

KNOTSON, NARCISSA.

INTERVIEW

6510

BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma
KNUTSON, NARCISSA. INTERVIEW

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Field Worker's name Hazel B. Greene,

This report made on (date) June 23, 1937 1937

1. Name Mrs. Narcissa Knutson,

2. Post Office Address Spencerville, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month April 17, 1865. Day _____ Year _____

5. Place of birth about where Nelson is now.

6. Name of Father King Ashford Place of birth Arkansas

Other information about father is buried over in Arkansas, just over
the line, east of Broken Bow.

7. Name of Mother Elizabeth Griggs Place of birth _____

Other information about mother 1/2 Choctaw Indian. Is buried in
Griggs cemetery, about 8 miles north of Soper.

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 _____.

Note by Field worker: Mrs. Knutson has been married three times; first, to Robert Stewart Frazier, who died in 1911; then, to a Mr. Harmon, who died in Cilton where they had gone for a visit with his children in 1928. He is buried there. She married J. D. Knutson in 1928.

Field Worker, Hazel B. Greene,
June 28, 1937.

Interview with Mrs. Narcissa Knutson,
Spencerville, Oklahoma.

Narcissa Ashford was the daughter of King Ashford and Elizabeth Griggs Ashford. At sixteen she became the fourth wife of Robert Stewart Frazier, full blood Choctaw Indian, of about forty years of age. Narcissa was about a quarter breed Choctaw Indian, according to her sister, Jerusha (Theresa) Nelson at Soper. Narcissa was born about 12 miles southwest of the present town of Antlers. It must have been in about where Nelson is now. When she and Frazier had been married about a year they moved from Ten mile creek, northwest of Antlers. to old Spencer Academy, into the old building that was always the home for the superintendents.

Down a little way from the house a hundred yards or so was the old Academy garden, bordered by bois d' arc to form a hedge. A uniform square of them still outlines the old Academy garden. And now they are giant trees--plenty of them are two feet in diameter. One has a spread at the

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base of the trunk of at least 10 feet. Inside this square of trees and which was a garden in 1900, Robert Frazier lies in an unmarked grave. Narcissa believes he died in 1911. Not a mark, or a mound or stone to show where Robert Frazier sleeps, just level. No sign of a grave. Not even a paling fence around it, stock grazing at will over the ten graves that are there. A tombstone shows that Mosella E. Frazier was born November 14, 1900, and died October 14, 1903. The next tombstone was for a little full blood Choctaw Indian boy, Dennison Willis, an orphan, who was living at Robert Frazier's and was nearly dead from a congestive chill when the doctor got there after riding over those sand hills fifteen miles horseback. No date on it. He was ten years old. Sam Frazier's wife lies next in an unmarked grave. Next is Noah, born December 31, 1879; died May 13, 1903. Three tombstones in all. Next, is an infant son of Narcissa and Robert. Noah was Narcissa's stepson. She had three stepchildren. Sam and Reason were the others. Narcissa said there were ten buried there, but I saw no other graves, nor did she tell me who else were buried there.

In 1905, there was a big fine spring of water about a hundred yards down on the branch from those graves. The road

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crossed just below it. Another road leading north from Spencerville passed this spring. That spring was visited by every passerby and furnished water for the Academy and the families who resided there. The water was fine. Today there is an old dirty looking barrel sunken in the ground, the top level with the earth and the water comes about half way up the side of the barrel. The milk trough is covered over with sand. The trough that for years kept the milk and butter icy cold; and the spring branch runs under the ground to the creek bed, which is so filled up that it overflows the spring. One of the finest and most historical springs in the Choctaw Nation going into oblivion! It was so near the old stage line and military road that drivers stopped there for lunch and to rest and watered their horses and passengers. We used to have to ride down a steep hill to that creek to get our horses into the water. Now it is filled till it is almost level with the spring. Back across the small pasture the house stood where Narcissa's nine children were born. Only two of the nine are living now. Julius Frazier of Antlers, and Mrs. Maggie Noel of Spencerville. Emma, wife of Jesse Geel, was buried at Broken Bow; Wilson, killed by a horse, is buried

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at Spencerville. Lizzie, wife of George Buchanan of Spencerville is also buried there.

There are only heaps of rock and dirt and an occasional hewn sill to show where the old house stood. The chimneys and foundation of that old house were of native stone and this was always the home of the superintendents. It was of about 18 inch hewn pine logs. A 16 x 16 foot room on either side of a 12 foot hall were in front. A stairway in the hall led to two rooms above. A shed room of boxing plank was back of the east room and two boxed rooms making a dining room and kitchen were back of the west room. Fraziers used them for dining room and kitchen, but the Academy kitchen was of log and off a little way. The small-paned glass windows had wooden shutters, like doors, on wooden hinges, pivot style. The doors were put together with wooden pegs. Eight of those doors are in the present home of Narcissa. A storm blew the top off of that log house and Narcissa had it made into just a story and a half when she had it re-roofed. She was upstairs trying to get those old shutters closed when the storm took the top off. Took off a lot of the logs, too. She went down to find her two little children nearly drowned in the bed, so much water had rained in and she had

to bore holes in the floor to let the water out.

(She offered me a picture of that old house to have copied but I hadn't a quarter to have it done with. She said she would loan it to nobody but me because of our long standing friendship. It dates back to November of 1900. When I went out there with my doctor-father to visit them at the request of a white girl, Miss Jessie Hower, of Buck Indian Territory, who had not seen a white girl since she had gone up there to teach, September 1st and they really made me welcome. - Field Worker)

Narcissa built another house about 25 years ago, some hundred yards from the old log one. She used a lot of the old plank out of the old one and eight, I believe, of the old pegged doors. One of the old window shutters serves for a cover for a milk trough. The pine planks in that old house and the other old buildings are of lot heavier pine than that which grows here. Pieces exactly the same size will weigh more. It may be possible that it was grown where the pine is richer in resin than it is here, and probably shipped in here.

Now back to the pasture. There is an old excavation of perhaps 20 x 30 feet, walled up with stone. It was the

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cellar under the old kitchen, a one-room, log structure which was still standing in 1882 off just a few steps from the superintendent's home and was kitchen for the whole academy. It stood between the big house and the two-story dormitory, which was standing as late as 1905 and was being used for church, Sunday School, and school then. The stairways were on the outside, and the rooms of the old dormitory were plastered. Narcisse said when she moved there in 1882, there were five two-story buildings standing and the plank wash house, smoke house, and store house. The logs that came out of the old house were so well preserved that W. E. Schooler is using a lot of them in building his cabin on Schooler Lake about 3 miles south of Spencerville. He is also using a lot of the old chimney rock in his chimney.

Out behind the old kitchen was an ash hopper with a big iron pot under it to catch the lye as it dripped from the ashes. That pot sits in her yard today. The edges are chipped but it will hold 25 gallons yet. That old pot belonged to the academy and she estimates the age of it to be a hundred years, just from what she was told when she first went there in 1882. The old academy was supposed

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to have been built in 1847 or thereabouts. One of those old pegged doors in Narcissa's home has the original lock and brass knobs. One has an iron latch of the variety to be pulled up with a string from inside. She has one of the old school desks, and one of the mantels carved with initials and numbers. "No. 11. That's what I am," carved in Choctaw, is on that mantel.

The old military road and stage line goes past her gate, within three steps. In that old road, and grown up since it was used, are three giant trees that mark the passage of time; one black jack, one red oak and one black gum. That road was the freight and stage line from Fort Smith past Fort Towson to Jefferson boat landing on Red River, between what is now McCurtain County in Oklahoma and Marion County in Texas. Fort Smith was the court town for the Indian Territory, and lots of people traveled that road on their way to court. Once a party of men were returning from court at Fort Smith when one of them died on the road, and they just stopped long enough to pay the Fraziers \$5.00 to bury him in that old Spencer graveyard. They did not even tell his name or where he belonged. Nothing. Mrs. Frazier owned that plot so they buried him in an unmarked grave.

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In about February or March, 1904, a party of hunters were over on Frazier creek when one of them was stricken with nose-bleed. They took him to the home of Pete Williams, just north of the forks of Frazier creek and left him. He bled to death, and was about the last one to be buried in that old Spencer burial plot. His name was Don Whittle, and he was from Texas. His name was carved upon a tree, but some one cut the tree down long ago. He lies in an unmarked grave. Mr. Knutson could possibly locate that grave if the place were cleared of undergrowth.

In the spring of 1903 two small sons of Jim Dunn were drowned in a creek up near Spencerville and were buried in one grave in that cemetery.

One superintendent, by the name of Johnson, called his two sons to his bedside when he came to die and admonished them to live upright, honest lives. He talked to them about 30 minutes and asked that they bury him without any services of any kind, no song, no prayer, nor words, and said that he wanted no tombstone. He wanted to be buried in the little Academy cemetery beside "his boys," as he called those students who had been buried there. He also wanted one

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Thompson Ohio, a full blood Indian, to make his coffin. Ohio made it. They buried him there and walled his grave with rocks and at each corner they set a 6 inch, hewed cedar post.

Those two Johnson boys returned about ten years ago, grey haired men, to see the old place again and visit their father's grave. A huge post oak had grown close in beside that rock walled grave. They offered Mrs. Knutson money to let the tree stand there always. She refused the money but agreed to let the tree stand. That was in the Fall, the next Spring a storm uprooted that tree and tore up that rock wall in the grave. The roots of that tree had worked under the rocks.

Another superintendent was named Robe. A son and a daughter returned a few years ago, looking the place over. The daughter said she taught in the academy when she was young. The son told of the cook one day telling him that a coon was in the woodpile. He got the dogs after it and it ran up a tree, but fell out on him. Then there was a wild scramble to get the dogs and coon both off. Robe is buried in the academy cemetery.

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One woman was buried in two strap slippers. Rabbits burrowed in the graves and dogs dug out both of her slippers when they were digging after the rabbits.

Mrs. Knutson, present owner of the ground, would like to see that cemetery properly cared for so that the graves would not be desecrated in that manner. Two or three years ago, some interested persons from Hugo, W. E. Schooler, T. W. Hunter and others, cleaned the place off and repaired the tombstones. Some had been broken in many pieces.

One polished marble slab covers a grave and serves for two persons, who, the inscription shows, died one month apart to the day. Mother and son.

A rough, marble upright slab shows that a child was buried there in 1848.

Some stones were there with not a thing on them. No date or anything.

Mrs. Knutson owns a copy of the Laws of the Choctaw Nation, revised and collated to October, 1867 from 1834. It contains the Constitution of the Choctaw Nation, also the Treaty of 1855, between the United States and the Choctaws and Chickasaws. Also the treaty of 1866, when Andrew Johnson was President of the United States.

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Narcissa said that when she was born, about 12 miles southwest of Antlers, on Beaver Creek, that there was no Antlers then. Colbert's store, away up on Ten Mile Creek, fifteen or twenty miles away, was where they had to go for sugar, coffee and such things as they just had to buy. They raised the most of the things they ate.

"We used to tan cow hides from which to have our shoes made. There were shoemakers all over the country. The shoes were made with wooden pegs, of hickory, dog wood, bois d'arc, or sassafras.

We had no doctors much in those days either. Mother raised her family and there was never a doctor in the house. If a woman needed assistance in confinement we sent for old granny women, who knew what to do.

We had moved to Antlers, or nearly to where Antlers is now, when I married Robert Frazier. I was sixteen and he was about forty. I was his fourth wife. He was a preacher and mother thought him such a fine man. She managed the match. He was a full blood Indian. We moved up on Ten Mile Creek and lived there about a year. Then we moved to the old Academy grounds and buildings in April, 1882.

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In a few years a doctor was comparatively near us, Dr. O. N. Tucker. He was out west of Doaksville. Once when my oldest child had bold hives I went down there and stayed a week at Dr. Tucker's. There were Indian doctors but we never used them.

This was a sparsely settled country then. Wolves were so bad that they would howl until way up in the morning, nine and ten o'clock. I'd blow the hunting horn to make them stop. That would stop them because they realized that man was near. My nearest neighbor was two miles away when I first came up here.

Spencer was a mixed school for a while, but in the Fall before we came in the Spring they sent the girls to Wheelock Academy down in what is now McCurtain County and the boys to New Spencer near Nelson. There were remnants of groceries in the barrels in the store house when we came here, brown sugar, coffee, flour, etc. We always had big crowds to feed. The old academy buildings were used to hold big meetings in, and my husband being a preacher we had a lot of folks.

Game was plentiful. The first year we were here, my husband and the boys killed a hundred and sixty deer. They

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would go out at night with hunters' lights on their hats and shine the eyes of the deer and kill them. I have killed three deer. Though I never went hunting but once, and that was opossum hunting one night. My first deer came to the house, I put the dogs after it and followed them down to the creek, which was frozen over and the dogs caught it on the ice. I ran in and knocked it in the head and dragged it to the house and skinned it, alone. Another one came up to the yard and I set the dogs upon it and another woman and I followed and when they bayed it down on the creek we ran in and clubbed it to death and skinned it and carried it to the house on a pole. The other one I shot with the shotgun not far from the house.

John D. Knutson, 77 year old white man, husband of Narcissa Ashford-Frazier-Harmon-Knutson, said he first came to the Indian Territory, Choctaw Nation, in 1889 with a bunch of horses to trade and traffic with the Indians. He said he crossed Red River at the ferry east of Clarksville, Texas; came on up the old Military Trail and into the mountains; and that, before he went back to Texas, he visited the old court ground at Alikchi and saw an Indian whipped--90 lashes he said they gave him, and that Indian

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never grunted but got up and put on his own shirt. He also said he saw one executed. He said that the condemned were seated beside open graves and on their own coffins, blindfolded and when shot were buried immediately. He said he saw a sheriff shoot a condemned man at Tishomingo and when the shot did not kill him, the sheriff held the man's nose and his hand over his mouth till the man died. He also said that the condemned man's friends almost mobbed that sheriff because it was the custom or law if the first shot did not kill a condemned person that he should go free. He said that sheriff disappeared. He said this man at Tishomingo was convicted for having killed his wife and that his sister was there and handed him a handkerchief to be blindfolded with.

Knutson said he used to make larist rope, saddle girths, and bridles of horsehair, also that if one would put a horse hair rope on the ground around ones pallet a tarantula or snake would never cross it.