

STARR, CLARENCE

INTERVIEW

#12216

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James R. Carselowey, Journalist.  
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An interview with Clarence Starr, Vinita,  
with reference to writings and old documents  
of his deceased father, J. C. (Cale) Starr.

My name is Clarence Starr. I live at the corner of  
Canadian and Fourth streets, Vinita.

My father's name was J. C. (Cale) Starr. My mother  
was Libbie (Zimmerman) Starr and prior to Father's  
death they lived on a farm one half mile south of the  
Fairground corner on the Vinita and Ketchum road.

My grandfather's name was James Starr and my  
grandmother's name was Emma Jane (Rider Evans) Starr.

My great-grandfather was Ezekiel Starr, and Ezekiel  
was an uncle of Tom Starr about whom this story will  
be given.

My father received his education at the Cherokee  
Male Seminary where he was graduated December 12th, 1890.  
He attended the Fort Smith Business college where he  
received diplomas in bookkeeping, penmanship and steno-  
graphy.

My father was considered one of the best steno-  
graphers and penman among the Cherokees. He was the

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secretary to the Cherokee Commissioners, who made the final roll of the tribe. When this task was finished he was admitted to the bar and represented the Cherokee Nation as one of its attorneys in hearing citizenship claims before the Dawes Commission.

Soon after finishing his education in the early '90s he began writing for the early day/daily newspapers, among them the St. Louis Globe-Democrat, Kansas City Star and the Kansas City Journal, giving them much valuable information about the workings of the Dawes Commission and its work in making the Indian rolls and allotment of lands. He kept copies of almost all of his articles, which I have in my possession, together with many other valuable old documents. I am handing your field clerk one which he wrote on the life of Tom Starr.

Its is as follows:

A CHAPTER OF BLOODSHED SURPASSING BELIEF  
The Tom Starr War- Its Exciting Causes,  
Results and A Sketch of the Principal  
Actor in a Realistic Drama.

By J. C. Starr, A Second Cousin.

Many people in the Cherokee Nation remember quite well the Tom Starr War, and the many incidents

that are connected with it. After the removal of the Cherokees west of the Mississippi River, they were divided into two parties known as the Ridge and Ross Parties.

The Ridge Party was known as the Treaty Party, and the Ross Party as the Anti-Treaty Party. When the Ridge Party came west they settled in the Cherokee Nation under their Chief, John Jolly, and the Ross Party followed later, after the treaty of 1835, having been moved west by the United States troops.

As soon as the Anti-Treaty people landed in the Cherokee Nation they stirred up dissension and strife, out of which grew the Tom Starr War. The Anti-Treaty people were very much dissatisfied with the new country and with the Ridge Party for making the treaty, and very soon began to emphasize their displeasure by an organized attempt to kill all the leaders who had been instrumental in making it.

The Full Bloods armed themselves and went in bands all over the country to murder any leader of the Ridge Party whom they could find. They deposed Chief John Jolly and elected John Ross Chief of the Cherokees, and then followed the declaration of war between these two powerful parties. The Anti-Treaty people went so far as to declare that they would kill every man who had signed the treaty with the United States Government, and started blood to flowing by killing the leaders of the opposite party.

#### BOUDINOT AND RIDGE KILLED.

Early one morning a party of Full-Bloods rode up to the home of Elias C. Boudinot and Major Ridge and shot them down in cold blood. They afterward tied John West to a tree, stripped him of his clothing and gave him one hundred lashes on his bare back. The man who executed this command of the Anti-Treaty people tied West to a tree. He then cut ten young hickory sprouts, one year old, and would give him ten licks with one switch, throw it down and give him some water and then take another switch and give him ten more licks and so on until a hundred stripes were applied.

After this, times became very quiet until about a year later when more serious trouble followed.

## REMOVAL DECIDED UPON.

It soon became apparent to the followers of the Ridge Party, that they would not be permitted to live in peace with the Anti-Treaty Indians and they resolved to give up all their possessions in the Cherokee Nation, and go west and try to find a new location. Accordingly, Ezekiel Starr, one of the prominent leaders of the Ridge people, gathered together a large delegation of the Treaty Party and secured a sufficient number of pack mules and started west.

They went to Colorado and found what they thought would be a good location for another Cherokee Nation. Game was plentiful and the country, they thought, was a good one. They returned in about six months and held a general council of the Treaty Party, at which it was resolved that a delegation be sent to Washington to lay before the department their complaint and to try to make a treaty whereby they might select their nation in Colorado.

The Cherokees were very poor in those days and could not afford to send a number of delegates to Washington, so they selected Ezekiel Starr and entrusted him with the whole matter. He went in January, 1846, and

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remained until the following May when he died and was buried at Washington while negotiations were under way.

#### REMOVAL ABANDONED.

The death of Ezekiel Starr left the Ridge on Treaty Party without a leader, disheartened and they finally abandoned the idea of removal and decided to make the best they could of a bad bargain with their opponents.

Had Ezekiel Starr lived his efforts to establish a Cherokee Nation for the Treaty Party in Colorado would have no doubt proved successful and there would have been two nations of Cherokees and a great deal of bloodshed would have been averted.

While Ezekiel Starr and his crowd were in the west looking for a new location the rest of the Treaty Party became refugees and fled to Arkansas for protection. General Arbuckle with the United States troops was located on the Arkansas line for the protection of the people and to preserve the peace but his efforts proved futile.

#### CAUSE OF THE WAR.

One day while the homeseekers were still in the west and James Starr, father of the notorious Tom Starr, was preparing to go to White River, in Arkansas, on a hunting trip, a band of Full-bloods rode up to his house and

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shot him down on his porch. His son, Buck Starr, ran away, was pursued and shot several times and died a month later.

From the Starr home the Full-Bloods went to the home of Polly Rider and killed Sewell Rider in his own yard. When Rider fell to the ground, mortally wounded, a Full-Blood named Stan jumped over into the yard and plunged a big knife into the wounded man's heart. A few minutes later the Full-Bloods met Wash Starr in the road and opened fire on him. He fled to the brush desperately wounded but made good his escape and afterwards recovered. Wash Starr was a brother of the notorious Tom Starr.

This occurred in Goingsnake District, near the line of Arkansas and the women children of the Treaty Party fled to that state where they received rations from General Arbuckle. The Full-Bloods who were doing this killing fell back to their headquarters at Tahlequah from which place their future operations were directed.

When the killing occurred in Goingsnake District Tom Starr was living about two miles from his father's home. When his father was killed a younger brother, named Creek Starr ran as hard as he could to the Tom Starr residence and conveyed the sad news to Tom, who with his elder

brothers fled to the woods, and could not attend their father's funeral. Tom Starr had twenty-one brothers and sisters. The younger children attended the funeral, but the older brothers dared not do so.

#### A VOW OF VENGEANCE

A few days later Tom Starr visited the burying ground and over the new made grave of his dead father made a solemn vow that he would avenge his death, and that he would kill every Full-Blood who had had anything to do with the death of his father, James Starr. He at once organized a band of followers, composed of his brothers and cousins and a white man named Mack Gerring, and started out on his career of vengeance.

#### THE FIRST VICTIM.

Upon hearing that the Full-Blood, Stan, who killed Sewell Rider by stabbing him to the heart after he was wounded was at an Indian dance, Tom and his comrades took a man named Wheeler Fought who was friendly to both parties there. Tom Starr and his band hid out at some distance from the place where the dance was being held and instructed Wheeler Fought to go to the dance

and give Stan a drink of whiskey and to continue drinking with him until he got well under the influence of the liquor.

He was then to tell him that there was a jug of whiskey hidden in a certain top of a tree that had fallen and to persuade Stan to go there and get it. The ruse worked and later on in the night Stan came up to the tree top and met Tom Starr and his band. Stan was shot from his horse and then stabbed to death in the same manner that he had killed Sewell Rider.

#### FOUGHT AS ACCESSORY.

On the morning following the killing of Stan the Full-Bloods gathered together and held a council of war and accused Wheeler Fought of being a member of Tom Starr's band and had him arrested and gave him a speedy trial before their council fire the next night and he was hung the following day.

Tom Starr heard of what was going on and tried to get up a band of at least thirty brave men to make a wild rush into the Full-Blood Camp and rescue Fought but could not get enough men together to justify the attempt and Wheeler Fought paid the penalty with his life.

## ONE OF STARR'S EXPLOITS.

Tom Starr once heard of one of the men who had taken a leading part in the murder of his father and rode a hundred miles to kill him. He laid in ambush at his spring for two days, but could not get the man out, so he decided to kill him in his own home. He crept up to the house, taking a man with him to hold the horses, and standing beside the door, gently knocked.

A voice from the inside said, "Who is there?"

The answer was given, "A friend."

The Indian on the inside shot through the door and Tom seizing a fence rail broke the door down and entered the house with a drawn knife. The Indian had three other men in the house with him, and they ran under the bed for protection. Tom Starr killed the Indian with his knife and then dragged the other men from under the bed and killed them.

## MANIFESTED SUPERSTITION

When it appeared to Tom Starr that his end was near at hand he concluded to visit the Indian Medicine Men. He went to see a woman who was a conjurer and was advised not to go north- that he would get hurt, to go any course but north and he

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would escape. The next day he met two of his friends in the road with a jug of whiskey and they gave him some and wanted him to go north with them. He tried to beg off but his pleas availed him nothing and they called him coward. After he became well under the influence of whiskey he concluded that if his friends could make the trip he could. They set out and came to a narrow pass between a hillside and a fence. Starr wanted his friends to go around the place but they would not and so all started to ride through and were fired upon by the Indians in ambush. The friends of Tom Starr were riding ahead and escaped without injury, but his horse was shot from under him and he was wounded in the foot. The animal also fell upon him but he extricated himself and climbed up the hill and while on the hillside, it being very dark, he would throw stones down in another direction to mislead the Indians. Everytime he would throw a stone down the Indians would fire on the place where it fell and in this way he misled them until he made good his escape.

Tom soon discovered that he was about to bleed to death and he stopped and bound up his wound with his handkerchief, but this did not give him much relief.

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After making his way to a place where he knew he would not be discovered, he built up a fire, heated his knife and burned the wound and in this way made it quit bleeding. He said the only thing he regretted was having to ruin his knife by heating it.

Next day Tom was lying sick in the top of a fallen tree when the Full-Bloods rode all around searching for him, but without success. He afterward made his way to a spring and finally escaped and joined his band. He had not been betrayed when he rode into the path as one of <sup>the</sup> men with him was a faithful brother.

After this incident Tom Starr entertained considerable superstition in reference to conjurers.

The hill that Tom Starr had to climb, on the night described above, is located near Siloam Springs, Arkansas, and is known to this day as "Tom Starr's Hill".

#### A COUSIN GETS INTO TROUBLE.

After leaving the hill, at the time in question, Tom made his way to the home of John R. Rider, who was his cousin, and also a friend to the Treaty Party, but was a peaceable and good citizen. Mr. Rider gave Tom the best horse he had and told him to make good his escape. The Indians coming along in pursuit saw Tom Starr riding Rider's horse, so they decided to kill him. A friend

of Rider's came about midnight and told him to make his escape or he would be killed as the Indians knew he had furnished Starr a horse. Rider immediately got up out of bed, and mounting his horse, set out for Fort Gibson to place himself under the protection of the soldiers..

At daylight the house was surrounded by a band of about three hundred Full-Bloods and one of the number with a drawn pistol walked into Rider's home and made a search for him, but he was gone. The man then stepped into the yard, gave a yell and Full-Bloods came from all directions. They at once took the trail and followed the horse's tracks until they discovered the course taken and then set out toward Fort Gibson.

Rider stopped at a blacksmith shop to have his horse shod and while there the Indians located him and got in ahead and hid at a narrow pass in the road. Rider made a rush to beat them to the pass but to his surprise when he entered it a Full-Blood named Glory stepped out and caught his horse by the bits and he was quickly surrounded.

This pass is in the Tablequah district and the

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Full-Bloods decided to take Rider back to Flint, a distance of about a mile, to kill him. They used flintlock guns and as it was a very damp day the Indians began picking dry powder into the fire pans. Rider knew that meant they were preparing to do some shooting and while they were all busy he suddenly drew his big knife and made a stroke at Glory's hand which caused the big Indian to let go of the horse's bits. Rider then put spurs to his horse and rode rapidly away, amid a storm of bullets from the guns behind him. He was shot in the shoulder but kept going until he arrived at Fort Gibson and was out of danger.

Rider at once joined Tom Starr and his band and afterward did his share in slaughtering the Full-Bloods who had come so near to taking his life.

#### A WHITE DOVE STORY.

The Full-Bloods, in order to carry out their declaration to hang or kill every man who signed the treaty of 1835 or took any active part in the treaty, captured Jake West and sentenced him to be hanged by the neck, until dead. A guard of five-hundred Cherokees was placed over West until the time set for his execution.

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He was finally hanged and those who saw the execution all say that a white dove alighted upon the gallows just as the trigger was sprung and West was launched into eternity.

Whenever Tom Starr and his band would find an enemy in possession of slaves they would make a raid on them and take the slaves to Alabama, or to other places, and sell them.

#### TOMM STARR TAKES TO PLAINS

When hard pressed, Starr and his band would go west and join the wild Indians. This they could do without trouble but the trouble came when they wanted to leave. The Western Indians did not want to give up their friends, the Cherokees, but wanted them to remain on the plains, but Starr had not fully avenged his father's death and would occasionally make a dash into the Cherokee Anti-Treaty camps, kill a few of his enemies and then escape to the plains again.

While out on the plains with the wild Indians, Tom Starr had many ups and downs. He told the writer a few years before his death, that on one occasion he and his band and a band of wild Indians were trying to capture a small buffalo. The buffalo would run around the hill ahead of them and would not leave it. Tom hid by the side of the route taken by the buffalo and the rest chased it on around the hill. When

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the buffalo came within range, Tom raised up from his hiding place, took aim with his rifle but the gun failed to fire, and the animal showed fight. Tom ran and some of the wild Indians shot the buffalo and saved their friend's life but made a good deal of sport at his expense.

Next day a large buffalo came feeding along very near their camp. Tom started out to get him but when the beast took after him, Tom ran for his life and jumped into a swollen creek nearby. The buffalo jumped in after him and while it was swimming around in the water Tom got on its back and being joined by his comrades they captured the buffalo alive.

After one of Starr's raids on his old enemies, the latter got together, and followed in close pursuit, so close that one night while Starr was camped on a creek, the pursuers came to the creek and camped within half mile of him. The Starr men were out early after their horses and finding them mixed with the better ones, belonging to their pursuers, selected the best of the bunch and escaped with them.

#### TREATY MADE AND VIOLATED.

Tom Starr's war with the Anti-Treaty Cherokees over the murder of his father lasted about five years. The Full-

Bloods finally concluded that they could not capture him and his band and realizing that they would finally all be killed, if the struggle went on, made overtures of peace which were accepted.

The conditions insisted upon were that Tom Starr and his men all would be pardoned and allowed to return to their homes and live in peace the rest of their days.

This was agreed to and a treaty of peace was accordingly made and signed, and a pardon granted to Tom Starr and his men in accordance with the terms of the treaty. As soon as this was done Starr and his men returned to their homes in Goingsnake District. They were not allowed to live in peace, however.

#### HALF-BLOODS ENTER THE LISTS.

Early one morning soon after the treaty of peace was concluded a number of Half Blood Cherokees went to the home of Mat Gerring who had been with Tom Starr through his war and killed him. The next day they went to the place where Ellis Starr was staying and called him out in the yard and killed him. From this place they went to Sallisaw, took Washington Starr out of his sick bed and returned to

the very spot where they had killed Ellis Starr, and there killed Washington Starr.

They went to the Choctaw Nation to capture Creek Starr and Ike Gerring. When they captured these men Ike Gerring was killed and Creek Starr made a prisoner.

They started back to Goingsnake District, with Creek Starr to kill him, and while enroute stopped to feed their horses. Watching his opportunity, Creek Starr mounted a fine horse, made a dash for liberty and escaped unharmed amid a shower of bullets. He was afterwards killed in a duel with a Creek Indian.

#### THE CONFLICT ABANDONED.

Repeated attempts to kill Tom Starr failed and also failed to provoke him to hostilities, if he could avoid them. On the other hand the Half-Bloods tired of the struggle and finally gave it up. In order to avoid further trouble with these people, who so flagrantly violated these terms of the treaty of peace, Starr moved to Canadian District where he spent the remainder of his days in peace and became very wealthy.

Tom Starr could slaughter an enemy with ease and think nothing about it but at home his only aim in

life seemed to be to please his wife to whom he was thoroughly devoted and for her he would do anything in the world which he thought would afford her any pleasure.

Starr raised a large family on the quiet banks of the Canadian but his sons are all dead now and only two of his daughters are yet living.

Sam Starr, a younger son, became noted because he married Belle Shirly, who is said to have been at one time the wife of Cole Younger. This woman was a desperate character and soon got Sam Starr into trouble and he was killed. Later Belle Starr was assassinated near the Canadian River.

Tom Starr lived a few years longer than his wife and became a peaceable and good citizen.

During the last years of his life he lived with his younger son, whose name was Thomas Starr, Jr., and always slept with two good sixshooters under his head with every gun about the place always in shooting order. Tom Starr took great pleasure in entertaining his friends in his old days and in recounting to them his daring exploits and hair breadth escapes.

He is buried on the bank of the Canadian River.