

7-616
July 6, 1970

Index side A, second part, recording time 15 min.; interview time one hour.

Informant: May Snell Butler, 72-year-old Cherokee,
Southwest City, Missouri

Subject: Northeast Delaware County - Cowskin Prairie, Butler
Prairie, and Peters Prairie country.

The Oklahoma-Arkansas state line runs a short distance in front of Mrs. Butler's home, in Southwest City. This early frontier Missouri town figures well in the history of the Indians of Northeast Oklahoma. Before towns and country stores came the Indians of this area came to the border towns of Maysville, Seneca, Tiff City, Cherokee City, and Southwest City to obtain some of the essentials for survival. Southwest City has been the trading center for Mrs. Butler and her folks before for as long as she can remember.

Mrs. Butler was born and raised on Honey Creek, and spent most of her life in that area that was known as Butler Prairie. Little remains now of what was once a thickly settled area of Indians. To-day, there are few people living in this once prosperous and happy land. Old abandoned homes, once clean and well cultivated fields are now weed patches, large areas bulldozed smooth by big cattle companies; Honey Creek, polluted and ugly - this is what one sees to-day. Many old cemeteries of Indian families uncared for and abandoned since much of the land is no longer owned by Indians. Mrs. Butler has witnessed these changes and many more in her time.

Until a few years ago, Mrs. Butler had spent all her life in the Butler Prairie country. She got her education at the Old Butler School. This old school stood in a beautiful location on the side of a wooded hill and just above a big clear spring. She well remembers the teachers at this early day school. They were: Ruth Fleming, Houston Ballard, Walter Fox, and Pink Ward, all Indians themselves, as were all their pupils. Butler School was the only school for miles around and many children walked as much as five miles one way to get to the school. The old school building has been gone a long time now, the hillside bulldozed off for a pasture, and the big spring is nearly filled in with gravel and brush.

Not far east of the old Butler School was the Butler Church, whose support and attendance in its day would put to shame some churches of to-day. Time and distance was no barrier to church-goers of those olden days, and people came from long distances, and some even camped overnight. Old timers tell that if you never heard the old Indian preachers conduct sermons in two languages, then much has been denied you. For there the Rev. James P. Butler, Rev. Joe Fox, Rev. Eli Snell, Rev. Aaron Butler, Rev. George Cunnigan, and Rev. Dave Bucket ministered long and hard, and told it like it was. The Devil never had a chance, at least during their time. The old church is gone, and all of the old preachers have laid down their burdens. As one visits the Butler Cemetery, the monuments of those old-time spiritual Indian leaders can be seen.

In the old days she says the wagon, horseback, and foot traffic from the Indian Nation to Southwest City stirred the dust frequently along the winding roads. A popular commodity of that long ago day was whiskey -