MCCOY, WESLEY. SECOND INTERVIEW. #13473.

James Russell Gray,
Investigator.
March 21, 1938.

Interview with Wesley McCoy,
Adamson, Oklahoma.

I am a freedman, eighty-one years old, and I act as a sort of informal chief or leader for the freedmen in this section; I am usually called upon to represant them in business matters involving land grants and the like.

I am mostly negro, of course, but I have some Choctaw blood, too; both my mother and father were part Indian, and I figure, roughly speaking, that I am around a half Choctaw, or such a matter. I was born on July 4, 1856. I was born near Red River in what was then Kiamichi County, Indian Territory.

My father was Jerry Williams, but after the Civil War we took the name "McCoy" because that had been the name of father's master. I don't know how old he was or where he was born, but he died during the Civil War and was buried on the place belonging to Mother's master.

Mother's maiden name was Eva Carney. I'm not sure, but I believe she was born back in Alabama or Mississippi somewhere before the Choctaws were brought to Oklahoma. She must have been born about 1830, for she was fifty-two, she said, the year she died, 1882. By then she and I were living close to Skullyville, and she is buried there.

My mother and father lived three miles apart when I was born and afterward, too, because they had different masters. McCoy, father's master, ran a small country store and traded with the Indians. He was about half Choctaw himself.

Mother and I lived in a log cabin on the farm owned by her master, a man named Caffrey. We were three miles north of McCoy's place and about seven miles northwest of Hugo. This Sam Caffrey had a blacksmith shop and a store, too. He was a white man.

Practically all our neighbors were Indians then. Not all of them had slaves, but quite a few did. I

was so young when we left that section of the Choctaw Nation that I cannot remember many of our neighbors' names. One man, though, was called Peter Peachlimb; I think he was sheriff of Kiamichi County. And I recall one family named Maley.

Mr. Caffrey was the only man in our community who farmed on a large scale; most of the Indians planted only an acre or two of corn and vegetables for their own use, and they hunted deer and turkey and wild hogs for meat. But Caffrey had one hundred acres in his farm, and the majority of this was under cultivation. He sowed all kinds of grain, like oats and wheat, and planted corn. He didn't raise any cotton; I don't remember anyone then who did. Caffrey also raised fruit, beans, peas, cabbage, and all sorts of vegetables. And he had cattle, hogs, sheep, and goats.

Mother and I lived in a one-room log cabin. There was a clapboard roof, a dirt floor, and a stick- and-mud chimney. We had no windows at all. Mr. Caffrey

had a dug well where we got water.

We were enough Indian to eat the Choctaw dishes like "Tom Fuller", made from crushed and fermented corn. And "banaha", or shuck bread; cornbread made from "squaw-corn" beaten into meal at home with a mortar and pestle; "bashofa", which is Tom Fuller with meat added. We ate lots of meat,too; venison, beef, pork, turkey, chicken.

A lot of our clothes were homemade. Mother could card, spin, and weave.

I was about eight the year Father died. That was in 1864. I remember a battle that occurred that year; I didn't see the actual fighting, but I was near enough to hear the cannons. This battle was near old Perryville. Stand Watie, Sam Cooper, and a Colonel Williams were the commanding officers. The Federals won, and I remember seeing the Southern Army in disorganized retreat; it was composed of about half Indians and half white men, Texans. Some were barefoot, some hatless, many wounded.

In 1867, after the War was over and we were freed, Mother and I went to live in Skullyville County, about two miles west of Fort Smith. We lived between the Arkansas River and the Poteau, close to where they ran together. We lived for a while with my grandfather, Jerry Carney, and I remember helping him hoe corn when I was eleven.

I never went to school until I was about twelve. In 1870 we mowed over west of Skullyville, close to a place on the Fort Smith-Stringtown stage road. This place was called Brazil Station. I have often seen the stage coaches traveling over this road. They were big, awkward things; a driver sat up on top, and the passengers rode inside. The coaches were pulled by six horses.

But I was talking about schools. There was a school at Brazil, and another about three miles above on 'Possum Creek. I went to both schools. My first teacher was named Sarah Keller. There was another named Sarah Chantany; I think she was a Frenchwoman. These schools were maintained by the government.

McCOY, WESLEY. SECOND INTERVIEW. #13473.

6

I knew lots of United States marshals before the Choctaw Nation became part of the state of Oklahoma in 1907. There were Charles Barnhill, Coon Ratteree, Bazz Reeves, Crowder Nicks, Joe Willard, Charley Alexander, Ben Ayres, Jake Ayres, Columbus Ayres, and a Frenchman named Marchaund.

I knew some outlaws, too. I have seen Belle Starr and Sam Starr, and Belle's daughter, Pearl. Belle had the name of an outlaw, though I don't recall any of her crimes; she was what you'd call hard-boiled, carried a gun, and wasn't above going outside the law if there was any profit in it. She was a well-built, good looking woman; I guess you could call her handsome. I saw a man grab her horse's bridle one day in Fort Smith, and she pulled a gun from somewhere and said, "Turn that bridle loose or I'll shoot you loose from it." I don't know what the trouble was. I do know the man turned loose the bridle. And I saw the outlaw named Ned Christopher after he was dead; that was about 1879.

McCOY, WESLEY. SECOND INTERVIEW. #13473.

7

I have been married twice in my life. The first time to a colored woman; the second to a full blood Chickasaw. My second wife's name was Parthenia Brown before I married her. Altogether I have had five children. I married the first time in 1880; the second time in 1897.

In 1894 I moved to Sans Bois. I took up a small claim there and farmed. I knew Green McCurtain, the Choctaw high chief, or governor; went to his house lots of times. He had a big, two-story house. His place was a sort of combined farm and ranch.

I have known many Indians in my life. I will give you the names of some of them. Most of the men whose names I call lived near Skullyville and Sans Bois, though not all; I knew men all over the Choctaw Nation. I knew Jim Terrill, Yah Hontubby, Elias Tobey, Isaac William, Simon Hancock (he was a preacher), Peter Folsom, Jerry Folsom, Willis Folsom, John Merryman, Jerry Ward, Sam Chabby, Simon Johnson, Solomon McGilbry, and Charley McGilbry.

McCOY, WESLEY. SECOND INTERVIEW. #13473.

8

The first chief that I remember was old Coleman Cole; he held the office in the seventies;died, I believe, about 1876. He is the one who had the quarrel with J. J. McAlester over coal leases near McAlester. He got so angry that he threatened to kill McAlester. McAlester even left the Territory for a short time and went to Kansas. McAlester came back though, and he and Cole settled their differences.

The next chief I remember was Thompson McKinney; then Edmond McCurtain, a brother of Green McCurtain. I believe I have skipped one; Ben Smallwood came after Coleman Cole. The next chief I remember after Edmond McCurtain was Wilson Jones; then Gilbert Dukes. I may not have the chronological order exactly correct but all the men named at some time or other held the office of high chief.

The Choctaws held elections each August and voted for county and national officers just as we do now; of course, when I say "national" I mean the Choctaw Nation.

There were two political parties among the Choctaws; the Progressive, or Liberal, Party that believed in opening up the Choctaw Nation to white man's customs; and the Nationalist Party that believed in the old ways. These Parties were also named the "Eagles" and the "Buzzards".

These differences in political beliefs caused some pretty hard feelings among the Indians. The trouble was brewing as early as 1887 or '88. On one of these years, I forget which, there was an election, and the Buzzards won with their candidate, Wilson Jones.

Then, if I remember right, the next election saw the other side win. In the days following the Buzzards organized a sort of night-riding vigilantes committee to terrorize the other side and reap vengeance upon them. In the early part of the eighteen- nineties a group of about twenty men rode up to the cabin of Joe Hoklatubby, who lived about a mile south of Hartshorne, and shot him as he lay sleeping on his front porch. The man was said to have been shot about twenty times.

McCOY, WESLEY, SECOND INTERVIEW. #13473.

10

An Indian named Silan Lewis who lived somewhere in the western part of the Choctaw Nation, somewhere near the present village of Blanco, was accused of being one of the gang that shot Hoklatubby. He was tried for the murder at the courthouse a mile south of Wilburton. Noel Holston was the judge. I served on the jury. Lewis was accused of being the leader of the mob that did the killing. Lewis was tried and convicted, and he was sentenced to be shot. Then, as was the custom of the Choctaws, he was turned loose until the date set for the execution.

I didn't see the execution, but it occurred some time later, about the time I moved to Sans Bois. That was the year John Perry was sheriff of Gaines County.

5131

407

INDEX CARDS

Shawnees
Delawares
Bartles, Jacob
Law Enforcement--Cherokee
Courts--Cherokee.
Houses--Cherokee Nation
Churches--Cherokee Nation
Schools--Cherokee Nation
Social gatherings--Cherokee Nation
Game--Cherokee Nation
Ball games--Cherokee
Farming--Cherokee Nation
Hogs--Cherokee Nation
Food--Cherokee
Grist mills--Cherokee Nation.
Fruits--wild
Household manufactures--Cherokee
Chouteau
Mercantile establishments--Cherokee Nation
Cemeteries--Cherokee
Trails
Toll gates--Cherokee Nation
Ferries--Grand River
Ferries--Arkansas River
Salt works--Cherokee Nation
Ranches--Creek Nation
Ranches--Cherokee Nation
Turner, C. W.
Cowboys
Cattle-- shipping
Intermarried whites--Cherokee Nation
Marriage--Cherokee
Political parties--Cherokee
Mayes, Joel B.
Bushyhead, Dennis W.
Factions--Cherokee
Elections--Cherokee
Mayes, Sam H.
Thompson, Charles
Rogers, W. C.
Downing, Lewis
Buffington, Tom
Payments--Cherokee
Locust Grove
Salina
Muskogee
Hotels--Creek Nation
Osages
Clothes--Cherokee
Indian fights--Cherokee-Osage
Law Enforcement--Federal