October 7, 1968 T-315

Index side A. Recording time 45 minutes

Informant: George and Belle West, 85- and 82-years old respectively, Cherokees, of Okay, Wagoner County, Oklahoma. Their son, Kurt, contributed some comments on early Indian Nation history.

Subject: Mr. and Mrs. West were born and have spent all their life in the Three Forks Country where the Arkansas, Grand, and Verdegris Rivers converge. Parents of both of these people were also early pioneers in the area.

They remember that Ft. Gibson was the only trading center in their early days. Then Grand River could be forded by wagon without any trouble. They say that Ft. Gibson has changed very little in their time. The major change has been the abandonment of the Government Army Post and the removal and decay of the Post buildings.

The Town of Okay, on the Verdegris River 8 miles north of Muskogee, has experienced prosperity in its time, but has declined before industrial and economic progress. Many of its some 200 people live here in retirement, while others commute to work in Muskogee and nearby areas.

Okay has seen much in its existence. Established in the early 1890s first as a mail and freight stop on the Missouri Pacific Railroad then called Coretta Switch, so named after a train crewman. Shortly thereafter a post office was built about half mile south of the Switch and the new name was Rex. (during erection of the post office building and in searching for a name for the place, the label on large cans of hog lard awaiting shipment at the freight dock prompted the selection of the name.) The town began to grow on the east bank of the Verdegris River near the natural falls, and the town became known as Falls City. About 1910 during the peak of its growth the town changed its name to North Muskogee. This name did not hold long, as its first industry, The Okay Truck and Implement established a plant there, and its importance to the community prompted the change to Okay.

Belle West was the daughter of Frank Smith and Ella Fields a full blood Cherokee. Her first schooling was at Three Forks School, which was a subscription school going up to the fifth grade. After finishing there she attended school in Ft. Gibson for a while. Her last schooling was at the Cherokee Female Seminary at Parkhill.