M-11

Informant: Ella Rogers Merritt, 78 year old Cherokee - Talala, Okla.
Interviewed by: J. W. Tyner 11-25-68
Transcribed by: Monette Coombes M-11

Subject:

Mrs. Merritt was born in 1890 near the early day town of Talala, and has lived here all of her life. She has seen the many changes come to this part of northwestern Cherokee Nation.

The town was named for the creek which runs nearby, and comes from the Delaware word for "red-headed woodpecker," which lived in considerable numbers on the creek.

At one time many Cherokees and a few Delawares lived in the Talala community. It was good farming country and the prairie grassland produced fine cattle. Before the allotment of Indian lands many Cherokees came to look over this country from other areas. For example, in the TALALA GAZETTE of January 31, 1904, Mr. Citizen Redbird of Goingsnake District is mentioned in the newspaper as having been visiting the area looking over land on which to file for an allotment.

As an early day town, Talala did not really start its growth until around 1886. From then on it grew to have a main street with the Talala State Bank on the main corner, and three large mercantile stores, drug store, telephone office, harness and saddle shop, blacksmith and wagon shop scattered up and down the thoroughfare. Either side of the Iron Mountain Railroad depot were the stockyards, grain elevator and hay barns. The rich land produced much hay and grain for shipment. Dr. F. Y. Bass and Dr. B. W. Freeman were the M.D.'s who tended the sick and injured for many years. In later years around 1900, Sinclair Coal Company did strip mining in the area and shipped coal out of Talala. For many years the town and community supported a newspaper, first under the name of TALALA GAZETTE and later as the TALALA TOPIC. The last publication of the newspaper appears to have been about 1926.

Mrs. Merritt has many fond memories of her days attending the Talala school. In the early days teachers only had to have a fifth grade education to teach. Indians and whites alike owe much to the untiring efforts of those early day teachers, she reflects, as school opportunities in her day offered the basic grounds of learning. Entertainment was not forgotten in the community, as again in the announcement column of a 1904 newspaper were listings of a cotillion party, box supper, oyster supper, and square dance. Sometimes these events were for civic fund raising, or just plain enjoyment, and many were held at the school house. It is with a sad note that Mrs. Merritt now looks out her window at the big stone school, closed in 1960 and left to the elements, vandals, and the march of time.