

INFORMANT: JAY BEECH, CHEROKEE

INTERVIEWED BY: J. W. TYNER

INTERVIEW DATE: OCTOBER 22, 1968

SUBJECT: WATTS HISTORY

Mr. Beech was born and raised in this community just across the Illinois River east of Watts. He has spent all of his life here.

The town of Watts was named for Eli Watts, a Cherokee who owned the land where the town now stands. Watts town did not come into existence until 1912. About a mile south was the village of Ballard which was the trading center and railroad switch long before establishment of Watts. About 1900 the Kansas City Southern built a roundhouse and switch tracks on adequate ground north of Ballard. This probably led to the formation of a new settlement. Nothing remains today to identify the once busy village of Ballard.

One-half mile north of Watts is Ft. Wayne Spring. In the naming of Watts some of the people wanted to call it Ft. Wayne, but were over-ruled. An army fort did exist here at one time, after the abandonment of the first Ft. Wayne in 1842 several miles farther north. So in 1912 Watts started growing. At one time it was an important train stop for freight and passengers, for the eastern part of the Cherokee Nation on the road from Kansas City to New Orleans. The town supported a bank, two drug stores, four cafes, two hotels, several mercantiles and other places of business, in addition to a lime kiln, cotton gin, charcoal plant, and saw mill.

In early days most of the people in this community were Cherokees. They lived by farming and cattle raising, cutting saw logs and making railroad ties. The Illinois River was a fine fishing stream used by the Indians. Little remains today as evidence of its once prosperous times. The