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James Carselowey,
Field Worker,
May 11, 1937.

Interview With Chaney McNair,
343 South Fifth Street,
Vinita, Oklahoma.

I am eighty-five years old, being born in slavery,
near Tahlequah, Cherokee Nation, June, 1852.

My father and mother belonged to Dick Ratcliff, who
lived southeast of Tahlequah, at a place called "Caney",
and did his trading at Tahlequah. Dick Ratcliff was the
father of four sons and two daughters as follows: Daniel,
Abe, Billie and Alex and Charlotte and Lydia.

Mr. Ratcliff was a very old man and his sons did
all the bossing of the slaves about the field work. We
raised wheat, corn and Hungarian Millet, and we gathered
the blades off the corn and bound them in bundles for
fodder, to take the place of hay as there was no wild
hay growing near.

We had plenty to eat, good horses to ride and plenty
of good whiskey to drink. Our masters were kind to us
here in the Indian country and there were no restrictions

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set as to how much work we should do in a day. I was told that down in Texas the slave owners set a rule that each slave was to do so much work each day and any who failed to come up to their rule received so many lashes when night came.

Old man Ratcliff's hobby was to have us little "Niggers" around him, sing "Polly Put The Kettle On", and many other old time songs and watch us dance. He would also have us wrestle, run races and do a lot of other foolish things to amuse the little ones, while the old folks were in the field.

FATHER SOLD IN SLAVERY.

My father was sold to John Drew, a neighbor, before I was born, but he was allowed to come home every week. He had ten children, of which I was the youngest, and the only one now living. My two oldest brothers were sold and I never heard of them any more. Up to the time my father was sold, he went under the name of Bob Ratcliff, after he was sold he changed his name to Bob Drew, but my mother was still a Ratcliff.

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SOLD ME TO COLONEL WILLIAM PENN ADAIR.

When I was ten years old my master sold me to Col. William Penn Adair, a very famous Cherokee lawyer who lived at Greenbriar, on Grand River, east of Adair, in Cooweescoowee district. They just took me over there and left me and I didn't know I had been sold for a long time afterward. Dick Ratcliff had had a big lawsuit and employed Colonel Adair to defend him and I was sold to pay the lawyer fee.

William Penn Adair was a mighty smart lawyer and served his country as a Cherokee Senator and was sent to Washington to represent his people so many times, I can't begin to tell you how many. It was on one of these trips to Washington that he died in the city of Washington and was shipped back to Tahlequah in a coffin.

SOLDIERS COME IN 1862.

I didn't stay but six months with Colonel Adair, before the Northern soldiers came and told all the slaves they had come to get them and take them to Kansas, where

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they would be set free and live just like white folks. They gathered up all the horses and cattle they could find and the slaves helped drive them out to Kansas. They made a drive up and down Grand River and gathered up every "nigger" they could find and they had about one hundred when they left here, but had four or five hundred before we reached Kansas.

Some of the families I remember who lost their slaves at this time were the McNairs, Martins, Vanns, Daniels, Schrimshers, Landrums and a great many others, whose names I do not remember.

It was just before this trip that one of Benjamin Franklin Landrum's educated slaves composed the celebrated violin piece, "I tell you, Massa Ben, your niggers gwine to leave you".

The Landrum family was one family that believed in educating their slaves, and they taught them all to read and write, from the time they were children. This had a telling effect and many of the negroes returned after the war, and went to work for their old masters.

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NEGRO SLAVES JOINED ARMY.

When we reached Kansas most all the negro men folks joined the Northern Army, and the women were put to work in the fields just wherever we could find work. It was much different from what we expected. When we drove all those horses and cattle back from the Indian Territory we thought they would be given to us to start out with, but we never saw them any more after we landed.

WILLIAM PENN ADAIR A PRISONER.

When they set me free, they made my master, William Penn Adair, a prisoner and took him to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, where they gave him a trial of some kind, but he made them such a fine speech that they set him free and he came right back and took up his place in Stand Watie's army, where he fought all during the war. Clem Vann and a lot of other prisoners were taken to Kansas on the same trip that took us out.

JOHN ROSS FLEES COUNTRY.

John Ross was Chief of the Cherokee Nation in 1862, and tried to get his people not to take sides in the

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Civil War, but some of them called him a "Yankee" and were going to kill him, and would have done so, had not the full-blood Cherokees guarded him, until a bunch of Northern soldiers came into the Territory. He went with them, going to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he died in 1866. He was brought back to Tahlequah and buried.

HANGING IN 1859 - ILLINOIS DISTRICT.

In 1859 John McFields killed Jim Colston over some Cherokee money and threw his body into the Illinois River. They tried him in the Illinois District, found him guilty and hanged him in the courthouse yard. In those days each district did its own hanging, but later on a National jail was established at Tahlequah and all the prisoners were taken there to be hanged.

SLAVES RETURN TO TERRITORY.

After the war was over, my folks came back to the Indian Territory in 1866 and settled on Fourteen Mile Creek, near Melvin, in the Cherokee Nation.

The Indians' slaves didn't like it in Kansas and most of them returned to the Indian Territory, after the

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war. They found many empty buildings here, belonging to people who had left the country during the war, seeking a place of safety. I remember two big old brick buildings, located on Grand River, about twenty miles southeast of Vinita, that had been left by Johnson Thompson during the war. They were so large that several families camped in them until they could build a log cabin of some kind to live in. Most of the slaves settled on the rivers and were there when statehood came, and that is how so many of them got the river bottom land for allotment.

Johnson Thompson had been a merchant before the war and was considered very wealthy, but he had gone to the Choctaw Nation where Southern soldiers were located and stayed all during the war. He came back after the war and claimed his two brick buildings. Andy Fry, an ex-slave and neighbor of Thompson, told me he helped him dig up a fruit jar full of money after he came back that he had buried under the front step of one of the old brick buildings before he left.

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CAME TO VINITA IN 1888.

I came to Vinita in 1888 and began work in the home of Dr. Oliver Bagby, one of the first doctors to locate in Vinita. In 1889 I was married to Columbus McNair, a slave of the McNair family, living near Pryor in Mayes County. My husband died several years ago and I have lived all alone in the home he left me in Vinita.