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

Field Worker's name Charline M. Culbertson

This report made on (date) April 30 1937

1. Name William T. Culbertson

2. Post Office Address Kiowa, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) Kiowa

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month June Day 22 1957

5. Place of birth Chillicothe, Missouri

6. Name of Father E. H. Culbertson Place of birth Princeton, Ind.

Other information about father Moved to Livingston Co. Mo. in 1839

7. Name of Mother Helen H. Culbertson Place of birth Galliton, Mo.

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 _____.

Interview with William T. Culbertson
Kiowa, Oklahoma.

In June 1868 my father and mother with seven children of which I was the oldest son, (eleven years of age) landed at the Sulphur Spring where Stringtown is now located, having moved from Texas in an ox wagon, driving a small bunch of cattle and horses. Captain Joseph Ward, an old friend of my father's, bought from Lizanna Geary a double log cabin with about two acres of land in cultivation for my father, where we lived until we could secure lumber to build a house. Colonel James Riley, a prominent Indian citizen, was on his way with a saw mill, having to haul it with ox teams from the end of the railroad which was near the Kansas line. Colonel Riley located his saw mill on Chickasaw Creek, this being the first saw mill brought into this part of the Territory. My father secured lumber and built a commodious residence and shop, he being a blacksmith and a wood workman down on the thoroughfare through the Indian Territory. Two main highways joined here, the Government surveyed the road leading on through Boggy Depot, where the main highways forked, one road leading

south to Sherman, Texas, and one on west to Fort Arbuckle and Fort Sill. This was the old Butterfield overland stage road. One highway and another highway join here coming in from Kansas and Missouri. My father's home was made the Stage Stand. The government built a stable for their horses and father kept the stages in repair and boarded the drivers. Our nearest store was at Boggy Depot some twenty miles away. Our nearest neighbor was three miles away. Father kept wagons on the road, hauling supplies for his shop from Fort Smith, Arkansas, and Paris, Texas. This was a time when cattle was being driven from Texas to the northern market, at Baxter Springs, Missouri and Chetopa, Kansas. As there were no railroads in Texas for shipping cattle, the cattlemen were driven to the necessity of driving them through. This was considered much of advantage to the cattlemen as cattle were grazed through the Territory and reached the market in good condition, this being done during spring and summer. There were so many herds of cattle passing that you had difficulty in crossing the road between herds. The stages and wagons had great trouble getting along the road on account of the many herds of cattle.

It was not an uncommon sight along in 1869-70 to see

great trains of wagons drawn by four and six yoke of oxen to each wagon, loaded with buffalo meat and hides, passing from Fort Sill and western places to Fort Smith. About once a month a company of negro Federal soldiers called Dragons, would come along with their commissary wagons on their way from Fort Sill to Fort Smith, Arkansas. On one occasion and the last trip for the negro soldiers, on their return trip from Fort Smith they met a rather fatal encounter with the citizens. Their habit was wherever they camped, to kill a beef or hog and they always refused to pay for it. At their camp at Alex McKinney's on North Boggy, they had killed a hog and as usual had refused to pay for it and a bunch of citizens well armed met them out a little ways and opened fire on them and it was a running fight to the toll bridge across middle Boggy where another bunch of well armed citizens met them and opened up on them and they jumped their horses off of the bank into the creek and swam across. The results of the fight was kept a secret for some time. It was reported that when they came together about Boggy Depot, there were about six negro soldiers missing. After that white soldiers were sent out to make these trips to Fort Smith.

Stringtown received its name along in 1869. A wag got off of the stage one day and inquired the name of the town and the bystander told him that it had no name, so he said we will call it Stringtown, which suited very well as what few houses were in sight was strung along for a half a mile or more.

The first store, which was a general merchandise store, was erected by two old Confederate Captains, Captain Watkins and Captain Dismukes. They bought and sold lots of cattle paying for them in merchandise. Right after the war the Indians owned lots of cattle and ponies and had quite a bit of money but there was no place to spend their money or any demand for their cattle, as there were very few stores in the Territory. When Watkins and Dismukes established their store the Indians begun driving in cattle in from five to twenty-five head to trade for merchandise, and there were generally from five to ten or more that were owners of the cattle and they had a very peculiar way in doing the trading. One would get up and trade a little and set down and another one would get up and trade, they would keep this up until they traded out all that was coming to them. The most valuable

possession that a woman could have was a red blanket or shawl of good size and a small shawl for the head. Men also wore shawls wrapped around their heads. A large red shawl or blanket sold from ten to fifteen dollars. Calicoes were all red and blue polka-dots and some solid red and black. The men most usually wore hunting shirts and pants made out of calico and fringed, occasionally you would see one wearing jeans.

Cattle were sold at \$8.50 for cow and calf and \$8.50 for a three year old steer. Great bunches of wild cattle and ponies were roaming over the woods and prairies. The only way you would know of their proximity was the sound of their running. The woods were full of game of all kinds. You could buy a venison ham for twenty-five cents and a dressed wild turkey for twenty-five cents.

The Choctaw Nation when I came to it in 1868 and on until it was corrupted by the meanness of white men, was the most delightful country to live in that could be found on earth. The Indians were peaceable, honest, truthful and religious. I have gone out with as much as four-thousand dollars in an old pair of saddle bags, laid down to sleep on a dirt floor in an Indian cabin perfectly

contented and unafraid. I was out to buy cattle, though a mere boy, for some white man that was afraid to leave the main thoroughfare.

Along in the early part of the year of 1869 my father, E. H. Culbertson, realized the necessity of building a church and schoolhouse and with the assistance of a few other men built a very suitable house up near the Sulphur Spring where Stringtown is now located. This house is still standing and is in a fairly good condition yet. I attended school in this building and remember that the first teacher was a woman. Twelve or fifteen or possibly half of the school were full-blood Choctaws with a few Chickasaws, none of them could talk English. The teacher had a time with them teaching them the alphabet. She cut out letters of good size and tacked them on the wall and with a pointer she would point to the letter and pronounce it and have every one of them to pronounce it after her. They learned rapidly and when the term was out they knew their letters. They also taught many of the white boys to talk Choctaw, I was one of them and I found that being able to talk Choctaw came in good use for me in years following. These Indian boys walked three

and some four miles to school and on the beginning of the school they brought all of the dogs along and the dogs would kill a half-dozen skunks on the way and on one or two occasions the dogs depopulated the school room; so the teacher laid down a fixed rule that all dogs must be left at home.

Several of the full-blood boys who started their education in the school referred to above made good and useful men among their people.

The Choctaws as a people are a noble race. They have never been accorded the place in history that they were entitled to. The white race have always looked upon the Indians as inferior to the white in every way. They were driven from their old homes in Mississippi to a strange land and there forsaken and left in the hands of grafters who had preceded them into the country.