

JOHNSON, WILLIAM B.

INTERVIEW

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

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Field Worker's name Selfridge, JennieThis report made on (date) April 20 19371. Name William B. Johnson2. Post Office Address Arkmore, Oklahoma3. Residence address (or location) 117 J Street S.W.4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month November Day 18 Year 18905. Place of birth Big Bone Springs (Boone County) Kentucky6. Name of Father Thomas B. Johnson Place of birth KentuckyOther information about father Merchant7. Name of Mother Sarah J. Slater Place of birth Kentucky

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 \_\_\_\_\_.

Experiences of William B. Johnson  
Ardmore, Oklahoma.

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I came to Gainsville, Texas, in 1872. At that time Gainsville was the headquarters for the cattlemen of the southwest, and was a larger trade center than it is today. In 1890 I came to Ardmore, Indian Territory. The population at that time was between three and four hundred. We all went together and made donations for schools and churches. Mike Gorman was chairman of the road and bridge committee in the early days, and roads and bridges around Ardmore at that time were a problem, since this was the shipping point for on an average of fifty five thousand bales of cotton each year.

My law firm was known as Johnson, Cruce and Cruce, and we had an office located on the corner where the first National Bank is now located. This office was a two room frame structure.

The first term of Federal Court held in Ardmore was held in the Methodist church on the corner of B street and Broadway, where a filling station is now located. One morning during this session of court, a young man from Leon walked into my office and told me that he lived at Leon in a one room house, and that he and his wife had attended church a few Sundays prior to this date. During their absence a bunch of goats had entered the house,

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chewed up all their clothing and bed clothing, and also had practically destroyed the furniture. When they returned from church the young man got his shot-gun and killed twenty-eight of the goats. The court penalty for such an offense at that time was double the amount of property destroyed. The young man asked me to go with him to court and plead guilty for him. I tried to tell him that this was unnecessary, since he could plead guilty for himself. He still insisted so I went with him to court. When the case was called I got up and told the Judge that the man wished to plead guilty. The judge asked me if I knew anything about the case. I told him what I knew. He said the young man shouldn't have pled guilty, but since he had it would be necessary to fine him, so he fined him one dollar and remitted the cost. The young man was so excited, that he ran to me and started to give me the dollar. I told him to keep the dollar and give it to the Judge, although I knew the Judge did not intend for him to pay the fine. I met this young fellow ten years ago in Chickasha. He was serving on the jury there at the time, and he walked up and asked me if I still remembered the goats.

In 1896 I was appointed General Attorney for the

Chickasaws, and served for them until 1898. It was during this time that they made treaties with the Mississippi Choctaws, agreeing that the Choctaws might allot land in the Chickasaw Nation.

I was appointed Federal District Attorney in October, 1897, and served until January, 1906. I did not apply for re-appointment. When I first went into office, we were holding court at Ardmore, Pauls Valley, and Purcell. Marietta was later added to the district on the Sante Fe Railroad, Chickasha, Duncan, Tishomingo and Ryan on the Rock Island, and Ada on the Frisco. Judge Hosea Townsend was the first Federal Judge appointed for the District and he was appointed in 1897. J. T. Dickerson was later appointed and we had two Judges.

When I was first appointed, I only had one assistant. Later two clerks and three assistants worked under me. During the first four years I served as Federal Attorney there were four hundred forty four men convicted. During the next four years I convicted eight hundred men. I prosecuted Frank and Al Jennings and the O'Malley brothers at Ada. They had robbed a Rock Island train. I convicted Al on the coldest Friday of February 9, 1899. The thermometer stood at twelve degrees here at Ardmore, and fourteen degrees at Chickasha. Al Jennings was sent to the Fed-

eral Penitentiary at Columbus, Ohio, for life. The others later pled guilty and received Federal sentences. There was only one man hanged during my term of office, and he was a negro. There were several sentenced to be hanged, but the President always changed the sentence to life imprisonment.

He never had any trouble with the Choctaws and Chickasaws, and it was very seldom that one of them, had a case in court.

The Mississippi Choctaws were moved to the Chickasaw Nation in 1902. Most of them were unloaded at the stone building in east Ardmore. They were brought here by white men who had contracts providing that the white men would get a certain percentage of the three hundred twenty acres of land (allotted to the Choctaws) in payment for their removal here. A lot of these white men later brought suit against the Choctaws to collect claims. Senator Owens argued the case in the Circuit Court of Claims.

I still represent the Choctaws as special representative of legations, before the United States Court of Claims, and the United States Supreme Court.

I was one of the original stockholders of the Rod

and Gun Club Lake and Club House at Ardmore.

I secured the site for the present Ardmore jail site. I went from house to house and made up the money, promising the people if they would donate the money for the Federal jail site, that the jail would be given the county after Statehood.