

JOHNS, HELEN

INTERVIEW

#7910

159

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

Field Worker's name Johnson H. Hampton

This report made on (date) October 20, 1937.

1. Name Helen Johns

2. Post Office Address Antlers, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month November Day 17 Year 1894

5. Place of birth About 25 miles northwest of Antlers,

Oklahoma; this place is known as Johns Valley.

6. Name of Father Dixon Johns *Place of birth San Bois

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Sophia Johns Place of birth Near Antlers,
Oklahoma.

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 8.

Investigator, Johnson H. Hampton
October 20, 1937.
Interview with Helen Johns,
Antlers, Oklahoma.

I was born November 17th, 1894, in Johns Valley.

My father's name was Dixon Johns and my mother's name was Sophia Johns. Grandfather on my father's side was named Amos Johns, and step-grandmother's name was Listie Johns.

My grandfather, Amos Johns, was in the Civil War and served through the war. He told us about the hardships they went through and told about the battle he fought with the other Indian soldiers.

My grandfather moved from San Bois County, Choctaw Nation, to Jackfork County, and located in a valley which was afterward called Big Caney: he was the first Choctaw to move into this valley and after he settled here, some more Choctaws came and settled here.

There were no white people at all in this valley; this valley must be about four or five miles square and surrounded by mountains; this valley had two creeks running through it. It was called Big Caney by my father because there was lots of big cane on it and it was just as thick as could be and that was the reason it was called Big Caney. After some white

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people moved in there they called it Johns Valley after my grandfather and it is still known as Johns Valley. This place being surrounded by mountains it was pretty hard to get in and out at that time and is still that way today. This valley was a fine country at that time; the grass was high and there was plenty of cane on the creeks and the stock did not have to be fed; they stayed fat all the year 'round without any feed.

My father had a small farm where he raised corn and other farm products and we had a good many cattle out on the range and some ponies; in fact we had plenty of everything we wanted.

I don't know how they lived before I was big enough to remember anything; I did hear them say that when they had to go to Fort Smith for their groceries they would hook up a pair of oxen to a wagon and go to Fort Smith and it would take them about a month to get back home. After the Frisco railroad went through they then traded at Tushkahoma and also at Kosoma, a small saw mill town on the Frisco railroad.

My grandfather built the first church that was built in this valley; in fact, it was the only one in the valley; it was a Presbyterian church; he built it out of logs and seated it with split logs, they had a school in this log house

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after it was built. When I was a small girl, I went to this school myself. This church was given up by the Presbyterians, but the old log house is still there. Of course it is very old now and pretty well rotted but it is still there where it was built. There are no Choctaws there now, not ing but the old church which the Choctaws used to attend and that church is the only thing left to remember the Choctaws who used to live there, who have died out.

The people went to work and got up a school there for what few Choctaw children there were. The first white man who taught the school was from somewhere else and his name was Mr. Hufford.

I went to him when I was a small girl; he taught for a while, then a white woman was sent out there and she taught for several years; in fact, she married one of my uncles and they lived there near the school house, so she taught this school until after statehood.

In the meantime the country was settled up with white people so they built a new school house out of lumber and she taught in this school house for several years. She finally quit teaching. In the meantime my uncle died and she then married a white man and is now still living in this valley.

There was not much farming done in this valley; the saw-mill

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came in and began to cut the pine timber and also the white-oak timber. When the saw-mills cut all the best timber they left, but some of the white people stayed there and put in some farms. It did not take the saw-mills long to cut out the best timber in that valley.

We used to have lots of deer, turkey, and plenty of fish in the creeks and bears on the mountains and panthers, wild-cats and the like. Sometimes a bear would come to our house following the hogs and would carry a hog away from the pen they were in, and the panthers would kill the calves and sometimes they would kill grown stock for us.

The Choctaws would get together, get all the dogs they could and make a drive for the panthers; the dogs would kill some of the panthers but there were lots of them so they just could not kill the panthers out.

We had a man named Wilson Bobb, who was a bear hunter and he killed lots of bear in those mountains. He knew how to trail them up and if he found where a bear had gone into a cave he would go right in after the bear and kill him and drag him out of the cave. He used to sell the meat of the bears to those saw-millers and he would bring us the meat but I could not eat it for it was too fat for me to eat.

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It was no matter for the boys to go out and kill a deer or a turkey at any time when they wanted fresh meat and they would take their bows and arrows and go a fishing down on the creeks and it would not take them long to bring all the fish we could eat; they killed them with their bows and arrows.

It was very dangerous for any one to step out at night, especially after night; that valley was full of rattlesnakes. I know of three Choctaws being killed by them and one woman that was killed by the snake. It seemed that this valley was full of big rattlers; you could see them at any time during the day; after the whites began to settle in the valley I think they killed most of them out.

I never saw a ball game; that is an Indian ball game. My father used to go to them but he would not take us so I never saw one. I never saw an Indian dance; the only dance I ever saw was the square dance; the Indians danced just like the white people at the time when I was a young girl going to dances, but they quit dancing, so I never did go to any more of them; ~~it has been a longtime since they danced; they just quit dancing altogether.~~

My grandfather used to camp at the Indian camp meetings; he would kill hogs or maybe a beef in the summer and dry the

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meat for the meeting. When it was close to the meeting time he would get everything ready, then he would move to the church and camp; he had a camping house so he would just move over there until the meeting broke, then he would move back home. He did this until all the Indians died out or moved away from there. He was the last one to move away from our old home place. Nothing but a sad memory is left of the proud Choctaws who used to live in this valley.