

November 11, 1968

T-346

Index side #1, first part. Recording time 20 minutes

Informant: Robert White, Longview Prairie, Craig County, Okla.
74-year old life long resident of this area and a
descendent of pioneer mixed blood Cherokee and white
parents.

At times Mr. White assists the Craig County Museum
in gathering early day artifacts, papers and documents,
Indian history, historical facts regarding Craig County
and the Indian Territory. Some of the information he
gave is on tape, and some from notes at interview.

Subject: Mr. White was born on Cabin Creek about eight miles
south of Vinita, and has spent all of his life in
the area. He has seen the changes that have come to
and affected this early Indian country, and herein
relates some of these things.

To-day Vinita is a busy crossroads city in northeast
Oklahoma. The Frisco and the Katy railroads roll
their long trains through town. Four main highways
join with the Will Rogers Turnpike carrying motor
traffic around and through this 100-year-old plus
community.

Vinita has not always been known by that name. Mr.
White showed a copy of the town plat dated 1871 when
it was known as Downingville, and so called in honor
of Chief Lewis Downing. At that time and before the
community was mainly populated by Indians. Also during
those days other Indian communities were known in that
region of the Coe-wee-scoe-wee District, among which were
Pawpaw Creek, Oknee, Cabin Creek, Ketchum, Hollow, White
Oak, and Cocklebur. The building of the Katy railroad
thru Downingville in 1871 seemed to guarantee the
permanency of the town. Later that same year the Atlantic
and Pacific railroad built their road thru town, crossing
the Katy tracks providing rail outlets in the other two
directions.

Chief Downing figured prominently as a leader of the Cherokees,
and worked to direct their way of life toward building a strong
and prosperous Cherokee Nation. The many Cherokees who later
became good farmers, successful cattlemen, professional men
and civic leaders attest Chief Downing's own efforts.

Most of the Indians of those early days, both Cherokees and
Shawnees and a few Delawares, were men of the soil, who
loved the farm life. Those pioneers were no strangers to
the bountiful plant life growing wild and knew their uses
for food, medicines, weaving, and even decorations. Wild
animals and birds were plentiful and conservatively used.
The streams provided fish at any time. Mr. White regretably
says that most of these blessings are gone now.