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

Field Worker's name John F. Dougherty

This report made on (date) September 10 1937

1. Name L.A. Davidson

2. Post Office Address Indianhoma, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month December Day 12 Year 1861

5. Place of birth Tennessee

6. Name of Father James Davidson Place of birth Tennessee

Other information about father Farmer

7. Name of Mother Lucind. Hicks Place of birth Tennessee

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 12

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J. I. Dougherty,
Sulphur, Okla.,
Interviewer,
September 10, 1937.

An Interview with Mr. L.A. Davidson.

Life of a Pioneer Man

My parents were James and Lucindy Hicks Davidson, both of whom were born in Tennessee.

Father was a farmer.

There were twelve children in our family. I was born in Tennessee, December 12, 1861.

I came to the Chickasaw Nation in 1896 to live, and settled at Butcher Knife, between Ardmore and Ryan. However, I worked on the Santa Fe Railroad bed while it was being put through the Arbuckle Mountains in 1886. I worked from Gainesville, Texas to the Jones and Cary Camp in the Arbuckle Mountains. When I arrived, there was no job for me. I began to wonder what I should do, for the commissary would sell no food to people not employed by the railroad, neither would they board anybody unless they were working.

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Finally a young man said "You just fall in line when we start to our meals and say nothing about paying for it." I acted on his suggestion and got my meals for three days. By the end of that time, I was put to work, helping to build the piers for the bridge across the Washita River. I waded in water up to my waist most of the time. While working at this, I received \$1.75 a day, and paid fifty cents a day for my board.

They used hand drills and hammers in putting holes in the ground to shoot the dynamite. These holes were usually drilled twenty or thirty feet deep, and they held thirty kegs of powder, each keg containing five gallons. When the fuse was put in and set on fire, the hills and canyons were full of running men and teams.

One day an old gray mule turned his cart over and fell. He couldn't get up, and a large rock from the blasted hole fell on him and killed him. I said "That's one gray mule that died."

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All the trees and vegetation were killed by these blasts. The blasted rocks were hauled away by mules in two wheel carts. The mules had no driver. They walked up to the pit, and when the cart was loaded, were turned around and given a lash with the hand. They went to where the rock was unloaded and after the cart was dumped, they started back to the pit. It was very interesting to watch these animals work.

There was plenty of game. We could hear turkeys gobbling in the trees after a blast was shot. The river was well stocked with fish. We often threw dynamite into the stream, and went in with sacks afterward and got all the fish we wanted for supper. This was against the law, of course, but that was the quickest way to get them and it took so many to feed the crew. There were four or five hundred working men, and some of them had their families with them. There were probably a thousand or more people in camp.

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We got all of our supplies from Gainesville, except the beef. Freight wagons were on the road all the time, bringing supplies to the camp. They contracted for the beef from ^a/cattleman.

One day he failed to bring the beef. The company had a dozen hogs which they were fattening. They killed and dressed these. The crew had eaten beef for so long that the change made them greedy. Some of them were not able to work for a day or two.

There were seven hands in the kitchen. I was second cook for five weeks. We bought several barrels of sugar, flour and coffee at a time. The coffee was green and we had to parch and grind it. We used a large beef everyday.

One Sunday a bootlegger came to camp. He discovered another stranger there, whom he thought was a marshal. They watched each other all day, and finally discovered that each was a bootlegger.

Some members of the crew built a dance hall near the camp. It was a 12x12 picket room, with a dirt floor.

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One night I dressed up in my best clothes and wandered over. There was only one door and no windows. A kerosene lamp and a pile of six shooters were lying on a table. When a boy bought a ticket, he laid his gun on the table, until he was ready to leave the hall. This prevented shooting fray taking place in the buildings.

There was very little sickness in the camp, although we had an epidemic of measles during the time I was there. One woman died and we buried her. This was the beginning of the cemetery at Big Canyon, south of Dougherty.

I finally got tired of working around the camp and asked the boss to fire me so I could be paid. He did so, and I walked to Ardmore, where I caught a work train to Gainesville. I didn't return to the Territory until after I was married about ten years later.

I moved to the Chickasaw Nation between Ardmore and Ryan and farmed for five years. In 1901 when the Comanche Country was opened, I went to Fort Sill and

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registered for a claim. They charged fifty cents registration fee. All the numbers were placed in a large box and thoroughly stirred. A blindfolded child drew them. Cards were then mailed to everyone who registered, informing them whether their number was drawn or not. I received a card, telling me to come to Lawton to file on my claim. I camped near Lawton for about a week, and all the farms near there had been claimed. So I went to Indiana and selected seven places. I took one of these and settled on it. I moved there in November 1901. A friend had reached there before I did, and had made a dugout. When I arrived at his place, he was not at home, but I put up a tent near his woodpile, and we moved in. During the night a terrible blizzard and snow storm blew my tent down. The door to the dugout was nailed up, but I took an axe and broke it open. We went in there for the rest of the night.

The next day when he came home and saw my team and wagon, he hardly knew what to do. He thought some

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one had jumped his claim. He crept up cautiously but on discovering me, was certainly happy.

He hadn't shaved for several weeks and asked me to shave him. He had been feeling badly for several days, and when I got the beard off his face, I discovered to my horror that he had the smallpox. His face was covered with scabs. I knew we were in for an epidemic, so I went to a doctor at Lawton to find out what to do. She told me to give cream of tartar to my family to purify their blood. This I did. We all had the smallpox, but in a very light form.

My nearest neighbor was a full blood Comanche Indian, whom I learned to like very much. In the spring, I had to go back to the Chickasaw Nation after some cows, and I asked him if he would haul a barrel of water for my wife while I was gone. He consented. She was afraid of the Comanches, but when she needed the water she sent him word. He came with his wagon and team, but refused to go to the spring unless she

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went with him. She was frightened, but she had to have water, so she climbed into the wagon. There lay an axe covered with blood. Brave but sure she would be murdered she went along with him.

When they got to the spring he motioned to her to get out and dip the water. She finally got him to fill the barrel. Then she was greatly amused at the whole affair. It was the custom of these Indians to have their women do the work. When they went for a load of wood or a barrel of water the squaw rode on a pony behind the wagon and she dipped up the water, or loaded the wood on the wagon. This being their custom, he expected my wife to go along with him and do the work. He was willing to haul the water, but she must fill the barrel as his own squaw would do.

He was an old warrior. His father captured Herman Lehman when he was about seven years old. He and his brother, who was nine, were taken captives in Texas. The brother watched closely for a chance to escape and finally succeeded in getting into a freight wagon

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and was returned to his home. But Herman was not so fortunate and had to remain with the Indians. They punished him severely at times and he was very afraid of them.

One day they discovered a colony of bees in the side of a big bluff. It was Herman's lot to secure the honey. They tied a rope around him, and let him down to the hive. He was stung many times, but at last they pulled him up. They asked him if there was any more honey, and he told them there was. So they made him go down again and get the rest of it. He knew that he would be punished severely if he did not tell the truth, and they found it out.

He was a great character, I knew him well; he has been in my home many times, and told me of his numerous experiences among the Indians. He was reared as an Indian and was like them in every respect. He almost forgot his own language. He wore blankets and painted his face; also tinkle bells on his moccasins.

After he became grown, and the Indians were sure that he would remain with them, he went to Texas for a

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visit with his mother. She was so happy to have her boy return home, that she prepared a feast and invited their neighbors in for his homecoming. As soon as he walked in the door, he smelled pork. This made him very angry and he kicked over the food laden table. The Comanches never ate pork. The poor mother was heartbroken to see how like a wild Indian her son had become. He refused to sleep in the bed which she had prepared for him, but preferred to wrap himself in blankets and sleep under the trees.

There was a camp meeting in progress during his visit at home and his parents urged him to attend with them. He was reluctant, but at last consented. Toward the close of the services some women got happy and began to shout. He jumped over two or three benches giving the war whoop and started dancing among them. He thought they were doing a war dance. This closed the meeting for that night. People scattered in every direction.

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He returned to the tribe quite content to continue in their mode of living.

He was an expert marksmen with a bow and arrow. One of their favorite sports was shooting wild steers with bows and arrows, no one could equal him at this.

He wore a breech clout and a feather cap and painted his face. One would never have guessed that he was a white man.

When the Comanche Reservation was opened the Government refused to give him a claim because he was a white man. I circulated a petition to allow him a claim, and he was granted one on the "Big Pasture." This was several thousand acres extending south and west of Chattanooga to the Red River. The land was set aside for two years for unborn children. This pasture was leased by cow men who paid monthly rent on it. The rental money went to the Indians. They received their payments at Red Store. The merchants credited the Indians on these grass checks, and each

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pay day they were there to collect. They always had the exact change between what the check amounted to and what the Indian owed there. This was the way the Indians cashed their checks.

I married Emma Barker in Texas in 1891. We have five children, fourteen grandchildren and five great grandchildren.

My father is buried at Norman.