

JOHNSON, SOPHIA.

INTERVIEW

#13683

387

JOHNSON, SOPHIA.

INTERVIEW.

Form A-(S-149) #13683

BIOGRAPHY FORM

388

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name Levina R. Beavers

This report made on (date) April 13, 1938

1. Name Sophia Johnson

2. Post Office Address Broken Bow, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) One mile west of Broken Bow, Oklahoma

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month October Day 14 Year 1862

5. Place of birth At Abner Hill, 2 miles west of Lukfata, Oklahoma

6. Name of Father Bill Anderson Place of birth Golden, Oklahoma

Other information about father Farmer and stockman

7. Name of Mother Betsy Anderson Place of birth Abner Hill

Other information about mother Housekeeper

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 4.

JOHNSON, SOPHIA.

INTERVIEW.

#13683

Interview with Sophia Johnson
Broken Bow, Oklahoma

Investigator - Levina R. Beavers
Indian-Pioneer History, S-149

Sophia Johnson was born near Lukfata, in 1862.

One of the most ancient customs of the Choctaw Indians and one that is to some extent followed to this day, is the funeral cry. When a member of the family dies, he is quietly buried with some or all of his personal belongings, at which time the stoicism of the Indian is apparent for it is not often that any tears are shed at the burial service.

On the day of the burial the head of the family cuts and trims nicely twenty-eight little sticks which he lays up in the cracks of the log cabin as representing the twenty-eight days of the moon month. Every morning he takes down one of these sticks until there are seven remaining then he sends out invitations to his kinsmen and friends to come to the funeral cry, which is to be on the day the last stick is taken down. The kinsmen and guests are required to bring with them a specific amount of certain foods or provisions. One is allotted so much meal, another so much flour, and another so much beef, etc. This request is strictly complied with.

The congregation of relatives, friends, and even the strangers meet at the grove near the grave of the late deceased, where a circular place has been cleaned of all shrubs and grass, in the midst of which a table is spread for the immediate family. At intervals around this center table are tables arranged for all other kinsmen and still outside of these are tables for friends and visitors. Before the feast is spread, some relative of the deceased rises and begins an oration telling of the good qualities of the deceased, of his courage and prowess and as he proceeds he grows more and more eloquent and impassioned. When the cry starts then begins a copious flow of tears, something of which the Indian is very sparing, accompanied by low wailing and moaning that forces the onlooker to join in the cry.

When the cry has gone on for some time the feast is spread and certain ones of the deceased's relatives are appointed to wait upon the inner table and others are selected to wait on the other tables.

The alternate ceremony of feasting, crying and wailing is kept up for two or three days. The intrusion and curiosity of the white people have tended to lessen the frequency

JOHNSON, SOPHIA,

INTERVIEW.

#13683

3

and publicity of the funeral cry as well as many other ancient customs and ceremonies of the Choctaw Indians. Many people regard the funeral cry of the Indian as a relic of barbarism but really it is like a ceremony of some of the Christian denominations except that the latter confine themselves to fasting and prayers for the dead, leaving off the feasting and wailing.

If it is not convenient, or if weather conditions are such that the cry cannot be held at the grave of the deceased, the relatives and friends go to the church where the feast is spread and candles are lighted around which they assemble in prayer and weeping, dividing their time between the candles and the festive board and local oratory.