicine man cannot be reached in time of the sick patient, for temporary relief from sickness, if a land turtle can be found in haste, it may be placed on chest or stomach on the sick patient, and let alone in a quiet place until it opens up and walk away. It was thought that the direction

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that it went in getting off was the way the pain that the patient may have been suffering, and by rubbing down in that direction would relieve the sick patient. In rewarding the Doctor Terrapin, one would tie beads or ribbon around its neck and let him go on his journey.

Placing a string of beads or ribbon on a terrapin's neck is not an easy task. To do this trick, one may place the terrapin and conceal it behind a door or some hiding place until it opens up, projects its head out of shell, ready to walk away when all at once one may place his foot on its back with enough pressure that it cannot stick its head back in the shell, then one may tie a string of beads or ribbon and let it go. Or an easy method to kill one is to hold it upside down about five or six feet high and let it drop to the ground on its back. It will never move but ready to be placed in a coal of fire for roast, since some like them for table use.

A good luck happened to a person one time who enjoyed roasted terrapin as a meal dish. Woods caught on fire one time. The fire was coming toward the house through the prairie where grass was tall, and when the fire was

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nearing the house, a lady went out in the yard and to her surprise there were several terrapins assembled out in the open space in the yard, undoubtedly trying to get away from the fire, but to their surprise were ushered into a heaping fire by the lady for a big roast.

Note: No change has been made in this manuscript as submitted because of the naive wording by the writer, a full blood Indian, and the value of the expressions as he writes them. Editor.