

JOHNSON, W. 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 John F. DoughertyThis report made on (date) February 11, 1938.1. Name W. B. Johnson2. Post Office Address Fitzburgh, Oklahoma.3. Residence address (or location) Pontotoc County.4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month March Day 28 Year 18715. Place of birth Scott County, Arkansas.6. Name of Father W. F. Johnson Place of birth N. Carolina.Other information about father Blacksmith - Farmer.7. Name of Mother Alice Lawrence Place of birth Tennessee.

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 _____.

An Interview with W. B. Johnson, Fitzhugh, Oklahoma.
By - John F. Dougherty - Investigator.
January 10, 1938.

My parents were W. F. Johnson, born in North Carolina and Alice Lawrence Johnson, born in Tennessee. Father was a blacksmith and farmer. There were three children in our family. I was born March 28th, 1871, in Scott County, Arkansas.

I came to the Indian Territory in 1885 to work for my uncle, W. B. Lawrence, who lived on Buckhorn Creek south of the present site of Sulphur in the Chickasaw Nation. I helped build a Baptist church a short time after coming here. The church was built of logs and the floor and seats were of cottonwood lumber. The schools were subscription schools and when a pupil reached the sixth or seventh grade he was qualified to teach. There were no educational requirements and many people taught when they were scarcely able to read and write.

A Masonic lodge was organized near Buckhorn Creek and the meetings were held on a hill in the woods.

In 1886, after Bill Guy became Governor of the Chickasaws, he had a law passed that the white man could lease land from the Indians for eight or ten years.

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I married in 1888 and moved to Pawpaw (no longer in existence) in the Cherokee Nation, Sequoyah District, now Sequoyah County, about eleven miles southeast of Muldrow on the banks of the Arkansas River. There was a store and postoffice here at that time, run by Mr. Watts, better known as Governor Watts. He received this title while he lived in Arkansas. He was Justice of the Peace there in a small town. He paid the local paper \$10.00 to announce him as a candidate for Governor of Arkansas. He didn't make the race, but from that time until his death he was known as Governor Watts. He was a brother of Jeff Watts who was president of the Watts Association with headquarters at Muldrow. This was an organization perfected by Mr. Watts, claiming citizenship in the Cherokee Nation by men who were trying to prove that they were Cherokee Indians. There were no Indians belonging to the Association. Jeff Watts took as members, anybody, colored or white, who would pay the membership fee which was \$25.00 at first. Later, this fee was reduced to \$5.00. He gave his members the right to go anywhere they desired in the Cherokee Nation and put in farms without paying permits and rents. Whatever they

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made belonged solely to them.

For many years the suit of the Watts Association was in litigation in the Cherokee Council at Tahlequah but these men were finally refused citizenship in the Cherokee Nation and Jeff Watts carried it to the United States Court at Washington where it was again denied. The association then ceased to exist, but the members held their farms until the Dawes Commission made the rolls and the Cherokees were allotted land.

The Watts Association always paid Jeff's expenses to Washington. He would call the association together a few days before he contemplated taking his trip and ask each one to contribute toward the expense. How the Cherokees hated the members of this Watts Association!

There were three boats which sailed on the Arkansas River in the early days, the "William Drew", the "E. C. Miller" and the "Captain Blakely". They were all three freight and passenger boats and all had saloons on them.

They were fired with cord wood and were the stern wheel type of boat. They hauled cottonseed and cotton, also hay and some corn from Pawpaw. There was a cotton gin at Pawpaw.

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A snag boat also ran on the Arkansas River to keep the channel open. The men on this snag boat pulled trees, logs, etc., to the bank so that freight boats could get through.

I moved to Briartown on the Canadian River in 1890. Here I lived on a place belonging to Tom Starr. He was a fine man to work for, although his home was headquarters for outlaws. During his outlaw days he and Bill West were border bandits. They were very hard to capture and the Cherokee Government offered a \$1,000.00 reward for either of them, dead or alive. They were brothers-in-law. Tom killed Bill and collected the reward. But they couldn't seem to get Tom. Finally the Cherokee Government told Tom that if he would lay his gun down and stay at home they would let him go free. This he did - and from that time on he was a good citizen. I have been in Pontotoc County since 1901.