

ROGERS, JOE J.

INTERVIEW

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381

INTERVIEWER JAMES R. CARSELOWEY
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INTERVIEW WITH JOE J. ROGERS
R.F.D. 3, Vinita, Oklahoma

My name is Joe J. Rogers. I live on my wife's allotment, eleven miles southeast of Vinita, Craig county. I was born thirty miles east of Carthage, Missouri, on January 18, 1875.

My father's name was Thomas C. Rogers. He was born in North Carolina, and moved with his parents to Ellyjay, Gilmore County, Georgia, where he lived until the fall of 1873, when he came west and stopped near Carthage, Missouri.

My mother's name was Ella (Ayers) Rogers. They were the parents of Joe J., Dena, Bert, Clint and Harley Rogers.

We first came to the Indian Territory in 1889, and the same year my father settled on the farm I am now living on, having rented it from a man by the name of Jim Connally.

MADE STRIP RUN IN 1893

We had been here about four years when the Cherokee Nation sold the Cherokee Outlet to the United States for

2

the total sum of \$8,300,000. This land was thrown open for white settlement and my father made the run into the strip, which was opened for settlement on September 16, 1893. He had a team of mules and a wagon in which he made the run, but they were too slow. He drove them out as far west as the present site of Perry, Oklahoma, but everything was taken up, as far west as he went, and he finally became discouraged and came back home.

PARTNERS WITH CHIEF BUFFINGTON

Chief Thomas M. Buffington lost his first wife about the time the strip run was made, and my father made a deal with him to take over his farm and stock which they shared equally. The old chief had quite a herd of cattle and hogs and my father made enough money in a few years to buy a farm of his own, and as soon as allotment was made he bought land in 1908 from a freedman. Before statehood a white man could not own live stock in his own name, other than his farm teams and a milk cow or two. I found out,

3.

too, about that time, that a white man could not work for an Indian, without first getting a permit from the district clerk, for which he had to pay 50 cents per month, or \$6.00 per year.

I remember I was getting pretty sweet on a little Cherokee girl, and I began to think of getting out and finding me a job, so I could get a marriage license, which cost \$5.00. I went and told Chief Buffington my troubles, and he told me he would give me work for six months repairing his fences and doing other work about the place, but I would have to get a permit. He went and got it for me and it read as follows;

Delaware District,
Cherokee Nation,
Indian Territory.

I, Thomas M. Buffington, a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, this 5th day of May, 1898 have made application for a permit, to employ Joe J. Rogers, a citizen of the United States to work at farming.

Permission is hereby granted to the said Joe J. Rogers, to remain within the limits of Delaware district for the period of six months, from the date hereof.

4

Given under my hand and seal of office this
5th day May, 1898.

John E. Duncan, Clerk,
Delaware District, C.N.

MARRIED MY CHEROKEE GIRL IN 1899

The following year, after I worked for Chief
Buffington and got enough money to buy the license,
I married Belle Witt, a Cherokee girl, and a daughter
of Felix N. Witt and Isabelle Jane (Gormley) Witt.
To this union six children were born as follows:
Ella Kate, Lee Gilbert, Clint D., Annie B., Alba
Lucille and J. Eugene.

When I went to the clerk to get my marriage license,
he told me that I would have to comply with Section 68,
Article 15 before he could issue me a license. I had him
copy it off for me and this is what he gave me.

ARTICLE XV-SECTION 68-CHEROKEE LAWS

"Every white man, or person applying for license,
as provided in the preceding section of this act,
shall, before obtaining the same, be required to present
to the said clerk a certificate of good moral character,
signed by at least ten respectable Cherokee citizens,
by blood, who shall have been acquainted with him, at

least six months immediately preceding the signing of such certificate."

It "kinder" went against the grain for me to ask people to do this for me, but I mustered up all the courage I could and started out, and found out that by being a hard working boy all my life, my neighbors thought it was all right, and they all seemed anxious to help me. I secured the ten signers without any trouble, and got married in 1899.

STARTED OUT AS A RENTER.

I did not have anything to buy, or take up land with when I married, so I rented a little place the first year or two. My father gave me an old span of mules that he came here with, and in 1901, I bought a small place northwest of Vinita and in a few years I traded it for the one I now live on, and where my wife and five children took their allotments. My family allotted 720 acres of land, and I have since bought 280 acres more, and today we are farming and paying taxes on a little more than a thousand acres of land.

6

We gave all of our children a high school education, and five of them a two-year college course. The youngest son, Gene, preferred to stay at home and farm, rather than to take his college course, and he bought himself a tractor and gang plow outfit and is farming on a big scale.

OLD HOUSE WAS HAUNTED

When my father first rented the place where I am now living in 1889 there was an old house that stood on the place that people told him was haunted. There was a man by the name of Jim Connally, who owned the place, and the "ghosts" had run him crazy. The story was that two horse thieves had been killed at a spring near the house and hanged to a near-by limb, and that ever since the house had been haunted. Several families had lived there before we came to the place, and every one of them had heard strange noises about the house. Most of them had heard noises in the kitchen, like the dishes all falling out of the cupboard. One woman said that she had been letting the hogs run loose in the yard

7

and heard the same noise other people had heard like the dishes being broken, and was sure the hogs had gone into the house, and upset the cupboard, as this was before there were any screen doors, she ran into the house to see and there was nothing wrong. Several women have heard that same noise.

Jim Connally and his wife lived there longer than any one, and both of them heard the same strange noise. Connally went crazy, and the neighbors had him sent to the Insane Asylum at Tahlequah, an institution for Indians and adopted citizens, maintained by the Cherokee Nation, until tribal governments ceased. He would stay a few months, during which time he would seem to get well and they would send him home. This happened several different times, and the last time he came home, he began chopping down all the small trees on his place that he could drag, and would carry them out into the prairie and place them across the road. When he had cut all the small timber he could handle, he began cutting down larger

8

trees, and felled them across every road and path that led to his house, and before anyone noticed him in his orchard, he had cut down a ten acre orchard of grown trees. When asked why he was doing this he stated that he was going to keep "them ghosts" away from his place. Connally finally disappeared from the neighborhood and no one ever knew what became of him. He was a white man, who had married a Shawnee woman, and his wife never seemed to be afraid of him, or care what he did.

CONNALLY'S WITCH

Long before I came to the place there had been a light, about as big around as a large dish pan, some say it was about the size of a full moon, that would travel about over the place, usually coming from the big spring, where the two horse thieves were hung. It traveled all over the prairie, north of the Connally's house, and has been seen by practically every man who lived in the neighborhood, and it is still

9

walking. It was thought to be a jacko'lantern at first, but as they only appear in wet weather that was given up, as it has been seen during the most severe droughts we have ever had.

I have seen this light at night ever since I have been on the place, in 1889, but I never heard the dishes fall, but have talked to a number of people who have. The only strange noise I have ever heard on the place was out in the timber and it sounded like a huge rock that had fallen from a long distance.

Painter Green married Connally's wife, after he disappeared, and Green sold the old house to Joe Thatcher, who tore the old house down, and hauled the rocks in the chimney to Vinita and made himself a walk with them.

FIELD WORKER'S NOTE

I have known this man, Joe J. Rogers ever since he came to Oklahoma in 1889. I have also seen the ball of fire moving about over the prairie, as he related it. The last time I saw it was in June 1937.

INDEX CARDS

Journey to Oklahoma
Openings--Old Oklahoma
Game--Oklahoma Territory
Case
Mail Routes
Pioneer Life--Oklahoma Territory
Shawnees
Payments--Shawnee
Indian Trade
Crime--Oklahoma Territory
Social Gatherings--Oklahoma Territory
Dances--Shawnee
Clothes--Shawnee
Burial Customs--Shawnee