

RITCHEY, W. H.

INTERVIEW

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#7769

Form A-(S-149)

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

Field Worker's name Lula Austin

This report made on (date) October 5, 1937

1. Name W. H. Ritchey

2. Post Office Address Durant, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 1201 West Main

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month October Day 1 Year 1871

5. Place of birth Cook County, Texas

6. Name of Father John D. Ritchey Place of birth Texas

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Eliza Harris Place of birth Arkansas

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 _____

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Interview with W. H. Ritchey
1201 West Main, Durant, Okla

Interviewer - Lula Austin
Indian-Pioneer History, S-149
October 5, 1937

Mr. Ritchey, who has been practicing law in Durant since 1896, states: A client of mine, a white man, married an Indian and she died and he re-married, this time a white woman, but he had his Indian rights to property and pretty soon the last wife tired of the man and sought a divorce. Suit had to be filed in district court sitting at Mayhue, Blue County, Choctaw Nation. The only means of getting to Mayhue was in a wagon and the party had to start the day before the date for trial and stay over night at Boswell,

then just on the map. Next morning we drove out to the court grounds where there were two houses; a one room court house for judge, clerk, attorney, sheriff and deputies, clients, lawyers, witness and spectators. The other room was the county jail.

There was little use for a jail; even Indians when condemned to be shot always returned on the day appointed

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for execution.

The district judge, W. W. Hampton, a full blood, was a very large man. He was six feet six inches in height and weighed over three hundred pounds. He was very kindly disposed and prompt and courteous in the dispatch of court business. A divorce was granted to this white couple and at 10 o'clock A. M. the party started back to Durant and it rained the entire time on the return trip. The white woman got a goodly part of her divorced husband's property. He had gotten this property from his Indian wife.

He arrived in Durant, which was then a village of five hundred people, October 22, 1896, and a few days later a celebrated Choctaw Indian, Tandy Folsom, was pointed out to us and we were told of his feats of daring. He had strapped to his saddle a very large bare Winchester and to his belt one or more large pistols. Across the street from the present Bryan Hotel on the north was a two story frame structure with Dr. W. A.

Clark on the ground floor with a stock of drugs and sundries and over-head the Masonic and Odd Fellows Lodge rooms where the East was in the South and the West in the North but where the white man and the Indian fraternized.

Across the street a man known as Banker Jones started a bank but it lasted only a short time and he closed his doors. Tandy Folsom had \$70.00 or \$80.00 in this bank. Folsom came to town and heard that the bank had closed its doors and he looked Banker Jones up and asked for his money. Mr. Jones told him that the bank was "broke" and that he could not pay and Folsom said to him sharply, "You get my money or I'll kill you." Mr. Jones made some inquiry as to Folsom's threat and succeeded in borrowing enough money to pay off the debt and thus saved his life.

In the southern part of what is now Bryan County, between 1870 and 1880, many horses and cattle were stolen. These horses and cattle were carried to

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Texas just across Red River where it was hard to find and identify the thief. Frequently the Indians, whose horses and cattle had been stolen, took the law into their own hands.

The story is related that one day south of Bennington two men who were full blood Indian citizens and property owners, had apprehended a man in the act of stealing and had proceeded to hang him. but about the time the thief was strung up to a limb Jim Martin, a negro in the country, came up and saw the proceedings. For fear of discovery the Indians concluded to hang Jim too but he partially satisfied them with his promise of silence; later they became afraid and tested Martin by sending someone to the negro in an effort to pump him. The questioner plied him with all sorts of inquiries and applied all kinds of threats and promises and even went into details to show Jim that he knew about as much as Jim did of the hanging but the negro remained steadfast.

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Horse stealing was greatly discouraged.

Many of the Choctaw laws were very good.