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BLALACK, JAMES A.

INTERVIEW

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

Id Worker's name Bradley Bolinger
s report made on (date) July 9 193 7

Name James Andrew Elalack
Post Office Address Wilburton, Oklahoma--General Delivery
Residence address (or location) Outskirts of Wilburton
DATE OF BIRTH: Month January Day 22 Year 1871
Place of birth Lebanon, Missouri

Name of Father John S. Elalack Place of birth Dallas, Texas
Other information about father Died at the age of 60 in the State of Texas.
Name of Mother Salley Mackey Elalack Place of birth Texas
Other information about mother 86 years of age and living with her son,
James Andrew Elalack.

is or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and story
the person interviewed. Refer to Manual for suggested subjects and questions
in on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this form. Number of
ts attached

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My father's name was John S. Blalack. He was born near Dallas, Texas , and died at the age of sixty years and was buried in an early day burying place that was then called Content in the State of Texas. I do not know whether this settlement still exists or not.

My mother's name is Salley Mackey Blalack and she is 86 years of age; she now lives with me.

My brother and myself came to the Indian Territory to that part called Gaines County in those days. I was eighteen years old when we came and my brother was twenty. We settled on Limestone Prairie, stopping with a man by the name of Denton, who had been living in this part of the country for sometime. His place was located about nine miles west and a little south of where Wilburton is now located.

Mr. Denton was a ranchman raising lots of livestock. He had married an Indian in this country after he had settled here, and had applied to the Indian Department for what was known then as intermarried Choctaw citizenship which would entitle him and all children born to him and his Indian wife the same rights as the full-blood to hold land in the Choctaw

Nation.

My brother, Joe Blalack, married the oldest daughter of Mr. Denton. He then put his application in to the Indian Department and was received as an intermarried citizen of the Choctaw Tribe. This entitled him and all children to all the Indian privileges in the way of possession of land.

Along about the year 1885 a party of men from Minneapolis, Minnesota, came to this country on a wild turkey hunt. I got acquainted with one of the men by the name of Edward D. Chadick who was looking for all the outcroppings of coal around in this county.

This party of men had come to McAlester on the new railroad which had just passed through that part of the country called the M.K. & T. R. R. Co., and they had gotten acquainted with a settler by the name of J. J. McAlester. Sometime later the town of McAlester was called by his name. This J. J. McAlester also was an intermarried citizen of the Choctaw Tribe. After the M.K. & T. Railroad had come along there, McCurtain staked off some land for his home, built his house and started to dig

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him a well. After they had dug this well part of of the way, they came upon a large vein of coal, and of course this man Mr. Chadick was notified about this. Mr. Chadick located a lot of coal outcroppings around where Wilburton now is, and the idea came to him that if it were possible to get a railroad built through this country, it would be a great thing in the movement of the coal.

So after the turkey hunt was over, Mr. Chadick went to Philadelphia. In those days that was the great headquarters for railroads. He explained his findings in this Indian country to men of that city. The Lehigh Railroad Company of Philadelphia financed Mr. Chadick. A company was organized in the year of 1888 and Mr. Chadick brought back to this country a party who made a survey of the prospective railroad right-of-way. The prospect of this railroad and the finding of coal was the reason for the location of what is now Wilburton.

The original name of this railroad was the Choctaw, Oklahoma & Gulf Railroad which later was changed to the Rock Island. As best I remember, this road went through this county in the year of 1890,

and it was operated then from what is now called Wister to what is now called South McAlester. There seemed to be a great argument with the department about these men being granted the privilege for this right-of-way so these men just ran their road two miles or possibly not quite that far, from what was then McAlester and made their stop. This of course made another settlement spring up around this new station. Therefore we now have what you would call two towns. The first one, or the old town, was called North McAlester and the new town was named South McAlester. These names exist today.

The Choctaws had what they called the Choctaw Governor's home and council house, I have found in my experience that this first council house was built along in the year of 1862. It was located on a high hill, they called Council Hill, about two and one-half miles east of where Red Oak, Oklahoma, is now located.

There were three McCurtain brothers living here then who had come to the Territory with the Choctaw Tribe, when they were moved here from the south. All of these brothers were reasonably educated before they had left the south. They were Jackson McCurtain, the oldest one, Edmond McCurtain, and Green McCurtain, the

youngest. All three of these Choctaws were elected as Governor of the Choctaw tribe.

The last Indian election was in 1894 when Green McCurtain was in the race for the Choctaw governorship. The Choctaw Tribe was divided in those days in two parties, called the Progressive and the Non-Progressive, and Green McCurtain was at the head of the Progressive party. The Non-Progressives were against the Territory being accepted for statehood and were against the white settlers coming into the territory. There was a lot of dissatisfaction among the tribe in those days. Great crowds of these two clans would get together and travel over the territory and even shoot and kill any opponent working against them. Many deaths resulted from these fights. The old Federal Judge Parker of Fort Smith had to send a regiment of soldiers from the Fort to stop so much killing.

When I was a young man going through this county and working where I could make a little money, the Choctaws who lived all over the county in small cabins, did not have anything much to say. They would talk to you very little, even though you could speak and understand their language. About all they would do

was just grunt.

When you came to one of their cabins at meal time you were never asked to come in the house and eat. If you wanted to eat or were hungry, you just dismounted and went in the cabin and sat down and ate with the Indian family. Nothing was said at the meal. This was what the Choctaws expected you to do.

The Choctaw Indians were all generally honest. When the traders came through the Nation to trade with the Indians, they always carried gold or silver in large saddle pockets as the Indians would not accept anything for payment, only this kind of money. There were no banks or any place of money deposit in those days and the stock buyers just carried their money in what they called saddle pockets and when they spent the night at some Indian's cabin, they just pulled their saddle pockets off and placed them on the floor under their bed. At no time did I ever hear of any of the Indians in this county ever stealing any of ^a trader's money or robbing him.

When a white settler married an Indian woman, it was necessary for the white man to secure twelve names of Choctaw Indian citizens and send them to the head

office of the Indian Department. This also had to be signed by the Indian Judge and the marriage must be done by the Indian Judge. After his application was accepted by the Department, he immediately became what was known in those days as an intermarried Choctaw Citizen and his privileges were the same as a fullblood in allotment.

My grandfather's name was Andrew Mackey. He had been to California to the Gold Rush in about the year of 1848 and he was on his way home or back to this county and the Indian Territory and was almost home when the stage coach team ran away. This happened at the top of a large mountain called Mountain station. This stage station was located about ten or eleven miles southwest of where Wilburton is now located where all stages that ran on the through road from Fort Smith to the Texas Border had to stop for food and water. As they started down this mountain, the team ran away and my grandfather was killed in the smash. He was buried in the Mountain Station burying place. This was during the year 1858. The people who live around in these mountains still use this old burying place now. This place is one of the oldest landmarks in the whole county.