

CHAMBERLIN, SARAH LEHR.

INTERVIEW

#7047

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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) August 6, 1938 1938

1. Name Sarah Lehr Chamberlin

2. Post Office Address Tulsa, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 1142 North Main Street

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month _____ Day _____ Year 1868

5. Place of birth Tennessee

6. Name of Father _____ Place of birth _____

Other information about father _____

7. 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 8

Mary D. Dorward, Field Worker
Indian-Pioneer History S-149
August 5, 1937

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SARAH LEHR CHAMBERLIN

A biographic sketch

From a personal interview with the subject
(1142 N. Main St., Tulsa, Okla.)

Sarah Lehr Chamberlin came at the age of seventeen to Vinita, Indian Territory, in November 1885, with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. D. Lehr. On July 29, 1886, she married Robert L. Chamberlin, one thirty-second degree Cherokee, son of the Rev. A. Chamberlin.

ALLOTMENTS.

My husband and our two oldest children, a son and a daughter, each received allotments. I, although a citizen by adoption, received none, because when the allotments were made, the Commission ruled that only those white wives would be considered eligible for allotment who had been married prior to 1876. My youngest daughter, Nadine, received none either for the reason that she was a "too, too late," that is, when the Commission began enrolling the Indians and assigning the allotments a certain date was fixed as a dead line, those born after that date being excluded from participation in the allotments. Those born after that date were known as the "too lates." Later the first

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date was extended to a later time so that those born after the first date but before the last were to share in the land distribution. Those born after the second date never were given any share and were known as the "too, too lates," a Cherokee expression. My daughter was one of these.

My husband and my older daughter received allotments just at the southwest edge of the town of Vinita, along Big Cabin Creek, plus ten acres each in the Spavinaw hills. Because of its proximity to the town that land was rated at a higher valuation than some other sections, so they received only eighty acres apiece. My son, however, was given a tract at Pheasant Hill, about six miles north of Vinita, along Big Cabin Creek. Because the land was farther from town it was rated at a lower figure and my son was allotted 160 acres plus the ten acres in the Spavinaw hills.

Politics was rotten then just as it is now and many people bought their way into allotments who had no right whatever to one.

COMMISSION TO THE FIVE TRIBES

One group of the Dawes Commission stayed at the Cobb hotel in Vinita. Their duties were to enroll the Indians and evaluate the land which was later allotted. They did not know the value of the land and rated it wrong. They all had their jobs through politics and didn't care whether they did things right or not. Thus my husband and daughter were allotted land considered more valuable than that given my son and were therefore given only half the acreage he was given, when in reality his was the better value for, while theirs was rich bottom land and close to town, yet it was rendered less valuable because Big Cabin Creek overflowed there so much worse than it did on my son's land.

The members of the Commission sold whiskey freely to the Indians. I once saw old Chief Se-quitchee, a member of the Commission, sell a bottle of whiskey to my husband.

PAYMENTS

When the Cherokee Strip was opened to settlement each headright among the Cherokees was given a payment of either \$160.00 or \$260.00, I have forgotten which. My husband and my two sons, our only children at that time, each received a payment. This payment was made less than a year after the strip opening.

The Old Settlers each were given a small payment by the Government to compensate them for having come to Indian Territory voluntarily and at their own expense, whereas with the later exodus the expense of transportation had to be borne by the Government. My mother-in-law received such a payment but not until after I had married into the family, many, many years after she had made the trip.

CEMETERIES

The Chamberlin family had a cemetery adjoining the church at Pheasant Hill. It dates from about 1870, when the family settled near Vinita, and at first was private. It has of late years been used as a public burying ground.

GHOST TOWNS

Pheasant Hill at first was not a town. It was just a church. About 1891 or 1892 a postoffice was opened there, the mail being carried on horseback from Vinita. The post office has since been abandoned.

CEREMONIAL GROUNDS

At one time there was a stomp grounds near the town of Big Cabin, but it has been abandoned. The grounds near Lenapah are now the principal ceremonial grounds for that part of the country.

My husband would never let me go to them. He said the Indians all lay around drunk and it was no place for a woman. He didn't even go himself but about once or twice.

The Cherokees always buried beneath the ground, burying toys or treasured belongings with the dead, but placing tomahawks on top of the grave.

AGRICULTURAL FAIRS

The fair at Vinita was already a going affair when we came to Vinita in 1885. It was held annually in September, and consisted chiefly of displays of canned fruits and vegetables, handwork and stock exhibits. There were premiums for the stock, fruits, etc. Handwork consisted of quilts, dresses, embroidery. There were also the usual sideshow and merry-go-round.

COW TOWNS

Vinita was not much more than a postoffice when we came there in 1885. Later it got to be quite a shipping point for cattle, great herds being driven and shipped out. The cattlemen used to steal all the cattle they could find loose that were not branded. They once stole my cow as they drove a herd through town, but my husband took a ride through the cattle pens and found her. She was one my father had given me when I was married and bore his brand D-L and they were afraid to ship her with the others. They once stole a calf from me that was not branded and I never got it back.

HUNTING GROUNDS

When statehood came the Government set aside certain untillable lands for hunting. Payments were received by the Indians for these lands.

REMINISCENCES OF THE REVEREND A. N. CHAMBERLIN

The Rev. A. N. Chamberlin was a Presbyterian missionary to the Cherokees in Georgia. He there married a part Cherokee woman and came to Indian Territory with that band of Cherokees who came when the Government first ordered them to come and who became known as the Old Settlers.

He was associated with the mission at Park Hill and was superintendent of Dwight Mission near Sallisaw from 1868 until about 1871. He knew the Cherokee language, being able both to speak it and write it, and was official interpreter for the Cherokee Council. He translated the English alphabet into Cherokee and assisted in editing and publishing literature for the Cherokees. The printing press used by him and containing the Cherokee characters is now in the keeping of the First Presbyterian Church of Tulsa. Rev. Mr. Lamb had borrowed the press from Rev. Chamberlin and after my father-in-law's death Rev. Lamb offered the press

to my husband. My husband replied that he didn't know or understand Cherokee and told Mr. Lamb to give the press to some one who could make use of it. Eventually it came into the possession of the church.

Rev. Chamberlin used to hold protracted meetings for the Indians, who would come for miles around and stay till the meetings were over. Many of them would stay with him in his house and of course he was glad to take care of them because he was anxious to get them to come to the meetings. My mother-in-law had one of those huge kettles about the size of a hoghead, at least five feet in diameter, which she would fill with hams and shoulders and cook them to feed the Indians. Hogs were plentiful and easy to get since there were wild ones roaming around everywhere.

Rev. Chamberlin served in the Civil War on the side of the Union.