

MARK, LEE CLANTON

INTERVIEW

#5926

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BIOGRAPHY FORM

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION  
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name Bradley Bolinger

This report made on (date) May 25, 1937

1. Name Lee Clanton Mark

2. Post Office Address Panola, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 3 miles south of Panola Post office.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month March Day 11 Year 1873

5. Place of birth Elmore County, Alabama

6. Name of Father John Garrison Mark Place of birth Troup County, Georgia.

Other information about father Buried in Peachland cemetery Latimer County.

7. Name of Mother Elizabeth Curry Mark Place of birth Troup County, Georgia.

Other information about mother Buried in the Peachland Cemetery, Latimer County.

Born 12-25-1831 Died 9-1-1900

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 \_\_\_\_\_.

Interview with Lee Clanter Mark  
Panola, Oklahoma.

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My father, John Garrison Mark, was sixty three years of age when he died and was buried in this county, at the Peachland Cemetery. He was born in Troup County, Georgia.

My mother, Elizabeth Curry Mark, was born December 25, 1831, in Troupe County, Georgia. She died and was buried September 1, 1900, in the Peachland Cemetery.

This cemetery is located two and one-half miles west of what is now Bengal, Oklahoma, in the southeast part of this county.

I was ten years of age when my father and mother moved from the south to the Indian Territory in the year of 1884. We traveled on a steamboat up the Mississippi River part of the way. We traveled the

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rest of the way to Fort Smith by wagon and team and moved three miles into the Indian country over the Arkansas line.

When we landed in the Choctaw Nation we hunted around until we found a tract of land which did not require much clearing of timber. We paid the Indian Department \$5.00 for a permit to live in the Indian Territory and agreed to improve the land by building a split log fence around it and building a log house. We were permitted to keep possession of this land for a period of five years without further rental.

In my early day in the Choctaw Nation the Indian Government did not maintain any jails or prisons for their law violaters to wait for their trials. The Choctaw tribe had their Indian sheriff and his deputy helpers who were called the Lighthorsemen.. Some of these Lighthorsemen would go and notify any Indian that had been reported to have violated any of the Indian laws to be at the Indian Court House on a cer-

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tain day. He did not arrest the offender; all Choctaw Indians were living on their word of honor in those days and it was never broken. No Choctaw Indian could stand to be called a coward and that was how they classed one who failed to report in defense of any charge that was against him. To my personal knowledge no Indian ever failed to report the day he was told to.

In those days there were several Choctaw Indian Court houses built out of hewed logs and rough sawed lumber. This county was then called Gaines county. When an Indian came to one of these court houses for trial the entire court was of full blood Indians, officials and all. If he was tried for petit larceny, grand larceny or similar offenses he was immediately sentenced to be thrashed. For the first offense he would receive about twenty five lashes. The second or third offense he would receive from fifty to one

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hundred lashes. When the prisoner was found guilty he was immediately led out of the court house into the yard to a certain big tree which they used for the thrashings. They breasted the prisoner up to the trunk of this tree, with one Indian officer holding the right arm and hand and another holding the left arm and hand straight out in front. Other officers stripped the Indian prisoner to the waist. It was one of the duties of the Choctaw Indian sheriff to execute the punishment according to the Choctaw court findings, either to execute the prisoner or thrash him. This Indian sheriff, according to the rules, was not allowed to use a full arm swing when he was thrashing a prisoner. He only used a swing with the lash from the elbow alone. They used a good sized green hickory sprout, about six or seven feet long, in the thrashing and if the switch was worn out before he had given him the correct number of lashes they had plenty of new ones.

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When a Choctaw Indian committed a crime serious enough for execution and was tried by the Indian court and found guilty, he was told what date to appear back at the court house for his execution. He was permitted to return to his home until the next date of court and told to report for execution on that date. In my experience with the Choctaw Indians I never heard of one of them failing to report for their punishment, regardless of what it was to be. They would be there. They could not live among their tribe and no other tribe if they failed to accept their punishment.

This county was named Gaines County in the Choctaw Nation. The Choctaws gathered every two years to elect their County Officers. The Choctaw Indian County Judge at these different Indian court houses held this election. He either held it at his home or the court house, either place was permissible. The Indian County Judge would have the candidates' names written

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on plain paper in longhand writing, but in the Choctaw language. The Indian voter would mark the name of the person he wanted to vote for. The tribe was very quiet on the day of the election. The celebration took place after the count was made.

When a Choctaw Indian man or woman died or any member of the family died on account of sickness they did not have a big crowd of all his relatives or friends at the death and the burial, just the immediate family of the dead Indian. They took the body in the real early days out in their yard or to some place close to where the family lived and buried it.

The Choctaw Indians in those days had a large gathering in the spring when the weather was warm and in the fall before winter had set in to have what they call Indian Cries. At this time they mourned the death of their relatives and friends. They had Indian preachers then, I do not know just what their denomination was but on this Indian Cry Day they all gathered together and the Indian preacher would have services



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and then they would gather around the graves and have a great Indian Cry. This Indian Cry meeting was held mostly after the Choctaw tribe picked out burying places to take their dead to.

Field Worker's note: Mr. Mark took me to the old building site where the Choctaw Indian District court house was located. It was a big house, he tells me, built out of rough sawed lumber about 24 x 40 feet. The cornerstones of native rock and part of the foundation are still on the ground, nothing more. Mr. Mark tells me when this court house stood there it was located in an open country, with very little timber. The place is now covered with heavy grown trees, both pine and all kinds of wild timber. This land has never been in cultivation, it is still used for stock pasture.

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The last Choctaw trial that was held at this court house was in the year of 1893. This building caught fire in October 1895 and burned, destroying all records which were kept in a wooden closet in the court room.

Mr. Mark tells me that when Choctaw Indians have been educated at all they are the best penmen and can write a perfect hand. The Choctaw Indian court records were kept in large books and written in the Choctaw language in longhand. He tells me most of this writing was perfect.