T-553-5

February 5, 1970

Index side B, second part, recording time 25 min.; interview time two hours.

Informant: Henry Clay, 77-year-old Cherokee, Welling, Cherokee County, Okla.

Subject: People, places, and events in Cherokee history.

Henry Clay has spent all of his life in the Welling area, and he knows well the people and places of this Baron Fork River valley. He spends his retirement days in his little cabin near the river where he has fished and hunted as long as he can remember.

We go over across the river on the bluff to the site of his grandmother's old home site. Nearby is the old Clay family cemetery. His grandmother was Susie Clay who lived from 1830 to 1901, and his grandfather was Robison Clay who lived from 1827 to 1865. Both of these people came to Indian Territory on the Trail of Tears.

Henry relates a story told him by his grandmother of a time during the Civil War. Robison Clay was away serving in the military. One day a group of bushwhackers came to the Clay home hunting for Robison Clay. Mrs. Clay told them he was in the war somewhere and did not know where he was. The bushwhackers did not believe her, and told her they would be back late that afternoon and if she did not tell them what they wanted to know they would kill her and the children. The men rode off to the north and stopped at the foot of the hill about a quarter mile away. The four children were playing out in the yard near an ash dump. The men started shooting at the children, making clouds of white dust boil up where the bullets hit the ashes. The children ran behind the house for protection. Mrs. Clay had an old horse which she caught and prepared to escape the would-be killers. Two of the children were very small, so she cut open an old mattress and empied the straw out of it. She put the mattress cover across the horse, putting a few clothes in in and a small child also on each side. The other two children were big enough to walk, and they started off for Hungry Mountain where her sister lived. Her sister's husband was also gone off to war. When she got to Hungry Mountain she and her sister got another horse and loaded up what they could in a small wagon and left their homes. They traveled south until they got down near Red River where they lived among the Choctaws until the war was over. After the war the Clays came back to their homes to start life anew. Henry's grandfather was discharged from the Army somewhere along Red River and he started home. Somewhere in that country, the family learned later he took sick and died, and they never knew where he was buried. All that they ever knew was what was told them by a traveler who came thru the country, and told his grandmother that he had stopped at the home of an Indian family somewhere in the Choctaw country, had got sick and died in a few days.

As we drive around the old roads of his homeland he comments on how beautiful Baron Fork River was when he was a boy. He recalls when it was a big clear water stream with many deep holes of water, and the best fishing place in the country. But thru the years the river bed has filled up with gravel.