

RUSSELL, JAMES B.

INTERVIEW

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220

INTERVIEWER GUS HULMINGBIRD
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INTERVIEW WITH JAMES B. RUSSELL
Route 1, Westville, Oklahoma
Born, July 10, 1868,
Dawsonville, Georgia.

Father's name, John R. Russell
Born, Georgia.
Mother's name, Francis McClure
Born, Georgia.

James B. Russell, a pioneer white man, was
born in the state of Georgia, July 10, 1868.

His parents were John R. Russell and Frances Mc-
Clure, a Cherokee woman.

The McClures came to the Cherokee Nation with
the immigrants in 1836. They settled in the community
now known as Feavine in the center of Adair County.
Frances McClure was only a small child when they came
to the Cherokee Nation. They remained in the Indian
country several years, then returned to Georgia.

After this return to the state of Georgia, Frances
married Mr. Russell and she came back to the Cherokee
Nation with her husband in 1871, when James was only
two years old. They settled on the old Sam Foreman

2

place which was about two miles south of Fort Wayne on the Illinois River. The town of Watts is now located at the old Fort Wayne site.

Later the family bought a claim from one of old Sam Foreman's boys. The Russell family lived on this place until all the children grew to be men and women. Joe Russell still lives on the old home place. Part of this place was claimed by a noted Cherokee by the name of Going Snake. The district in which he lived was named in his honor.

EARLY LIFE

Most of the early life of Mr. Russell was spent on the farm operated by his father. The farm contained about forty acres.

The principal crops in those days were corn, wheat and oats. There was no machinery and everything had to be done in a crude way. The wheat had to be harvested by cradles. Several neighbors would gather and help harvest the crops and this system of helping one another was called "Town workings". Among the old-timers who

3

lived in this community were Frog Sixkiller, Johnnie Walker, Wash 'Lee, Tom Swake, Wilson Bushyhead, Smith Bushyhead, John Blackfox and Soldier Sixkiller .

These men always helped the Russell family harvest.

Wash Lee was elected sheriff several terms in the Goingsnake District. He was murdered sometime later by twin boys named George and Fred Duniwoss, who were fullblood Cherokee. These boys were convicted and hung at Tahlequah.

The first thresher in this part of the district was the one operated by horse-power, by Wash Lee before he was killed. He purchased this thresher from some white man in Arkansas.

There was always plenty of corn raised in this community. The Cherokees did not sell much because this was their chief food. Corn could be used in so many different ways for food. Mr. Russell's mother was not a fullblood and his father being a white man, he was not reared as many other Cherokee boys of his time. He was sent to school when very small at the Baptist Mission.

4

EDUCATION

Mr. Russell lived only two miles north of the oldest school in the Cherokee Nation. This was the Old Baptist Mission which was located about two miles north of the present town of Westville.

James Russell started to school at the age of seven. Two of his old teachers were Carrie Bushyhead and Charlotte Whitmire. Russell finished the seventh grade at this place. He did not attend any of the higher institutions of learning which the Cherokee Nation afforded at that time. Cherokee Male Seminary was the highest institution.

CHURCH ACTIVITIES

The oldest church in this part of the district or in the Cherokee Nation was the Old Baptist Mission. At one time there was also an old printing shop located at this place. When he was a boy, he saw some of the old papers that were printed at this place, but he does not remember the name of the paper.

He has been told that the Cherokee Advocate was first printed at this place. The paper at that time

5

was edited by some preacher by the name of John Jones.

The first post-office was also established at this place about 1878. George Qualls was the first postmaster. The name of the post-office was Baptist, I. T.

Among the old timers who took an active part in the development of this church was an old Cherokee preacher named Adam Lacie, and also the Bushyheads, Wash Lee and the Folsom family were prominent church workers.

CAMP MEETINGS

The Camp Meeting was an important event among the old-timers. These camp meetings were held at Baptist about twice a year. In the summer these meetings would last from two or three weeks. People from all over the Cherokee Nation would come. The food was furnished by the people themselves.

Most of the time the meat was furnished by making donations among the Cherokees and a big barbecue would accompany these meetings.

TRADING AND MILLING POINTS

The early day trading and milling point was Cincinnati, Arkansas, which was only about seven miles from the Russell home. F. V. Craig, who now operates a store at Westville, was an old time merchant at that place. Moore Brothers operated the mill.

CATTLEMEN

There were many cattle to be found in the Cherokee Nation in the early days. Every family owned a small herd of cattle. John Gunter was the only man who owned a large herd in this part of the Cherokee Nation; he owned about two hundred at all times. All other families usually owned about twenty head at all times. They would not sell cattle by weight, that is the fullbloods would not. They priced their cattle by the age. A yearling would bring about five dollars; a two year old would bring ten dollars, and so on.

Most of the cattle that left the Cherokee Nation was bought by white men from Arkansas. Vol English

was the early day trader in this part of the country. Sometimes buyers from Caldwell, Kansas, would come to the Cherokee country. These men would drive the herds that they bought through the country. Among the Cherokee fullbloods, Wash Lee and Soldier Sixkiller were stockmen. These two men usually bought all the stock the fullbloods had to sell. They then traded with the white men from Arkansas or Kansas.

BATTLEFIELDS

There is only one battlefield in the northern part of the old Goingsnake District and that was the battlefield of Ballard Creek. This battle was fought about 1862 on a spot in the small bottom just west of the present bridge on the Kansas City Southern. There were several men killed in this battle. The Union forces drove a small detachment of Confederates out of the District. Bill and Lock Morton, Cherokees, took active parts in this battle. They were stationed at Fort Wayne at that time. Captain Anderson was the Union leader. Lock Morton told

8

Russell, that in this battle he killed the horse that the Confederate general was riding.

Mr. Russell does not know anything about the Civil War in the Cherokee Nation. He only knows what has been told to him by some of the old Cherokees.

Lock Morton told Mr. Russell that before the war started in the Cherokee Nation, there were several meetings called among the fullbloods in regard to which side they should favor.

It seems that the Cherokees were divided at that time. Most of the fullbloods favored the Union. Morton claims that this division of the Cherokees was caused by an old grudge that they had among themselves. This grudge or hate started back in the old country. Those Cherokees and their descendants who were in favor of the removal favored the South. That faction of the Cherokees who did not sign the treaty favored the North or the Union.

9

This was the John Ross faction. Morton told Russell that Soldier Sixkiller made speeches in favor of the Union.

Morton also said, that this war caused a division in politics among the fullbloods. Those who favored the North are now all Republicans. Those who favored the South are now Democrats. Among the Cherokees after the war there were two parties: The present Republican party was called the National, the other was called the Downing Party.

Lock Morton and Bill Morton told Russell that there were about three battles fought in what is now Adair County; the Battle of Ballard; another battle, that was fought in what is now called Spad Mountain, about ten miles west of Stilwell; and the third was fought about three miles southeast of Stilwell.

There was no Commission to the Five Tribes at that time, that Russell knows anything about. Everything was owned by the Cherokee Nation in common.

10.

Cow Towns

There were no cow towns in this part of the Cherokee Nation. Most of the cattle were raised in the northern districts. In this part of the Cherokee Nation were the grass regions. Russell's brother has worked for a few men around Vinita, which was an early day cow town. Colagah and Talala were also noted as cow towns.

United States' Marshals

Mr. Russell was not acquainted with many United States Marshals early time. He was personally acquainted with one Tom Johnson of Silcam Springs, Arkansas. Among the Cherokees who received appointments as United States Marshal was Zeke Proctor. This man later became bad in the Cherokee Nation. The same men that he used to work with had to hunt him. These marshals were not stationed in the Indian Territory. They only came to the Cherokee Country when they had a warrant for some Cherokee for whiskey. It was a violation of law to bring any whiskey into the Cherokee Nation. Most of the

11

whiskey that was found in the Nation was brought from Arkansas. Moonshine whiskey was not known then. When the Prohibition Law was passed in the boundary states that was the time when the Cherokees began to see moonshine whiskey.

Outlaws

There were not very many outlaws in this part of the Cherokee Nation. The only outlaws who gave us trouble were two Indians named Jack Blythe and Thompson. These men lived at Vinita. Blythe was killed and Thompson was arrested and sentenced to Fort Leavenworth for several years.

Roads and Trails

The main means of travel at that time were by wagon and on horseback. There were no highways as there are now. The main road in the Cherokee Nation, that is this part of it, was the Tahlequah Road. The Tahlequah Road started at old Fort Wayne on the Illinois River, now the town of Watts, and followed the river for about sixteen miles to about two miles west of the present town of Chewey. Travellers crossed the Illinois River at a place called Joe Chewey's Place, which was called the Chewey Ford, and it still

12

goes by that name. From this crossing one went to old Oil Springs where at that time there was a Post Office established. From Oil Springs the road followed the river to the old Boudinot place about five miles east of Tahequah. The road at this place turned west by the old Walkingstick Spring taking the same route that is now Highway 62.

Ferries

There was only one ferry in the Goingsnake District and that was the old Fisher Ferry on the Illinois near the Arkansas line. Russell does not know the name of the operator of this ferry.

Fairs

There was only one fair that he attended in the Cherokee Nation that he remembers. This was a fair held at Vinita. This fair was held about 1880. The exhibits were mostly farm products and stock.

Elections

The only qualification of a voter was that he should be a Cherokee citizen-that is a bona fide

13

citizen, eighteen years of age. Mr. Russell voted in the election of 1888. He thinks in this election Sam Mayes and Rabbit Bunch ran for the office of Chief. Russell's folks being old fashioned southern Democrats, he voted for Mayes in this election. The people voted by speaking the name of the person voted for. There was not much chance to cheat a man when you told him that you would support him in any election. The voting precinct was the Goingsnake Court House. Later they created another voting precinct at a place called Mitchell's Place on the Illinois River about three miles northwest of the present town of Watts. This was called the Mitchell precinct. Leke Proctor lived in this community. He lived at this place when he was elected sheriff.

Railroads

There were no railroads in this part of the Cherokee Nation until 1894 when the Kansas City Southern extended its lines south of Siloam. This railroad was held up at this place for about a year. It took the Cherokee Council about that long to decide whether the road should come

14

through or not. This railroad question was the main issue in the election of 1892. In this election Jonathan Whitmire was elected councilman and Richard Wolfe was elected senator.

The fullbloods were not in favor of this railroad coming through their country. They based their arguments on the treaty of 1866, when they allowed only two railroads to come through their country. The two roads already in operation were the M.K.T. and the Frisco. But the National Council voted the law without the approval of the fullbloods.

Frontier Towns

After the coming of the railroads, the town of Westville was started. A depot was built at this place, followed by a hotel which is still called the Old Bates Hotel. A lumber yard was also erected by Eli Alberty. Eli Whitmire was an early day peace officer at this place.

Allotment

The Allotment question was one of the most important issues in any election that was ever held in the Cherokee Nation.

But like all other important issues this law was passed by the Cherokee Council without the approval of the fullbloods.

Most of the fullbloods were not in favor of this law. They wished their country to remain as it was with everything in common. The educated faction wanted their share of the land. Too much of this good land was claimed by the fullbloods. They would not let anyone use this land. Many acres of fertile land lay idle. So, in the election before statehood these mixed-breeds and the educated young Cherokees elected a Council that was in favor of this law.

Wolfe Coon an early day statesman and a good friend of President of Theodore Roosevelt's protested this law. He at that time was a Senator from this district and a Chairman of that body. His protest caused President Roosevelt to issue a proclamation calling another election by a popular vote. By that time the Night Hawks were so aggravated at the actions of their fellow tribesmen that they would not vote.

16

The number that did not vote in the said election caused this law to pass.

Secret Societies

This Night Hawk clan is the only secret society, which Mr. Russell knows anything about. In the early days there were about three hundred who belonged to this society around Chewey Community. This society is still in existence at that place; their leader is now Eli Pumpkin. But where it started he does not know, nor does he know what it means.