

KORTHANK, JOHNLIE W.E. DUNCAN

REV. W. E. DUNCAN ³⁹⁰ 7243

INDEX CARDS:

Tribe-Cherokee
Cherokee Emigration
Native Preacher
Methodist Circuit Rider
Cherokee Male Seminary

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

Field Worker's name James R. Carselowe

This report made on (date) August 19, 1937

Name Johnie Mae Duncan Korthank

Post Office Address Box 693, Enid, Oklahoma.

Residence address (or location) _____

DATE OF BIRTH: Month October Day 17 Year 1823

Place of birth _____

Name of Father _____ Place of birth _____

Other information about father _____

Name of Mother _____ Place of birth _____

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 7.

The Reverend Mr. W. A. Duncan was born on the ground which is now known as Lumpkin County, Georgia, near the old Cherokee town of Dahlanegah in the year 1823 and at the day of his death, October 17, 1907, he was eighty-four years old.

Mr. Duncan was of Indian extraction, his blood being a mixture of Highland Scotch and Cherokee. At the age of twelve when his parents, with the rest of the Cherokees, were expelled from their hereditary abode, east of the Mississippi, he came to the Indian Territory where he lived for the rest of his life.

From 1834, the date when the Duncan family settled in their new home until 1844, Wat Duncan's time was divided between work on the farm and studying such few books as he could find. When it was found that he could measure distance by calculation, without the actual use of a chain his decision upon all questions arising in the neighborhood was regarded as final.

In 1884, Wat Duncan was converted and became a Christian. In the latter part of the summer of that year, the Methodist people held a rural camp meeting and during service Wat Duncan arose and said, "Friends,

it is useless for anybody to question the truth of the Bible. I am convinced that religion is a necessity and my present resolve for the future is to serve and to live for the Lord." Soon after that he was licensed to preach. The evening meeting for that week fell to Mr. Duncan's own home and the neighbors had gathered in. The parlor was filled with sincerest kind of worshippers, with an inter-sprinkling of unsaved sinners who came from other motives than to honor God. The previous arrangements which provided that the young preacher should deliver the sermon caused unusual interest.

The preliminary steps in the service being concluded, Mr. Duncan rose to his feet evidently brimful of the Spirit. He announced his text and for a moment struggled in a faltering effort to proceed with his discourse. Then, with eyes and hands lifted heavenward he exclaimed, "Oh God! My God! Thou know'st that I cannot preach, but I know that Thou can'st send Salvation down and save souls here tonight, as Thou hast saved mine."

The event was truly Pentecostal. In those days it was by no means regarded among the Methodist people as a violation of good taste or a sign of low

breeding for a soul to shout forth its transports under the influence of the Holy Ghost. Those who came to scoff fell on their knees at the plain bench of repentance to ask forgiveness of their sins. Sinners were converted and Christians greatly strengthened.

The first regular work assigned to Mr. Duncan was to teach an Indian school located at a Methodist Missionary station, among the associated tribe who were then occupying the territory which is at present the northeastern part of the state of Kansas.

Having concluded a year of successful work in that position he returned to his father's home in the Cherokee Nation and at the next Annual Conference was made a Methodist preacher in due form and was assigned to a circuit. The circumference of his first circuit was something more than two hundred miles in extent.

From 1845 to 1861 when the Civil War opened he was a Methodist Circuit Rider, except for two terms when he served as a civil officer of the Cherokee government. For one term he held the office of superintendent of the Cherokee National Schools and

for one term represented his district as a member of the National Council. He spent the four years of the Civil War in Texas where he was both preacher and farmer.

At the close of the war Mr. Duncan returned to the Cherokee Nation. The heads of families by the hundreds had either fallen in battle or ^{been} swept away by disease and many orphans were left homeless. So single handed Mr. Duncan began a public movement for the relief of these children and caused himself to be commissioned by the National Council a special agent to proceed to found, organize, and conduct a Cherokee National Orphanage. The funds for this undertaking were furnished by the National Government.

Mr. Duncan first collected and located these orphans in the old war beaten building of the Cherokee Male Seminary. Later, the national authorities built a larger institution, located at the Grand Saline River. Mr. Duncan filled the office of superintendent and directed the affairs of this orphanage for twelve years and all this time retained his membership among the working forces of the Indian

Mission Conference. When he resigned as superintendent of the Cherokee National Orphanage he again went to his home on the farm.

Mr. Duncan never held public office although when Congress began the abolition of tribal governments he was induced by his countrymen to go to Washington several times to secure if possible a lessening of those drastic measures which so seriously threatened the rights and well-being of the Cherokee people. While Mr. Duncan was loyal to the United States and believed in living up to every treaty stipulation his heart was always with his own nation--the Cherokee.

About the year 1856 Mr. Duncan married Martha Bell. She was of Cherokee extraction. By this marriage there were born two sons and one daughter all of whom died of consumption early in life. Later the mother died also of consumption.

His second marriage was to Martha Johnson and of this union there were born one son, John Ellis and three daughters, May, Emma and Jennie. Mr. Duncan's second wife and three daughters died.

For the third time Mr. Duncan was married.

This wife was a widow named Mrs. Kate Caled. She bore him no children.

In the death of W. A. Duncan, the Cherokees have lost one of the best and greatest of their tribesmen.

Note: W. A. Duncan's father was John Duncan, who was the son of Charles Gordon Duncan, a Scotchman and Dorcas, a full-blood Cherokee. W. A. Duncan's mother was Elizabeth Abercrombie, both parents being native Georgians.