

BIOGRAPHY FORM

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

#9938

Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

LANE, J. M. INTERVIEW.

Field Worker's name John P. DoughertyThis report made on (date) February 11, 1938.1. Name J. M. Lane2. Post Office Address Fitzhugh, Oklahoma.3. Residence address (or location) Pontotoc, Oklahoma.4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month November Day 8 Year 18615. Place of birth West Virginia.6. Name of Father James Lane Place of birth West Virginia.Other information about father Farmer.7. Name of Mother Sarah Aldredge Place of birth West Virginia.

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 _____

An Interview with J. M. Lane, Fitzhugh, Oklahoma.
By - John F. Dougherty, Investigator.
February 10, 1938.

My father was James W. Lane, born in 1839 in West Virginia. He was a farmer. Mother was Sarah Ann Aldredge, born in 1840 in West Virginia. There were ten children. I was born in West Virginia, November 8, 1861. I married Nancy Hurley in Arkansas in 1881 and we moved to the Indian Territory in a covered wagon in 1882. We settled at Old Friaco, north of Mill Creek in the Chickasaw Nation on a farm belonging to Frank Byrd. Governor Overton was governor of the Chickasaws when I came.

In 1886 William L. Byrd, who was operating a store at Stonewall and for whom I hauled freight from Atoka, became a candidate for governor of the Chickasaws. Those were turbulent times for politicians. In 1877 William L. Byrd helped revise the Chickasaw laws and in 1881 he became School Superintendent for the Chickasaw Nation. In 1882 he went to Washington, D. C., as a delegate and was National Agent until 1885, when he became a candidate for governor of the Chickasaw Nation. His opponents were R. L. Boyd, William Guy, Ex-Governor Wolf, B. C. Burris and Palmer Moseley. Guy was elected, but failed to have a majority of

the votes cast, so the matter was handed to the Legislature and they decided in Guy's favor by one vote.

Again in 1888 Guy and Byrd were contestants for the governorship. It resulted as before, but Byrd's party had a majority in the Legislature and they decided to contest the vote. By so doing many illegal votes were thrown out and Byrd won the election by forty-eight votes. His opponents said he had no right to be governor because he was not an Indian. The report was spread about that Governor Byrd was an orphan child who had been adopted by John Byrd and his Chickasaw wife in Mississippi. Governor Byrd was very fair skinned and didn't have any of the Byrd characteristics, but he was loyal to the Chickasaw tribe and made a good governor. The action when governor which is well remembered was the disfranchisement of the white citizens. It was said that he did this so the white citizens couldn't vote against him in the election of 1890 when Sam Paul was his opponent in the Progressive Party.

Governor Byrd looked after the interests of all his people, regardless of their political beliefs and he also was considerate of the landed rights of the white citizens.

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Governor Byrd and his wife had no children, but the children of his neighbors loved him almost as much as they loved their own fathers. He was constantly surrounded by the children of the neighborhood in which he lived. Another law which Governor Byrd enacted was that ranch men could hire Indian boys only as hands and any Indian who hired a white man was subject to penalty.

I went to work for Joe Roff on the Roff Ranch in the Chickasaw Nation in 1888. My wife cooked for the ranch hands. We received \$25.00 per month as wages. Father was living at Lebanon when the Lee Boys killed Andy and Jim Roff. One day a posse of fifty men were hunting the Lee boys when a lad came into a store at Lebanon and told the merchant he wanted tobacco for the Lee boys who were not far from there. They sent word for the posse to come on out to the hill where they were but nobody went. Everybody was afraid of the notorious Lee brothers. Father often laughed about the fifty men who were looking for the Lees and praying that they wouldn't find them, for when they had a chance to encounter the Lee boys the fifty men ran and hid.

Fire often got started after July when the grass became

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dry, and it was certainly exciting when we saw an approaching prairie fire. The flames would leap into the air many feet. Often cattle and horses were seen after a fire had raced through the country with the hair singed from their bodies. It was almost impossible to out-run these fires. The wind would whip fire for a distance of fifty feet or more. We protected our houses by plowing furrows several feet wide around about an acre of ground on which our homes stood and carefully burning all the grass within this furrow. If we were on the range when one of these fires started we would set fire to the grass ahead of the fire and burn off a large spot to ride onto until the fire was past. We drove our cattle to Atoka to ship them over the M. K. & T. Railroad, which was the first railroad across the Territory.

The full blood Chickasaws were very superstitious. I shall relate a few of their queer customs. When a Chickasaw died they always put groceries enough in the box with his dead body to get him to the "Happy Hunting Ground". They also put in an extra pair of moccasins or shoes, his gun, or bow and arrow, all of his money and any trinkets which he prized. After he was buried they led his favorite pony up

to a hole beside his grave and shot it. It was buried beside him, so it would go to the Happy Hunting Ground with him. Their graveyards were always near their places of abode and each night after the death of a loved one a light burned all night for many nights. This was to give light on his journey and keep him from being lonesome.

When a boy was born they killed a quail and scratched the bottom of the baby's feet with the quail's claws so that the boy would have the power to run as fast as the quail.

When a Chickasaw rode up to the house of a white settler he made no sound but just sat there until somebody appeared to make him welcome, and if a white man went to the home of a Chickasaw he expected the same action from his white visitor. It made the Chickasaws angry if a white man yelled "hello". I have seen the Chickasaws peek through cracks in the house, but make no effort to welcome me when I said, "Hello". If they suspected that a person had committed a crime they would probably kill him even if he was innocent.

The Chickasaws were very fond of whiskey and would give anything asked for a quart of firewater after they be-

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gan drinking. I have seen them give a horse if they had no money.

The Chickasaws always built their houses in secluded spots and if there was a road near the door it would be on the back side of the house instead of the front.

Their Pashofa Dances were interesting. They killed a hawk, buzzard or crow and covered two poles in front of the door where the sick person lay, with the feathers from these birds. This was to frighten away the evil spirits. The Pashofa which was cooked over a camp-fire, was set between these poles when they got ready to eat it. It was eaten from the pot in which it was cooked, with horn spoons. If one went between the fire and the cabin he was immediately covered with a liquid which kept the spirits from entering his body. If there were chairs these were turned upside down to prevent witches from sitting in them.