



LEGEND & STORY FORM  
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION  
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

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HARMON, JOHN

INTERVIEW

13689

Field worker's name Nannie Lee Burns,

This report made on (date) April 22, 1938

1. This legend was secured from (name) John Harmon,  
Address 702 West A Street, Picher, Oklahoma.

This person is (male ~~or~~ female) ~~white~~, ~~Negro~~, ~~Indian~~,

If Indian, give tribe Cherokee

2. Origin and history of legend or story As told by his mother and  
as he remembers it.

3. Write out the legend or story as completely as possible. Use blank sheets and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 8

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Nannie Lee Burns,  
Investigator,  
April 22, 1938.

An Interview with Mr. John Harmon,  
702 West A Street,  
Picher, Oklahoma.

My great grandfather was James (Buck) Smith; my grandfather was Henry Smith, and my mother was Mary Smith, a full blood Cherokee. They were all born in Tennessee and came to this country on the "Trail of Tears." My father was A "(Bunk)" Harmon, an Irishman who came with the Cherokees as one of the conductors on their trip and as far as I know he was also born in Tennessee. He and my mother were married while on the "Trail of Tears," on their way to this country. They grew acquainted on the way and their courtship took place as they walked along behind the wagons during the day. My great grandfather was a spokesman for the tribe and came with them all the way and after spending some time here and not liking this country he returned to Tennessee where he died. My father is buried at Tablequah.

Mother has often spoken of the hardships that they endured on the road and told that many of them sickened

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and died from the hardships and exposures on the trip. Some had wagons and teams of horses and others were driving oxen which would not travel as fast as the horses. Each morning all would start at the same time but as some traveled so much faster than the others, some would not reach the camping place until late at night perhaps midnight and then after only a few hours rest they must be up and ready for the next day's travel, so these who had the slow moving oxen had a very hard time of it and not many hours rest at night.

After they arrived here my father not liking the Indians took my mother and went to Kentucky but after a short stay came west again and this time located in Missouri near Irondale where I, the next to the oldest of a family of fourteen boys, was born. Today of that family I am the only one living. Four of the boys died when very small and I have buried four of them that died with the consumption and also my father and fourteen years ago I buried my mother. After a few years in Irondale, we came to Centerton, Missouri, and here we farmed. Life was

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hard for there was a large family to be fed and we had no feed for the horses and had to make a crop on the grass. Each morning as a barefoot boy, I would have to get out and hunt the horses that had been turned out to graze during the night. We got the chills that year. Under these circumstances, we did not get much school and what we did get was at a little log schoolhouse where we sat upon split logs without any backs for seats.

My father was in the army for three years and four months under General Lee and when he came home I did not know him. He was a stranger to me.

Once when we were all at home, father went to town and told the merchant that he wanted fourteen straw hats and the merchant interested asked him what he wanted so many for and father replied, that he had that many boys and had a head for each hat. The merchant said, "If you will bring them all in at once, I will give each of them a good hat." Father returned home and took all of us to town in the wagon. He had a wagon load of barefoot boys. We got our hats.

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One of the amusements in those days for boys was jumping and one day, Father came out and said, "I will set you a pattern." He not only jumped over a three rail fence but jumped a greater distance than any of us were ever able to jump.

When I was seventeen, I went to work in the coal mines at Pittsburg, Kansas, where I ran a water box for a while and later was a "cager" for six or seven years. Father died a short time after I was twenty-one and I became the wage-earner and the head of the family and moved them to the country near me. I had a hard time with the younger boys, as I had had little education, I tried to keep them in school but they would play hooky so much that I finally gave it up and let them go if they wanted to go.

January 6, 1888, I married Tulia Wallen whose parents had come from Kentucky and Tennessee. I moved to Galena, Kansas now. The next year, with my brother-in-law, Earl Wallen, who lived near where Bernice now is, I made the Run. From his home there we drove in a buggy

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with two good horses of his to the edge of the Strip. We registered and the morning of the Run found us on the line waiting for the signal to start. Every conceivable kind of conveyance was there and it seemed to me every kind of a person. There was certainly a gang on the line. At the shot, which was the signal, they went across the line like sheep but those who had the best horses soon were ahead and soon you would see men drop out and set their stakes and as we drove we would see some men ploughing with oxen. They had been there before and had located their claims though no one was supposed to have been in the land to be staked that day. These men were afterwards called, "Sooners." We drove quite a way and then we got out and set our stakes with the flag. I did not have the money to stay and had gone only because I could go with Earl. A man came along and seeing that we were not prepared to stay, after looking around he said to me, "You have got a mighty poor claim but I have a good shot gun that I will give you for it." We traded and my brother-in-law sold his claim and so we both returned home having been gone about two weeks.

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When they were enrolling the Cherokees, I sent Mother to Tahlequah to enroll our family but she could not read or write and they told her that it was all fixed so she came home but we never secured any headright. Later one day, I was with Earl Wallen at Grove when the Cherokees were getting a payment and the man, who was giving out the checks had known my grandparents and my mother, said to me, "You should have a check but I have no authority to give you one."

Many years ago when Ottawa County was covered with tall grass and the prairie with cattle, when driving with my wife across the country to see her folks, I would often say to her having learned something about the lay of a mining country, "Some day there are going to be big mines here around the Blue Mound." My first mining experience in this county was at Lincolnville at the old Katy mine. I had occasion to come down there when we were still living at Galena, Kansas, and the manager said he would like to get me to take charge of the mine. I met him and was hired. The first week everything went fine but

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at the end of the second week the manager was not there to pay the men for the week's work and I thought that it was accidental until I had some of them tell me that it happened quite frequently and that the men would get mad and quit and the company would save quite a bit of money in this way. At the end of the third week in the middle of the afternoon, I was "tipped off" that the manager was getting ready to leave and I went into his office and asked for the men's checks, he said that they would be there soon but that he was compelled to go to Joplin at once and could not wait. I closed the door and told him that the men wanted their money and the mill-man got word to the other boys who soon came in and when he admitted that he did not have the checks, one of the men said, "Lets beat him up" and another suggested that we hang him from the derrick and they brought a rope. Seeing that we were in earnest after keeping him there all night he got word to the owner in Joplin to bring out money to pay the men which he did Sunday morning after which we let the manager go. He was a little Frenchman and later he got a mine down in Arkansas and wanted me to come and run it for him but I did not go.

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Later I ran the old Blue Bird Mine at Commerce and later for many years worked for the Black Eagle Mining Company. I had been with them for many years and was not used to the sun and during a shut-down while doing some outside work in the sun, I suffered a sun-stroke which affected my eyes and since then I have not been able to do any work nor can I stand to be in the sun much. I took care of Mother until her death and after my wife's death several years ago, one of my two daughters came to live with me at my home here.