

January 3, 1969

T-369

Index side #2, recording time 15 minutes.

Informant: Cynthia Downing Ross, 88-year-old Cherokee,
Vera Community, Washington County, Oklahoma.

Subject: Mrs. Ross is one of the few remaining pioneers of this wide prairie country of southern Washington County. She has seen much of the growth of and changes in this part of the old Cherokee Nation.

Born and raised in the Tahlequah area, she was educated in country schools around Peggs and Tahlequah, and at the Cherokee Female Seminary.

Her father was of the Downing family, and her mother came from the Adair clan. She does not know the history of the Adair name, but has been told it was originally a Dutch name. The Downings settled in the Peggs and Tahlequah area following the removal of the Cherokees from the east. Her deceased husband was Cornelius Ross, who came from the Parkhill country and was a close relative of Chief John Ross.

She relates that when the Cherokees arrived in the Indian Territory in 1839 groups containing families and close friends were directed by the tribal leaders to lands in the Cherokee Nation where it was hoped they would establish communities and settle themselves. Her father left his home in the Peggs area and took up a claim near her present home because of the excellent grazing for cattle. It was here that Mrs. Ross received her land allotment and has lived here since statehood.

Her recollections of early days in the Vera country is of very few people and nothing but the wide grassland prairie. It is hard to picture at one time the country here was covered with prairie grass three feet high. This would be in sharp contrast to the scene to-day where much of the pastureland has been grazed almost down to the grassroots.

She never attended the famed Hillside Indian Mission, just five miles to the west, but she was well acquainted with this institution. It was the only mission in the whole country at one time. Country schools, as we know them, were few and far between. The only ones she remembers in the Vera country was Eureka School and Greenlake School.

She remembers the activities of the Dawes Commission. There seemed to have been a tragic lack of communications between the Cherokees and the government officials in that matter of land allotments. This was something completely new to the Indians, and the speed with which the government moved left a greater part of the Indians confused and bewildered. Here