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ANDERSON, CRAWFORD J.

INTERVIEW

#12189

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BIOGRAPHY FORM  
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION  
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma  
ANDERSON, CRAWFORD J. INTERVIEW. #12199.

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Field Worker's name Gomer Gower

This report made on (date) November 15 1937

1. Name Crawford J. Anderson

2. Post Office Address Talihina, Route #1,

3. Residence address (or location) Same

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month December Day 10 Year 1867

5. Place of birth Nanah Waiya, Choctaw Nation

6. Name of Father Captain John Anderson Place of birth Mississippi.

Other information about father Captain in Confederate Forces.

7. Name of Mother Elizabeth Perry Place of birth Tennessee.

Other information about mother A white woman.

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 Fourteen.

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Gomer Gower,  
Investigator.  
November 15, 1937.

Interview with Crawford J. Anderson,  
Talihina, Oklahoma.

Crawford J. Anderson was born on December 10th, 1867, at what was then Nanh Waiya, now Tuskehoma, the old capital of the Choctaw Nation.

His father, John Anderson, a Choctaw Indian, was born in Mississippi and came with other Choctaws from that state to the Indian Territory at the time of the general removal. He took a leading part in all Tribal affairs and was one of those who espoused the cause of the Confederacy in the war between the states and was rewarded for his efficient service by having conferred upon him the rank of captain. Consequently, he was known thereafter as Captain Anderson.

His mother, before her marriage to Captain Anderson, was Elizabeth Perry, a white woman who was born in Tennessee.

In his youth, Crawford Anderson attended Spencer Academy for a period of five consecutive terms, the

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first of which terms was before the removal of the Academy from near Doaksville to a point west of Hugo and the latter four terms after the Academy had been moved to the new site. The first superintendent under whom he studied was Mr. John Reed, who was succeeded by Mr. C. P. Starks, and Mr. Starks was succeeded by Mr. H. R. Schemerkorn.

After the completion of his studies at that academy, Crawford Anderson secured permission from the trustees of the community school near his home to take a special course of instruction under Mr. James Broom, the teacher at that school. At that time he was above the scholastic age prescribed for scholars attending the tribal community schools and the special permission of the trustees was necessary before he could be enrolled as a pupil.

In 1890 he was united in marriage to Sarena Benton, a full blood Choctaw, who died in March, 1895. Of that union three children were born: Alice, Edmond, and Bethel

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Eugene, all of whom except Edmond survive.

On May 6th, 1896, he married Esther Lois Beams, another Choctaw. Of that union the surviving children are Myrtle, Stafford and John Gilbert, the others having died in their infancy. Then in 1931 death again invaded the home and robbed it of the wife and mother.

On April 6th, 1932, he married Vacey James, another full blood Choctaw woman, with whom he now lives at his home about four miles southeast of Talihine.

The first two of his wives each attended the New Hope Female Seminary near Scullyville and his present wife attended the Wheelock Academy for Indian girls at Wheelock.

Soon after his marriage to his first wife, Sarena Benton, Crawford J. Anderson was elected County Clerk of what was then Wade County and later was elected County Judge for a term of two years. He was then appointed District Court Clerk of Pushmataha District, in which position he served two years each under the

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Judgeships of Houston G. Anderson, Gilbert Wilson and R. F. Wilson.

He also served as clerk of the General Council and was Journalist for the Choctaw Council and was a member of the Council Finance Committee. Then for two years he served as District School Trustee over six counties.

These services were followed by his appointment as Deputy Court Clerk for three successive two year terms, first serving under James Babb and then under Hosev Pilgren.

Mr. Anderson remembers with remarkable clarity the occasion when Governor Wilson Jones authorized the formation of companies of militia to effect the arrest of the Non-Progressives, or Snake Indians, who had banded together for the purpose of killing the leading men in the Progressive Party. The situation in the vicinity of Talihina and on down to Antlers was very tense. A large number of the Non-Progressives had

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congregated at the home of Dick Locke at Antlers, all armed to the teeth, and were openly defying the Tribal authorities. Mr. Anderson was a member of one of the companies of militia, serving under Captain Gilbert W. Thompson. The militia had camped at a small village called Davenport, a point about three miles distant from the home of Dick Locke and had proceeded on to Antlers on the following morning. Upon approaching the home of Dick Locke, the militia-  
were men/fired upon from all parts of the interior of the house, from the windows, doors and from every other opening through which a gun could be projected. The militia then opened fire. This exchange of bullets was continued for some time and then a truce was called and a conference between Captain Thompson and Dick Locke was held. It was agreed in this conference that the conspirators would submit to arrest without further resistance. The entire band was then placed under arrest and sent to Paris, Texas, under escort



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to be placed in the Federal jail at that place.

In spite of all the shooting which had taken place before the truce was called, no one had been seriously injured but the house which sheltered the conspirators was practically demolished.

Upon the submission of the offending parties to arrest, Captain Thompson directed most of the militiamen to return to their homes. Some of these men who were not fortunate enough to have funds with which to pay train fare, were required to walk, some of them as far as fifty or sixty miles. Mr. Anderson, however, together with some four other comrades was provided with the necessary funds and arrived at their homes in Talihina late on the same evening. Here they found a large assemblage of people awaiting the arrival of the train, all eager to learn of the result of the battle of which they had heard vague rumors during the day. Many of this group were sympathetic with those who had been taken to jail. This caused a well founded fear that reprisals against the militiamen who had just

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returned would follow. Mr. Anderson and his companion militiamen quickly made their way through the crowd and then separated to go to their respective homes which were at varying distances and directions from the railroad station.

Such was the fear of Mr. Anderson of being ambushed on his way home in the darkness which had by that time appeared that he avoided walking the well beaten road and kept at a distance of from one to two hundred yards from it.

Upon his arrival at his home he informed his much alarmed wife of his fears for his personal safety which he felt were justified and after eating his evening meal he made his way to a secluded spot to spend the remainder of the night. In this manner he very probably cheated his would-be assassins out of an opportunity to carry out their murderous designs.

This already tense situation was made the more so when it was learned that the conspirators who had submitted to arrest and had been taken to the Federal jail

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at Paris, Texas, had been liberated on the day following their arrest and were again free to renew their offenses against the peaceable processes of the Tribal authorities. They immediately resumed holding secret meetings in which they laid their plans to assassinate the leading man in the Progressive Party.

A young white boy, whom the Indians thought did not understand the Choctaw language and therefore it was of no consequence if he did hear them, overheard and understood the conversation had by a band of the conspirators, in which it was planned to kill several of the leading Progressives, Mr. Anderson and Gilbert W. Dukes being among the number to be killed. Upon fully satisfying himself of the correctness of what he had understood the conspirators intended to do, this boy very indifferently mounted his pony and rode off in the direction of his home which, incidentally, was in the opposite direction to that of the homes of Anderson and Dukes. This act on the part of the boy was designed

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to dispel any suspicion which the conspirators might have felt that he had understood their conversation and would notify the proposed victims. After reaching a point where he was out of sight of the Snakeheads, as they were sometimes called, this boy put spurs to his pony and by a circuitous route quickly arrived at the home of Governor Dukes and made known to him the plans which he had overheard.

Upon being apprised of those plans of the Snakes through the bravery and sagacity of that young boy, Governor Dukes immediately notified the remaining named proposed victims and they all met at the home of Governor Dukes and maintained a guard throughout the night, expecting each minute to hear the approach of their would-be assassins. The night passed without incident but a survey of the ground not far distant from the home on the following morning revealed tracks freshly made which told in unmistakable language that the boy's warning had been timely, well-founded and the means of foiling the purposes of the conspirators

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and perhaps of saving the lives of the proposed victims. Presumably the stealthy Snakes, aided by the darkness of the night, had made a reconnoiter of the premises and thereby found their would-be victims greater in number and much better intrenched than they had expected to find them. An attack in accordance with their prearranged plans was seemingly not warranted.

It is a well-known fact that a territory-wide slaughter of the leading Progressives in all parts of the Choctaw nation was to take place on that same night. Fortunately, however, with the exception of the killing of five leaders in what was then Gaines County, the plans of the conspirators were frustrated.

On another occasion a group of the Snake Indians had congregated in an isolated place and after they had held their pow-wow, all spread their blankets upon the ground and prepared to spend the night in sleep. One man had been designated to stand guard near the

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sleeping conspirators. The now watchful Progressives in some way learned of this bivouac, advanced upon it, found the irresponsible guard soundly slumbering, quietly siezed him and then noiselessly advanced upon the main body of the group, whom they found lying close to each other all wrapped in their blankets. The Progressives, being equal if not superior in numbers, surrounded them before they awoke and then each Progressive, with gun cocked and ready for instant firing, commanded the renegade Indian lying closest to him to arise and surrender.

In this manner the arrest of a considerable number of those who had proven themselves to be menaces to the lives of those with whom they did not agree upon Tribal matters was effected without the loss of life. Such wholesale arrests occurring at about the same time aided materially in ouelling the uprisings and finally brought peace and tranquility back into the lives of those who for months had lived in constant fear for the safety of

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themselves and for the safety of their families due to the sneaking way in which the renegades carried their vindictiveness into effect.

In that group arrest, it is interesting to note the personal experience of Mr. Anderson. The particular Indian, lying closest to him at the time the signal for the awakening of the sleeping Indians was given, was commanded by Mr. Anderson to arise and throw up his hands. He arose from a prone to a sitting posture and then put down his right hand as though in an attempt to seize a gun. At that instant Mr. Anderson commanded him to drop that gun or he would fire. This latter command had the effect of causing the Indian to again reach for the sky with his hands and elicited the information that as he was a cripple on crutches, he was merely reaching for his crutch and not for a gun as Mr. Anderson had thought. The instantaneous response to the second command of Mr. Anderson is all that stood between the still sleepy Indian and instant

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death for Mr. Anderson was not at that time in a mood to unnecessarily put himself up as a target for the gun of a renegade Snake Indian.

Following this group arrest the Non-Progressives were not so bold and their meetings were scantily attended. The appearance of several Progressives in the vicinity of the meeting place would cause a gradual departure of the Snakes from the meeting place for their several homes.

There was an element of justice in the cause of the Non-Progressives. The only fault to be found is in the method adopted in the promotion of that cause. They had been warned by the opponents of conformity with the terms of the Dancing Rabbit Creek Treaty in their far off Mississippi that it was useless to give up their lands upon which rested the remains of their ancestors; that if they moved to the new Indian Territory they would again soon be asked to give it over to the white man. So, it is not in the least surprising that they felt a spirit of rebellion



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arising within their bosoms when they realized that the warnings given to their fathers in Mississippi by the Non-Conformists were well founded and that the promises which were made as inducements to remove to the new Indian Territory were in process of being abrogated.

Mr. Anderson has served in various responsible official positions for his tribe and has also served the State of Oklahoma as Deputy Court Clerk in Le - Flore County for three consecutive terms.