

Chess Johnson

Early Settlers' Personal History Questionnaire, WPA  
Interviewed by Arthur R. Hill Hempstead County, Ark April 21, 1941.

Transcribed by Andrea E. Cantrell, University of Arkansas Libraries, 2003. [See transcriber's notes](#)

1. Early settler's name  
Chess Johnson (Col.) Uncle Chess.
2. Address  
Hope, Arkansas R.F.D. 1
3. Present occupation (most of the old timers are now retired).  
Retired farmner [sic].
4. Previous occupation or occupations.  
Farmer,
5. Date of birth.  
January 5, 1844, 97 years old.
6. Place of birth.  
Columbus, Arkansas 1844.
7. Married? To whom? When? Where?  
Edlo Robison August 20, 1865.
8. If an immigrant give particulars. City and country of derivation, name of ship on which arrived, etc.  
Not immigrant native of Arkansas
9. How long has the individual resided in Arkansas?  
All mu[sic] life.
10. If not a native tell of the voyage to Arkansas. Boat? Wagon train? etc.  
Native citizen.
11. Why did the individual come to Arkansas?  
Born in Arkansas.
12. Get details of construction of early homes. (In the southern and southeastern parts of the state chimneys were frequently built of clay and split wood or trimmed branches due to the scarcity of stone and the lack of brick kilns. Some of the more pretentious houses were built with brick imported up the rivers. In the northwestern part of the state stone houses occurred much more frequently. Pay particular attention to these and similar regional differences.)

- Rough log houses, stockades and puncheon floors.
13. What form of lighting was used in the early days? Pine knots? Tallow dips? Candles poured at home? Oil or fat lamps? etc.  
Tallow candles and pine torch.
  14. When were electric lights first used in your community?  
Hope, Arkansas 1873.
  15. What kind of fuel was used? (This was wood in most parts of the state, of course, because it was plentiful and convenient, but in some of the western counties coal may have appeared early.  
Wood and pine.
  16. What kinds of food did the early settlers have? Were fish and game depended upon for the meat supply? Was game plentiful?  
What kinds?  
Fish, deer turkey, hogmeat and farm products.
  17. What kinds of clothes were worn and how manufactured?  
Jeans cloths and hickory stripe shirts.
  18. Were there any interesting customs or incidents connected with early courtships? Was bundling ever practiced? (It is highly improbable but possible.) Were charivaries (usually pronounced 'shivaree' in Arkansas and the lower Mississippi Valley territory) frequent?  
Met at homes and camp meetings.
  19. Compare some early food, clothing, etc. prices with those of today. (Since staples were usually bought in barrels, hogsheads, bushels, and similar large units, present prices will have to be quoted on the same basis.)  
Flour barrel \$15.00 1865.
  20. What were some of the incidents pertaining to the sharing of food and other supplies in times of common need?  
Shared food after war 1865.
  21. What were some early cultivated crops? Domesticated animals? (For instance, when did tomatoes cease to be known as 'Love Apples,' regarded as poisonous? When moved from the flower garden to the vegetable garden?)  
Corn, oats, wheat, cotton
  22. What were early farm implements? Any homemade? If purchased, where? Prices?  
Carey wooden plow, Bull tongue and twisters,
  23. What were early industries in the community?  
Water mills, glist [sic] mills, gins and black smith shops.
  24. What were some native wild plants used as food or for flower gardens? (For example: mullein, sassafras roots, sweet gum resin, sun-flower seed, paw-paws, sumac berries, poke salad-- or salet, or salud. There are stories told of various food substitutes used during the Civil War and Reconstruction periods. These might supply interesting sidelight.)  
Poke salad wild onions,
  25. Relate interesting incidents of the early days. Tell of childhood impressions and memories. Tell of group activities such as

house raisings and warmings, quilting bees, corn huskings, brush arbor meetings, dances, games, socials, hunts and game drives, hog killing, sorghum making, play parties, and the like. Compare early farm and town life with that of today. Tell any experiences relating to the Indians, their customs and habits.

Log rolling hog killing, sorghum, quilting bees.

26. Tell of early methods of combating forest fires, town or building fires.  
Had to fight it out with hand with brush tops.
27. Get origin of place and thing names such as hills, valleys, rivers, soughs, bayous, plants, animals, etc.  
Red river, Cane creek. Old river, Bend lake.
28. Tell of early taverns, hotels, boarding houses, stagecoach stations, boat landings, etc.  
Old Washington Tavern and Stage Coach Inn.
29. Tell of early schools.  
Had no schools for the negro[sic] slaves went to the field and worked.
30. Location of school? Late?  
In Tarvens,[sic]
31. Name of teacher?  
I had no school teacher.
32. How were funds provided? Tuition? How much? Was payment made in kind?  
Collected no tuition from negros[sic]
33. School books used? Title? Author? (Many of the old plantations maintained tutors either for individual families or groups of families. Sometimes 'school' was conducted on the premises for darkies'[sic] youngsters. Check on such information.)  
I had no school books of any kind.
34. What constituted the reading matter of the early settlers? Books? Magazines? Newspapers? Get titles and authors.  
None had no newspapers when I was a boy,
35. Where was the first telegraph station in the community? When established?  
Hope, Arkansas 1873.
36. Tell of the early "Horse cars." When were trolley cars substituted? When buses?  
None.
37. When and where was the first automobile seen?  
Hope, Arkansas 1910/
38. When and where was the first train seen?  
Hope, Arkansas 1873.
39. When and where was the first airplane seen?  
Hope, Arkansas 1918.
40. When did automotive busses begin interurban operation? (Give descriptions on the five foregoing.)

Don't know.

41. Early theatrical performances? Local people? Traveling stock companies?  
Had no shows in slavery days.
42. Tell of any important local celebration in memory of any individual or event.  
Abraham Lincoln 1860.
43. Does the individual recall any early historical character such as Sam Houston, Co. James Bowie, former President Zachery Taylor, the James boys, etc.?  
James Boys 1881.
44. Tell of any duels. Where were they fought? By whom? Why?  
None.
45. Tell of any feuds. Who was involved? Where? Why?  
None.
46. Tell of any early tombstone inscriptions. Where?  
None.
47. Tell of any bank robberies, stage holdups, executions of horse thieves or other impromptu executions, including lynchings. Give details.  
None.
48. Tell of Civil War days, giving the fullest detail possible.  
Had lots of Yankee soldiers and cannons,
49. Tell of any battles, skirmishes, forays, etc., witnessed.  
Poison Springs, Arkansas.
50. Tell of Reconstruction, the Carpetbaggers, scalawags, etc.  
Carpet beggars[sic] burned crops and houses.
51. Get all information possible regarding the original Ku Klux Klan or similar organizations.  
Ku Klux faught[sic] carpet beggers[sic] and negroes[sic] had to stay home at night,
52. Tell of any participation in the establishment of any religious or fraternal organizations.  
Baptist and Methodist churches at Columbus.
53. Tell of any military affiliations.  
None.
54. Tell of any Indian mounds, cliff dwellings, caves, etc., that may be recalled. Get as accurate information as possible regarding artifacts, particularly such things as calendar stones, mortars, pottery, baskets, etc.  
South of Hope near Dooleys Ferry.
55. Tell of any other historic sites.  
Old Washington Capitol and Stage Coach Inn.

56. What is total number of descendants?  
5.
57. What are names and addresses of sons and daughters?  
Washington and Columbus, Arkansas,
58. Name some of the grandchildren and greatgrandchildren, if any.  
2 Washington, Arkansas.
59. Tell of any books, diaries, journals, sketches, or newspaper articles the individual has written. Give details.  
None.

The above questionnaire is intended solely as a skeleton outline to assist the interviewer in giving his subject leads. It is improbable that any one individual can answer all the questions fully but it is advisable to ask them all anyway. Record the answers on plain paper numbering the answers to correspond with the above questions, if possible.

**AT THE TOP OF THE PAPER ON WHICH YOU RECORD THE ANSWERS BE CERTAIN TO PUT YOUR NAME, ADDRESS, DATE AND REFER TO ARKANSAS HRS FORM J.**

Do not limit yourself to the above questions. If the subject goes off on any tangent follow it to see if it is of historical interest. Remember to get Who, What, When, Where, How, and Why on every possible question. As regards matters of location, such as Indian sites, early buildings, tombstones, etc., be as definite and detailed as possible. Give pertinent data i.e., whether or not buildings are now occupied and if so by what or whom, and in either case, in what state of preservation and repair.

AH/gm-9/13/38