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CHAMBERS, JENNIE MCCOY. INTERVIEW.

Mary D. Dorward,
Field Worker.

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

Field Worker's name Mary D. Dorward

This report made on (date) May 3, and 4, 1937

1. Name Jennie McCoy Chambers

2. Post Office Address Tulsa, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 1530 East 14th Street,

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month April Day 25 Year 1854

5. Place of birth In Cooweescoowee District, near Claremore.

6. Name of Father Joseph McCoy Place of birth _____

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Mary Hicks McCoy Place of birth Alabama.

Other information about mother Made trip from Alabama over Trail
of Tears.

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 5 pages.

Mary D. Dorward,
Field Worker.

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JENNIE McCOY CHAMBERS
A Biographical Sketch
From a Personal Interview with the Subject.
(1630 East 14th Street, Tulsa, Okla.)

(The subject of this sketch was very difficult to interview, for, while she was very willing to talk, she is very deaf, is eighty-three years old, and her mind seems to wander.)

Jennie McCoy Chambers was born April 24, 1854, in the Koo-wee-skoo-wee (her spelling) district of the Cherokee Nation, near the town of now Claremore. The house, a log cabin, still stands. It is at the north end of Claremore lake on Dog Creek, has two large rooms and a small room downstairs and a room upstairs. Has clapboard doors.

Mrs. McCoy is about half Cherokee (which she calls Cher ō 'kee, just as she says Tahl ēē'quah), her mother, Mary Hicks, coming over the Trail of Tears from Alabama when a child. Her father, Joseph McCoy, was a rancher and the family lived on the place near Claremore until the Civil War when they went over near Saline, and "refugeed" in the Cherokee Nation until the close of the War. Evidently they did not remain at Saline because she said that she and her sister many times walked from Tahlequah to Fort Smith and back for supplies from the Government, and many times they almost starved. Her people sympathized with the Union. After the War they returned to their home at Claremore and found everything undisturbed, just as they

had left it, with the smokehouse full of meat.

EDUCATION.

She was taught to read by her mother who found an old bunch of letters and an almanac from which she taught her daughter to read. Later she went to school in Ooo-wee-scoo-wee district. She could speak five Indian tongues, namely, Cherokee, Creek, Seminole, Choctaw, and Osage, and at the age of sixteen she acted as interpreter for those five tribes in their relations with the Government. (She said, "when they went to get their strip payments", but would the Osages have been drawing strip payments?)

ANCESTRY.

Her great-grandmother on her father's side was Jenny Wolf, of Revolutionary times. She has a knife which Jenny Wolf used in the Revolution. It is shaped something like a sickle and was used to cut off heads (I couldn't find out whether they were British heads or Colonists' heads).

Her grandfather, Elijah Hicks, was the first to be buried in the cemetery at Claremore. Before his death he prepared his own gravestone, engraving it in Cherokee. Part of it is still in the cemetery in Claremore, the other part was broken off and carried to Oklahoma City. The full inscription in English on his gravestone is as follows (the part in Cherokee has been broken off):

Elijah Hicks was born June 21, 1797.

In the old Cherokee Nation East of the Mississippi River, was educated in South Carolina. He assumed a high position as a leader, in 1832-3 succeeded E. L. Boudinot as editor of the Cherokee Phoenix; in 1835-9 was commander of the Cherokees to their present homes; was one of the framers of Constitution and laws of the Nation; filled a number of appointments as a delegate to Washington D. C. to attend to the affairs of the tribe with U. S. Grant.

August 6, 1856; aged 60 years; one month, sixteen days.

INDIAN CUSTOMS.

The Indians made the cloth from which their clothes were made, grew the cotton, picked the seeds from the boll, spun it and wove it into cloth. They colored it from dyes made at home, using indigo root for blue, walnut bark and copperas for brown, cochineal bulbs (Bugs?) for red, and walnut bark, alum, and borax for yellow.

Baskets were woven from cane gathered in the cane-brakes and from willows. Bows and arrows were made from bois d'arc; crochet hooks and knitting needles also were made from bois d'arc. Thread was made from sinews of deer. Mrs. Chambers has a spoon made from the horn of the buffalo. Pipes were made from pipe rock, coffins and

nails from wood. Purchases of guns, beads, etc., were in Kansas City when the cattle were driven over the trail twice yearly. (This must have been in the later days. I was utterly unable to get her to understand the word "agency.")

In the early days she rode horseback a great deal. Sometimes she rode in races and once she was awarded a prize for being a "modern" woman, riding the best, sitting her mount best, and looking prettiest on her mount. Always rode sidesaddle and when women began riding astride (after the Civil War, she said) she remarked, "What are you doing, taking after the wild tribes?" They never had buggies with tops till just within the last fifty years.

Cherokees never wore a "flap" (blanket), and wore a turban on the head instead of a blanket. An anachronism in a picture of Sequoyah in which he is wearing a blanket on his head. Sequoyah never wore such a head covering, he wore a turban. (Mrs. Chambers is a descendant of Sequoyah on her father's side). The Field Worker made an attempt, unsuccessfully, to get the Chambers family to trace their relationship with Sequoyah. Mrs. Chambers said, in an off hand way, "I'm kin to Sequoyah on my daddy's side", but the Field Worker on account of the old lady's deafness, never could make her understand that it was desirable to trace the relationship exactly.)

CLANS.

A member of the Wolf clan Mrs. Chambers belonged to the Ca-too-yah club. Betsy Ross Hicks, the grandmother of Jennie McCoy Chambers, was a sister of John Ross, Principal Chief of the Cherokees for a many years.

PLACE NAMES.

Claremore Mound was named for an Indian who is buried on top of it. Dog Creek is named for an Indian who is buried in its bed and who picked out a nice sandy spot for it where there was no water.

Chouteau (so she says) is an Osage name. (She started to tell me its meaning but wandered off on to something else.)

INCIDENTS OF THE TRAIL OF TEARS

Mrs. Chambers' grandfather and grandmother Hicks, together with her own mother, came in the emigrant train over the Trail. On the way they picked up two children who were lost. One, a boy whose people had all died of smallpox, came to them when they were encamped along a creek. He was known as S.S. Stevens and never knew but what he was an Indian. The other child was a little girl who knew no name but Polly. When she grew older she married and was known as Aunt Polly Myers.