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May 20, 1937

Interview with Mary Kennedy  
Sulphur, Oklahoma

Date of Birth July 28, 1869  
Near Heavener, Indian Ter.  
Choctaw Nation

Parents Father, Robert Benton,  
Mississippi (Merchant-Trader)  
Mother, Jane McCurtain Benton  
Indian Territory  
(Niece of Green McCurtain)

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LIFE OF A FULL BLOOD CHOCTAW INDIAN WOMAN.

My parents were Robert Benton, who was born in Mississippi in 1840, and Jane McCurtain Benton, born December 25, 1841, in the Choctaw Nation, near Heavener, Indian Territory. They both belonged to the Choctaw tribe. Father was a merchant and trader. He had a general merchandise store in Heavener, from which we had a fairly good living. He was a Confederate soldier during the Civil War. He reared fifty-two Indian orphan children. There were only two children in our family, my brother dying when an infant.

I was born July 28, 1869, in the Choctaw Nation, near Heavener. The house in which I was born was built

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of hewed cedar logs. There was plenty of rock in that section of the Territory, so father built a rock chimney. The house was a story and a half. There were two windows downstairs and one window upstairs. It had a hewed puncheon floor. We used water from a well and spring. I went to school near Heavener in a small log house. We had only three months in a term, and I did not go many of these. Edmund McCurtain came to visit us and he made the remark that girls didn't need to go to school much--If they could write their names that was all they needed to know. Mother decided he was right, and so she kept me at home after that.

We cooked on the fireplace in the winter, and outdoors in the summer. We had very few matches and we always kept an old log afire with which to start our fires. However, father always carried a flint rock in his pocket.

One year while I was a very small child there was a terrible drouth in this country. There was not a grain of corn raised and not much cotton. People were about to starve. They came in droves to father for food.

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He could not see them starve, so he went to see the Chickasaw governor. He told father to go to Fort Smith and lay in a good supply of food for those starving Indians, and the government would pay him. So Father took a wagon and went to Fort Smith and brought back a good supply of food. He took care of those people until another crop was made.

Father raised sheep and we sheared them and spun thread with which we made into cloth for our clothes. We also carded the wool for quilts. We dyed our cloth with home made dyes. We boiled bois d'arc bark for yellow, indigo weeds for blue, and black haw roots for purple.

The first ink I remember was made of polk-berry juice.

I was married April 12, 1891, to Mr. Kennedy, by Noah Holston, County Judge of Sugar Loaf County, in the Choctaw Nation. We lived near Wilburton on a ranch. We went in ox wagons to Fort Smith to haul freight. I allotted land near Wilburton in 1903. The land that I wanted was segregated by the government as

coal land. It was near Heavener.

We moved to Sulphur, in Murray County, in 1907, for my husband's health and we have lived here continuously since. My mother is buried at Sulphur and my father is buried near Howe.

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