T-554

February 11, 1970

Index side A, second part, recording time 22 min.; interview time 1½ hours.

Informant: Isaac Watt Rogers, 63-year-old Cherokee, Watts, Adair County, Oklahoma

Subject: Northeast Adair County history.

Of all the present counties that now lie within the bounds of the Old Cherokee Nation, Adair county most likely has as much or more historical significance of the Cherokee Nation that any of the others. Skin Bayou (later Sequoyah) and Delaware Counties follow closely in the Cherokee's history.

Isaac Rogers was born in the Watts area and has spent most of his life in Adair County. His mother was from the Beaver family. The Beaver family home was at Beaver Springs, Adair County. Among the Cherokees there seems to have been several different families by the name of Rogers, many of whom do not claim to be related to some of the others. Isaac's paternal grandfather did not come to Indian Territory until just after the Civil War, and he settled in northeast Adair County.

By comparison, Watts town is not old, actually having its beginning in 1912. Its beginning started when the Kanaas City Southern Railroad located its division yards there. However, the town of Ballard, about a mile south of Watts, was the first town in that area. In selecting a location for its repair shops, switch yards, turntable, loading chute, and other facilities, a promoter by the name of McCoy induced the Railroad Company to locate their division point on his 'pea patch' which did provide sufficient level ground for the operations. The town was named for Adam Watt, a Cherokee who owned most of the land where the west part of the present town is now. For a few years Watts was 'on the map'. With all the activity at the railroad division point, the Vannoy Hotel was the acme of hotelstry in that day. Business houses of all kinds lined the steep hill that was Main Street. Mr. Rogers says that there were at least twelve cafes scattered around town. A workmens' strike in the early 1920s spelled the doom of the growth of Watts. The difision shop closed, along with other activities of the railroad. And from then on Watts declined to the little town of today, with its post office, and three or four other business houses. The depot is gone, the Vannoy Hotel stands empty as does some other early day establishments. The short drive to Westville, or to Siloam Springs for shoppers will probably keep it just a small village.

In the chain of circumstances, the town of Ballard also died. In the early days, even before the coming of the railroad, everything looked promising. There were several general stores there, along with a charcoal kiln, box and barrel factory, sawmill, post office, a hotel, I.O.O.F. Hall. A water tank and coal loading tower was built when the railroad first came thru. All of the business places are gone now, and only a few residences remain to serve as a reminder that there was once the town of Ballard.

On that cold afternoon Mr. Rogers and I travel around the country that he knows well. A good highway runs on south of Watts, up Ballard Creek Valley. In this valley were the lands and homes of early settlers like the Morris, Fletcher, Rogers, McCoys, Bushyhead, Lacie, Sixkiller, Watt, Russell, and many others.