

CULBERSON, JAMES

INTERVIEW

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INTERVIEW

BIOGRAPHIC FORM

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

Indian-Plant or History Section, Oklahoma

Field Worker's name Lula Austin

This report made on (date) August 27, 1937

1. Name James Culberson

2. Post Office Address Durant, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 710 North 8th

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month April Day 21 Year 1870

5. Place of birth Soulyville

6. Name of Father John Culberson Place of birth Mississippi

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Lucy McDonald Place of birth Arkansas

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 6

Lula Austin
Field Worker
August 27, 1937

The Political Side of My Life
James Culberson
Durant, Okla.

When I came from college in Tennessee, the Choctaw Government was in full operation in this country. There was a full set of Choctaw officers in control of affairs in the county.

I moved to LeFlore, Indian Territory, a little town on the Frisco Railroad and hadn't been there long when the Indians found out I was educated and spoke two languages. They asked me to help conduct affairs. The first thing I did was to take the United States census in 1890, the first to be made in Indian Territory. That took me four months and I rode horseback through the country.

In Sugar Loaf County, a fullblood settlement, they built the Choctaw Railroad, the Rock Island, from Memphis to Amarillo, completing it as far as McAlester. In the treaties of the Indians the Government had agreed to build the Frisco and Katy. The Full Bloods thought

that was all that was needed. They were dissatisfied and blamed the intermarried men and the Chickasaws for building the railroad, and objected to its being built and plotted to kill out the intermarried men and mixed bloods who were holding office. In a secret meeting held in the woods, south of Wilburton, they picked out certain fellows to be killed and on a certain night started out to kill them and I was one of the men picked out to be killed. The men who were selected to do the killing were related to the officers, so they sent word to the officers who notified me and we all protected ourselves.

I was County Clerk and the Deputy District Clerk lived near me and was my friend, so he notified me, but in the next adjoining county, west of us, they killed two officers and a man in the neighborhood. That started political war and I was in the heart of it. We were in constant terror. Jones was governor; he called out the militia and started out to arrest the conspirators and chased them down after a month or so and caught all the conspirators in the plot and put them in jail at Wilburton. They had as many as thirty-five in the plot.

The county was in turmoil, Full Bloods against Mixed bloods. I was an official working for the people so I stayed with my people.

We had court in the county. Men were brought to trial. One hundred guards and special deputies were brought to protect us, while we had the trial. We had difficulty in getting a jury, but finally got one to try them. We first tried nine men. I was Deputy District Clerk, but I didn't want to serve and they wouldn't let me off. I told them I would serve only on one condition, if the witness would not talk faster than I could write.

Procedure began and went on for days under great tension as everyone was both mad and scared. Proceedings were suspended once or twice under alarm that their friends were going to rescue them. A week or more under suspense, then nine men were sentenced to be shot, as that was the method of killing. There had been so much excitement over this massacre and the newspapers had published so many stories about conditions of affairs among the Choctaws and other people that the Choctaws asked the Department to do something about it. They

said the Choctaws had their own government, but suggested having a new hearing. The Judge sent me to see Governor Jones to ask him what was best to do. He said it would be a good idea to have a new trial as there was a much excitement in the country.

The District Judge set a new term of court and tried five men upon the same evidence and convicted them. There were a lot of reports about that trial. Someone rushed to the Secretary of Interior and had him interviewed. The District Judge then ordered the leading man in the conspiracy to be tried. He was found guilty and shot.

In the meantime those men who were supposed to be friends of the conspirators burned down the courthouse, thinking they would burn the evidence, but everywhere we went we took the evidence with us.

While this excitement was going on, we had a negro in jail for killing his wife; we tried him and sentenced him to be shot. I issued orders for both executions and witnessed the negro's death. We had a good strong body guard to support us and see that the law was carried out.

After the courthouse fire, we built a temporary shelter. We held a special term of court there in summer time.

That was the last uprising of the Full Bloods against Mixed bloods. The Full Bloods thought the Mixed bloods were not Indian enough to love land like Full Bloods. There had been previous threats, but none took on prominence like this last. It cost the Choctaw government lots of money. I was twenty-three years old at this time.

After that time I served as District Clerk and experienced many changes and lawsuits in the Choctaw courts. All this time while these changes were taking place there was a gradual transformation from outside influence coming from adjoining states which finally ended in the abolishment of the Choctaw laws. Laws came to pass through the Sequoyah Convention in Muskogee, but during the existence of the Choctaw Nation, I acted as an official and took part in a great many Choctaw affairs in helping to work toward the ending of Choctaw affairs and hoping to find some solution where the Choctaw government could be benefited by a change of their government to Statehood.

I was elected and served as Attorney General of the Choctaw Nation and today I believe I am the last living member of any

of the Choctaw Nation and am a member of the Choctaw Council and we have our plans made and hope to restore the Choctaw Council House to a permanent building for the use for the Choctaw people.