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, ATOHKA, SIMON.

INTERVIEW.

13118

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

Field Worker's name Gomer Gower

This report made on (date) March 2, 1938

1. Name Simon Atohka

2. Post Office Address LeFlore, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) One and one-half miles west

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month March Day 7 Year 1873

5. Place of birth Wade County, Choctaw Nation

6. Name of Father Simon Atohka Place of birth Wade County

Other information about father Died in 1894

7. Name of Mother Sophia Atohka Place of birth Wade County

Other information about mother Reared in same vicinity

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

Field Worker, Gomer Gower,  
March 2, 1938.

Interview with Simon Atohka,  
LeFlore, Oklahoma

Simon Atohka, the subject of this sketch, was born on March 7, 1873, near the Thessalonia Baptist Church which is located at a point about four miles west of the village of LeFlore.

His parents were Simon and Sophia Atohka, full blood Choctaw Indians, who, likewise, were born near the birth-place of their son, near the Thessalonia Baptist Church. The father, Simon, died in 1894, and the mother, Sophie, died in 1885. Both are buried at the old Choctaw Baptist cemetery near the old church above mentioned.

Simon Atohka, Junior, attended the community school when a boy, that being the extent of his educational advantages. However, being of an observant turn of mind, he attained a practical, working education, which he has put to good use.

When but twelve years of age, his mother died and he was taken in charge by Mary LeFlore, a maiden Choctaw lady, who devoted her life to the cause of aiding orphan children.

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He continued to reside as a servant, at the home of Miss LeFlore until her death which occurred in 1911. In this manner he partially repaid her for the care which she had lavished upon him at the time he needed it most.

He relates of Miss LeFloré, that she was the daughter of a white father and a Choctaw mother, who had acquired considerable riches in cattle, horses and hogs after their arrival from Mississippi in the new Indian Territory, and that at their death the property reverted to the two surviving children, Mary LeFlore and a brother, Mack.

The original LeFlore home was near the center of what is now the village of LeFlore. It was destroyed by fire shortly before the death of Miss LeFlore.

The vast numbers of cattle, horses and hogs which the family owned necessarily required the raising of feed with which to carry the weaker animals through the sometimes frigid winter months. For that purpose, some two hundred acres of fertile land located nearby on Long Creek and extending to the confluence of that creek with the Fourche Maline River, were cultivated.

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At the time of the allotment of the land, the brother and sister LeFlore filed on the old home site, thus perpetuating the family ownership of the property, a status of ownership which has continued to this time, it being vested in Mack LeFlore, Jr., who inherited the part belonging to his father, Mack LeFlore and to his aunt, Mary LeFlore.

In 1886, the Frisco Railroad was constructed, its location at this point being directly through the land occupied by the LeFlore family. Miss Mary, among other peculiarities, had the notion that paper and silver currency was not as valuable as gold coin and would receive no other but gold coin in settlement of any transaction in which she was interested. It is said of her that upon the approach of the party of surveyors which was engaged in surveying the right-of-way for the new railroad, she met the party at the boundary of her domain and defied the men to proceed through it until settlement in cash was made for the privilege.

After considerable parleying, the party agreed to the demands made by Miss LeFlore and explained to her

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that they would drive to Fort Smith, a distance of seventy miles, to procure the money with which to meet her demands. However, the party had not at that time been made aware that Miss Mary would accept nothing but gold coin so unfortunately for them, they returned from Fort Smith with the required amount in paper currency and tendered it to her. She then explained to them that nothing but gold coin would be accepted by her. Imagine the chagrin of the vexed surveying party when it was revealed that their long, tiresome trip of some one hundred and forty miles, made with a team and buckboard, would have to be repeated for the purpose of exchanging the paper currency for its equivalent in gold, before she determined Miss Mary would grant them the privilege of proceeding across her land holdings with the survey.

At the age of twenty-one, Mr. Atohka united with the Thessalonian Baptist Church, but later transferred his membership to the Salem Methodist Church on Long Creek. He relates that this church was established by the Choctaw, Methodist minister and missionary, Willis Folsom, soon after the arrival of the Choctaws in the Indian Territory.

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This church still occupies the same site as that upon which it was first located. At first, the old church building consisted of one large room. Upon the passing of time and because of the healthy growth of membership, it became necessary to enlarge it from time to time.

Then, too, when camp meetings came to be held, more rooms were added to provide accommodation for those who lived at distant points. Communal bedrooms and kitchens were constructed. Corrals were provided for the ponies and milk cows. In short, ample accommodation was provided the communicants for stays of indefinite length. These mid-summer camp meetings provided a respite from the otherwise lonely and isolated lives led by the widely scattered Indians and were, therefore, well attended.

A very interesting feature of these camp meetings for the young boys was that of being vested with the responsibility of herding the many ponies which had served as the mounts of the various families attending these meetings. Each family attending the meeting would bring from three to six ponies, according to the size of the family. Upon arrival at the camp ground the ponies were placed in charge of the younger



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boys and turned loose to graze with the other ponies. It was the duty of the boys to permit none of the ponies to depart from the herd and in true Indian pony fashion, make its way back to its own range. The Indian boys, like their white cousins, exulted in this splendid opportunity to display their accomplishments in the presence of their companions and, consequently, hailed with the keenest delight the approach of camp meeting time.

No less delighted were the older young men and Indian maids who were provided with this opportunity to angle for a life-mate where comparisons could be easily made to determine which ones of the opposite sex had the power to wipe out all imperfections in the sight of the lovelorn youngsters. Many a coy smile and beguiling look was cast from the side of the aisle occupied by the maids in the direction of the opposite side which was occupied by the young braves, smiles and looks which were articulate beyond the power of the spoken word. Only those who were reared in the wide open spaces and in that early period can possibly appreciate the extreme joy which these camp meetings held annually and sometimes oftener afforded the younger

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element, of both sexes. At these gatherings the much hated chaperon was conspicuous only by her absence. It was more difficult to approach an unchaperoned young lady, on most other occasions, than to approach, afoot a wild bronco, catch, saddle and ride him, unaided. Then why would not this periodical freedom from the watchful and cruel eye of the chaperon be hailed with the greatest delight by the youngsters.

The old church now has for its pastor the Reverend Milton Monroe, a full blood Choctaw, who also serves the Yellow Spring Methodist Church, some fifteen miles to the East, as pastor.

Mr. Atohka has served his church as a deacon for several years and is active in all its undertakings.