

HARRISON, JOHN W.

INTERVIEW

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

HARRISON, JOHN W.

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Field Worker's name Johnson H. Hampton

This report made on (date) January 25, 1938

1. Name John W. Harrison.

2. Post Office Address Antlers,

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month _____ Day _____ Year 1873

5. Place of birth Lafayette County, Missouri.

6. Name of Father _____ Place of birth Missouri

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother _____ Place of birth Missouri

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 15

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Johnson H. Hampton,
Investigator.
January 25, 1938.

Interview with John W. Harrison.
Antlers, Oklahoma.
Born 1873

I was born in Lafayette County, Missouri, in 1873 and was about sixteen years old when we came through the Indian Territory. My father and Mother decided that they would move to Texas, so we left Belton, Missouri, and came by wagon through the Indian Territory and on to Texas; we stopped at Denison, Texas, then went on to Paris, Texas, where we found John Gordon, one of our old friends who had come from Missouri, living on a farm. He had conditionally rented a farm for us before we got there; he later moved to the Indian Territory to Antlers.

We made one crop in Texas, five miles east of Paris in the year 1888; we made a failure. The landlord wanted my father to stay for another year but Father would not stay, he had enough of Texas; he wanted to go back to Missouri but was not financially able to make the trip back home, One of our Missouri friends, Uncle Billy Payne, lived near Kosoma, hauling lumber, so Father went up there to look

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around and when he came back he said that the roads were awfully bad but they wanted teams and that there was lots of lumber to haul. They had just begun to run sawmills in that country and the railroad had not been built over four or five years; the Frisco Railroad which ran from Paris, Texas, to Fort Smith, Arkansas, had just been completed when the sawmills came into the country.

There was lots of Yellow Pine timber and it was good timber, this was the first cutting that was done; I think Short & Picking and Ash & Ferguson were the only big companies who had sawmills in there at that time. Father decided to move to Kosoma, and haul lumber for four or five months and then move back to Missouri; at one time he was very prosperous in Missouri, he had some very good real estate.

We moved to Kosoma, Indian Territory, in February, 1889, and I have been in the Choctaw Nation for forty-nine years the first of next month. I lived at Kosoma, for twenty-seven years and near there the balance of the time.

We had two good teams, mules and horses. Our friend, Jim Cave, moved with us; he had two mule teams. My father left his family in Paris, Texas, and Jim Cave did, too; they were to stay

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there until the winter broke. We had to camp out and I can well remember we had some awfully cold weather in February. Our house was our wagon bed, with sheets and bows; camping out wasn't so bad but hatching was awful, Father and Mr. Cave and the two negroes we brought with us from Paris. There were no other negroes at Kosoma, and I am quite sure that these were the only negroes who ever lived there; they lived with us for several years then finally left on their own accord because no other negroes were allowed at this village. While they were there they drove a team all the time for my father and Mr. Cave. My father was the campboy most all the time; our lumber hauling developed into years instead of four or five months.

We had good teams but our wagons were worn out and we broke down so much it was all we could do to make a living out of our lumber hauling. About the first of March Mr. Cave sent for his family, he had built a small sawmill shack and he moved his family to this shack and Father and I boarded with him and his family. Prior to this time I had thought that no woman could cook better than my Mother but after eating Mrs. Cave's cooking I told her that she was the best cook in

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the world. I tell you we had some good eating; we kept venison all the time but we never hunted; we bought from the Indians. We paid 25 ¢ for venison hams, all we wanted at any time and they sold turkeys at a very low price, in fact, there was too much game for it to be worth much. I have seen deer in droves, fifteen or twenty of them in one bunch, and turkeys were as thick as blackbirds.

There was a family of bachelors who lived at Kosoma of the name of Harvill, an old man and his two sons. They were white people and the boys were hunters; they would kill lots of deer and turkeys and a few bears and they would bring us bear meat once in awhile. One time, I remember, they captured two cubs and kept them until they got unruly, they had to keep them chained and finally sold them. Very frequently you would see pet fawn, they were easy to capture after you killed their mother and they were very easy to make a pet of.

About the first of April my father sent after his family and we moved into a small house at a sulphur Spring, about half a mile north of Kosoma. There was good water at this spring which is still there and as good as it ever was.

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When I first landed at Kosoma there were no schools, church nor Sunday School. My mother was an educated lady and Christian; she belonged to the Church of Christ and my father formerly belonged to the Baptist Church but some few years later became a member of the Church of Christ. Mother was a lady who always had influence in the advancement of education and Christianity and when we moved here the first step she took was to have Sunday School; about a month after she came or hardly so long she started a Sunday School at the Sulphur Spring in front of our house under a big tree. A few women and children came the first Sunday; there were twelve or fifteen men sitting on a cliff of rocks southwest of the house about sixty yards. A United States Marshal, Bert Brown, came along and asked these men if they were taking in the Sunday School. One of them swore and said, "We came down here to break it up, we are going to give them a war whoop", but the marshal told them they had better not disturb the Sunday School for they would be disturbing public worship it would get them in bad trouble. The next Sunday some of the same bunch came to Sunday School and helped with the singing

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and it wasn't but a very short time until we had good Sunday School.

The next step my mother made for advancement was for a day school; she went around and got signers to start a subscription school. She opened the school in the summer and she taught the summer school and the next year, and the following year my oldest sister, Eva, taught, the next year my sister, Mimie, taught and the next year my youngest sister, Emma, taught. By that time the school business was under a pretty good headway for after the school got started it seemed that everybody wanted the school to go on. Later they got a regular teacher and my mother and sister did not teach anymore.

My mother is also responsible for first preaching at Kosoma; she had a Baptist preacher to come from Paris, Texas, and hold church twice a month, he came for several months. We had been at Kosoma probably about a year when she got the preaching started.

I want to tell you the white people were the ones to civilize, not the Indians; I have always found the Indians more law-abiding citizens than the whites. While we will have to

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admit that they most all drink and like whisky, that is about the only time the Indians would ever get loud in their talking and we all know who is responsible for that. I have noticed that the Indians hardly ever got loud with a white man unless the white man started it; when they were drinking their troubles were among themselves, very seldom was a white man ever implicated in their troubles.

There were thousands and thousands of acres of fine grass almost waist high in the timber and mountains here; I think that the Indian agent charged the cattlemen \$5 per head, a limit for so many head, but the white man had a way to beat that; he would get some Indian to hold his cattle as theirs.

There was lots of whisky and dancing at Kosoma, I never danced nor would mingle with them on their big drunks but I remember I was at one dance at Kosoma when they danced with their spurs on and big six shooter buckled on. There was a water bucket full of whisky with about six tin cups in the bucket and everybody who wanted to drink but I don't remember of seeing any one down drunk; the dance went on without any trouble. They used to get their whisky from Paris, Texas, and from Fort Smith; hardly ever would an Indian get to those dances.

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In a very short time here in the southeast part of the Indian Territory sawmills were scattered promiscuously over the country cutting millions and million of feet of Yellow Pine timber. At first the Indians realized very little out of the timber, they got 25¢ per thousand feet, taking the log scale at the mills and the mill man beat the Indians out of thousand and thousands of feet of timber. The sawmill operators they would not turn in a report on all timber cut so the Indians went to the railroad agent and tried to get the number of cars that were shipped out at that station, still that was not satisfactory for the agents would not make a full report. The third and last plan of the Indians was to scale the stumpage, take their estimate from that and they proceeded with this scale until the allotment was made, still the sawmill business went on. Oh my, how they did slaughter the fine pine timber, all the best timber along the railroad was cut out. I am sure that I never took ^{anything} from the Indians, tho I was a lumber hauler and hauled on wagons with mules and horses for twenty ^{years} lost very little time. When I quit hauling lumber I began to check lumber; I checked for five

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years straight time. Very little lumber hauling was done with oxen but most all the logging was done with oxen for several years; they made good money hauling logs for the grass was good so they did not have to feed ^{their teams} except in the winter time. Most all the men who used to log are dead; I know of only two who are still living, Billy Gardener, who lives at Tuskahoma and Andy Pee who lives at Stanley.

At one time Kosoma was one of the best lumber points on the Frisco railroad. I was checking lumber there at the time we had over two million feet of lumber in the yards at one time; I was checker for seven or eight different mills. My father finally took a contract to haul lumber for so much and to keep up the roads and was allowed for a while to sell feed and groceries; we made good money then for groceries and feed were high.

I was married to Mr. T. A. Wilson's daughter at Kosoma December 24, 1906, but I still lived at home with my father and we worked to each other's interest just the same.

When an Indian died the other Indians did not cry and grieve like we did, that was not their way of doing. They

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didn't seem to be the least bit excited. They almost always buried their loved ones at home in the back yard or in the garden, sometimes in front of the house. However, I do know of several cemeteries where they buried their dead, but they did not erect tombstones; instead they almost always built a little house over the grave. The Indians set a time to meet and cry at the place where the deceased was buried. I don't remember how long they cried but I was at one cry and stayed a few minutes and I do know they seemed to be sincere.

I have also been to their preachings; they preach in their own language. I have been to their meeting where they used an interpreter.

I don't believe that I ever was at an Indian dance. The Indians were not much interested in amusements of any kind. I have been to their ball games. They used two wooden sticks that looked like dippers to catch the ball. There were a good many who would go after the ball at the same time; it is a rough game, almost as rough as we play football now.

About 1898, a Federal courthouse was built for this country that was the first court that the white people had in this country where they could be tried instead of going

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to Paris, Texas, or to Fort Smith, Arkansas. After statehood the Federal Court was done away with and now we have a good County Court House in the place of the Federal Court House.

After statehood, at the first election while we were still living at Kosoma, a friend of my father's had Father's name put on the ticket as a candidate for commissioner for the Second District, A. O. Bryant was candidate for commissioner of the Third District and for the First District a man of the name of Evans had his name put on the ticket. William Ellis was a candidate for Sheriff, A. J. Arnett for County Attorney, W. D. Parks for County Clerk, Mr. Trigg for District Court Clerk, Malcolm E. Resser for District Judge. L. P. Davenport for County Judge and F. L. Anderson for Township Assessor; all of these candidates were elected. My father was elected for the third term as County Commissioner for his district but he passed away before taking his seat for the third term and Mr. Tucker was appointed in his place.

At that time the County Commissioners got very little pay, I think that he got \$33.00 for the first year, then in his second term it had been increased to \$37.00 per month.

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My father was well liked by the citizens of Pushmataha County; he not only looked after his district but he looked after the whole county and the interest of the county. He was seventy-three years old when he passed away but I am sure that he will be remembered by the good citizens for all time to come and his name will be honored by the younger generation.

There has been a great advancement made since 1889, it only seems a short time back when we had no autos, very little machinery, not even a phone, you might say no roads. It will seem odd to the younger generation in after years how we got along and how we got by, but as for me, give me back the old Indian Territory times; I love Oklahoma but my mind still wanders back to the Indian Territory times.

I have lived here for a long time and know most of the full blood Indians in this county, they are good people, are all good friends of mine and I never did have any trouble with any of them. They are the best and quietest people that you can find and they are honest and dependable at all times.