T-553-1

January 27, 1970

Index side A, first part, recording time 15 min.; ~~record~~ interview time one hour.

Informant: Cooper Grayson, 66-year-old Creek Indian, Oktaha, Muskogee County, Oklahoma.

Subject: Oktaha country.

For reasons probably known only to a few, there appears in the early history of the Indian Nations few permanent Creek Indian settlements ~~of permanency~~ along the Nations' boundary line in southern Muskogee County. However, one of these Creek settlements is Oktaha in southern Muskogee County. One of the Creek Indians native to that area tells that the community's name comes from their language, meaning "sand" or "sandy ground", and it is truly that.

Not far northeast of the village of Oktaha is Butler Creek Indian Church, a present day meeting place of the Creek Indians of that area. There seems to be evidence that Creek Indians were scattered throughout this area even before the Civil War, as attest some of the old burial places, stories mentioning early day activities, old families, etc. Old graves in the Harjo, Grayson, Oktaha and other cemeteries of the area would also support the fact of very early settlement.

Mr. Grayson was born and has spent all of his life in the Oktaha vicinity. In his time he has seen many of the changes come to his native home land. As he has heard from his older people, the village probably became recognized by name in the early 1880s. Some of the early Creek Indian families of the area were the Graysons, Bullett, Washington, Wildcat, Vann, Harjo, Owens, Timothy, Newberry, and Sloan. Time and circumstance has left but a few Indian families here. As with other parts of the eastern part of the Creek Nation boardering that of the Cherokees, most of the Creeks seem to have moved to areas of heavy Creek populations, such as Okmulgee, Okemah, Henrietta, etc.

Looking down what used to be the main street of Oktaha now, one cannot fully picture of the town some half century and more ago. Old stone buildings and decaying frame structures stand as monumnents and reminders of a once busy and populous community. In a day long ago, along main street, there was the big Rhienhart Trading Company, and across the intersection of the main streets was the Oktaha State Bank headed by "Banker" Williams. Close by was the Post Office, where Ramsey West was postmaster for many years. In close competition with other mercantiles was the T. A. Thompson Store where one could buy just about anything in commodities, staples, and equipment needed for the surrounding farming country. Ballenger Drug Store on main street supplied drugs, herbs, bark, roots, patent medicines and related items for the sick and ailing, as well as dispensing 'sasperila' (sarsaparilla), root beer, and a red soda drink. Here too children came to invest their penny in licorice stick, horehound drops, and peppermint candy.. Weekday activity permitted much sitting on the "lofers" bench in front of the stores by the old timers exchanging tales of another day. But come Saturday and the streets and stores were crowded way into the night. Old Mack McGhee was always on hand to meet the trains that ran at the west edge of the business district, as he was the station agent there for many years. In that early day the main road (or highway) thru town went down main street. The large abandoned stone building on the west side of the railroad was the school in the early days. However most of the town was on the east side of the railroad.