

JOHNSON, FRANCES.

INTERVIEW

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LEGEND & STORY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

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JOHNSON, FRANCES, (MRS.) INTERVIEW 13778

Field worker's name Nannie Lee Burns,

This report made on (date) April 29, 193 8

1. This legend was secured from (name) Mrs. Frances Johnson,

Address 329 B Street Southwest, Miami, Oklahoma.

This person is (~~male~~ female) (~~White~~) Indian,

If Indian, give tribe Cherokee

2. Origin and history of legend or story As I recall it.

3. Write out the legend or story as completely as possible. Use blank sheets and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 8

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Nannie Lee Burns,
Investigator,
April 29, 1938.

An Interview with Mrs. Frances Johnson,
329 B Street Southwest,
Miami, Oklahoma.

Life Near the Line.

My grandparents were Ambrose McGhee and Judy McGhee, nee Cochran, the latter being a full blood Cherokee from Georgia. They were immigrants. My father, David McGhee, was born October 6, 1849, at the old McGhee home west of Southwest City, Missouri, over the line west in the Indian Territory. My mother, Mary Lusk, was a white woman, born and raised near Batesville, Arkansas. She was born December 23, 1853. I, the oldest of twelve children, was born at the home of my mother's parents near Batesville, December 7, 1873. My mother remained here six months after I was born and then she returned to the old home near Southwest City where the rest of my brothers and sisters were born and where we were raised. My father entered the Confederate Army when only thirteen years of age and served under Stand Watie. During this

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time the women folks gathered or bunched together at the old home and stayed together for protection while my grandfather and my father were in the Army. Grandfather was killed and this made it harder than ever for the family. After the War as my father, young as he was, was compelled to take up the responsibility of the support of the family. In addition to his own family, the wife of Albert McGhee and her children made their home at the McGhee home during the War. During this time, their stock was killed and driven off and all that was raised was what little the women could manage to tend and if they had a horse it was so wornout that the army could not use so this meant that most everything had to be tended by hand and the hoe. The raising of garden truck did not mean that the women would be allowed to keep them and use them, for their food was often taken and any other thing about the house or place that the Northern side wanted. If the men managed to get home to see their families, they had to hide while they were at home and if there was a rumor of their being at home, the house was searched for them whether they were

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there or not and the family were prodded to tell where they were.

Fortunately for our family our home was not destroyed during the War. The original home of my grandfather was a four room box house and though it has been remodeled and built over, a part of it is still standing. There was a spring near the house that provided water for the family and the stock. While my father was only a young man when he returned from the War, he began with the help of his mother and younger brother and sisters to try to clear the fields that had grown up in weeds and sprouts which had developed to small trees, repair the fences around the fields and put the place again in condition. They did not have any school for a couple of years after the War so all the family took hoes and axes and went to work. All this could not be done in one year as they not only had so much to do but they did not have any money to buy supplies and grain for planting. Fortunately some cattle and hogs which had escaped to the woods and multiplied during the War were available and there was still plenty of wild game, and these

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things together with corn bread made up the greater part of their food together with the fruit from the orchard which had escaped destruction.

Father met Mother while she was visiting friends near them and they were married in the month of January of 1873 and settled on his place which was a part of the old home and lived here to celebrate their golden wedding anniversary there at the same place. On the farm they established a family cemetery where most of them were buried. As soon as was possible after my parents were married and when I was very small, Father built a two-room box house in which they lived until they drew the immigrant money when Father built a nice frame home for his family, and between the first box house and the nice big home he built a comfortable log house in which they were living when the last home was built.

Here we had good land and plenty of timber close and many springs. I attended the local Cherokee Day Schools sometimes walking four miles to school which meant that we would leave in the short winter days by daylight and it would be dark by the time we would reach home in the evening.

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Then we had to carry in the wood and help milk the cows and some had to get supper and wash the dishes and by the time that all the night work was done and the family could gather around the fireplace it was bedtime for the sleepy school children but Mother would sit at the loom or spinning wheel and work and we would leave her there as we went to bed and to sleep.

Father farmed and served as interpreter and would always take the roll of the Cherokees when requested. Here I grew up except the short time spent at the old Cherokee National Seminary. I not only helped with the housework though I never did any of the spinning and weaving but I helped out of doors, hoeing, pulling weeds and working in the field. With all of our hard work, we had some good times, the old fashioned square dances where the whole family went, then we had church services and Sunday school at our schoolhouse, besides the singings at the homes, our picnics together with trips to the nearby towns which were always looked forward to. The ladies would come in and help you quilt, peel apples, cut pumpkins, etc. The men helped each other with the raising

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of a house when the logs were ready, had corn huskings, and while they met and had a good time they were always busy helping with the other fellows' work. They did not waste the time that they were together. They had too much work to do and did not have the labor saving devices that we have today. They had to do everything in the hard, slow way.

December 22, 1898, I married Perry Johnson, from Fall River, Kansas, and after we were married and began to look around to establish a home, as some of my cousins, the sons of T. J. McGhee, Senior, had settled west of Miami near Little Timbered Hill and a younger brother of mine, Dan, was also here and we liked the looks of the country, we decided that we would like to live here, too. So we chose a location about three-quarters north of the hill where we made our home. This was a beautiful country to look at as the prairie was covered for miles with tall blue-stem grass and ~~hundreds of cattle were grazing on it.~~ We had to break the sod and fence it and had only a shack to live in at first and with the first crop, we found that we did not have the rich soil that we had had where I was

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raised. I soon grew homesick for the woods here on the prairie where the wind blew so strong and some of the rest moved back and forth for a while but we stayed with it. There was a creek not far from us and a fringe of little trees or I might say brush along it and the river was not far away and this meant that the coyotes and other wild varmints would steal my chickens and a young pig or would kill a calf if they had the opportunity.

Both my husband and I worked hard and I helped him and in a few years we were able to build a comfortable frame house and here our two boys were born. Sometimes the back-water from the river during the spring rains would creep up in the edge of our fields and this later caused chills and fever. I have seen the water from the river spread out over the country until it looked like a big lake and once you could go from near our place to Miami a distance of about nine miles in a boat. These conditions undermined my husband's health, so in 1910 we rented the farm and moved to Miami and soon sold the farm and have remained in Miami since. We built a comfortable

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home here and my husband continued to work here until his death in 1925.. Since that time I have continued to live here but several years ago my home burned and I have managed to rebuild it and since my sons have married, I have continued to live here still remaining active and am still connected with fraternal insurance work here that requires considerable driving over this county and Delaware County.