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INTERVIEW.

13766.

James Russell Gray,  
Investigator,  
April 26, 1938.

Interview With Phil Anderson,  
Hartshorne, Oklahoma.

I am an Alabama man, born near Decatur on January 26, 1872, (said Phil Anderson, colored). My parents were both Alabama people, and they were slaves until freed by the Civil War. I don't know their exact ages or the exact location of their birthplace. They are both dead now, buried somewhere in Alabama. Father was John Anderson; mother was Lucy Parham. Father died when I was just a little fellow, but mother lived until 1924, there in old Alabama.

I had been working in coal mines for my living for quite a few years when I was thirty-two years old; so when I heard that miners were needed in the Indian Territory I decided to try for a job, there. I was married by then, and I needed work. I had married a girl named Mary F. Webster.

I came to the Choctaw Nation in 1904. I came by rail over the Choctaw, Oklahoma & Gulf line; it is now

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the Rock Island Railroad. Looking at this country now a man can hardly realize how different it was only thirty-four years ago. It was still pretty thinly settled. The discovery of coal about fifteen years before had opened the Choctaw Nation for settlement by whites, you might say. Before that time the population was mostly Indians, I've been told. Only a few white men and negroes lived in the Choctaw Nation before the discovery of coal; maybe a man here and there who had married into the tribe, a few farmers, cattlemen, and a scattering of outlaws who were hiding out from the officers of the surrounding states.

Then coal was discovered. I have heard that coal was found first in the Choctaw Nation around McAlester, about the time of my own birth. In time, mines were put in from McAlester to Fort Smith along the route of the Choctaw, Oklahoma & Gulf Railroad. When I came I was told that Harts-horne was about fifteen years old, and had started with the sinking of a mine there in the city limits called Mine No. 1. In 1904 Dow was about six years old.

I went to work at Dow in Mine No. 1. It was a shaft, having four main entries, as did most of the shaft mines

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then. The pit boss was a man named Alexander Breckenridge, if I remember right; he was also the mining superintendent for all the mines of the Milby-Dow Coal and Mining Company. Mine Number 1 had electricity for hoisting power, but there weren't any electric motors down in the mine; we used mules altogether. Number 1 was just across Brushy Creek, on the west, from Dow Lake.

I belonged to the miners' union, Union Mine Workers of America. I would rather work under union conditions; they are much safer. In those days before statehood, the union had a hard time getting any recognition. The coal was leased from the Choctaw Government, and there was some sort of agreement in the leases, so I have been told, that specified the mines be worked so many days a year or the coal, with mines and all improvements, would go back to the Choctaws. This made it hard on miners when they tried to strike; the coal companies had to keep the work going, and they always brought in non-union men from other places, sometimes from hundreds of miles away.

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There had been a strike at Dow a few years before I came here, about 1900. Breckenridge was ordered to fire all union men unless they would promise to quit the union; I suppose the coal company was afraid of the union or something. Maybe the union had been making demands for better conditions in the mines. Anyway, a lot of the men quit, but so many stayed that the work went on, and the strike didn't do much good. Some of the men who quit finally went back under non-union conditions.

I think there were ten mines at Dow altogether, but Number 10 wasn't put in until years later, about 1912. By the time I came to Dow, in 1904, all the other mines were put in. I don't know much about any of the mines except Number 1. I think that Number 5 was a slope, and that it was down about a mile, with entries every three hundred feet.

Mine Number 2 was a shaft. It was opened a year or two before I came, and the same year it was opened a fire broke out down in the mine and killed eleven men. Mining is always dangerous, and in those days when we worked under more primitive conditions than now, when we used open-flame

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lamps and powder that flashed fire when it exploded, deaths were common. In a way, you might say that coal mining was then in an experimental stage.

Most of the houses at Dow were around Mine Number 1 when I first came. A lot of those "company" houses are still there, and the community around the old Number 1 mine is now called "Negro Town". The company store was where it is now, on the western end of the community, where the interurban tracks swing northwest. That store was a big thing in those days. It was the most important store in Dow. It was sort of a department store, and it employed about a dozen men. I think a man named G. A. Reidt was the manager.

I didn't do anything then except mine, and so I did not get out away from the mining towns and communities where I worked. I wasn't much of a hand to hunt or fish, but I have seen wild turkeys around Dow. A man could take a rifle and walk out from Dow and kill a deer if he wanted to; I knew men who did that. Fish are pretty scarce now, but in those days you could catch all the fish you wanted

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in the creeks and lakes around here. Cat fish, creppie, perch, a few bass, suckers, buffalo, and a few other kinds of fish were in the streams. I have heard of some wolves and bears in the hills near here.

In those days baseball was something to get excited about. It was the main sport and recreation of the miners. We had a baseball team called the "Dow Team", though some of the members were from other little towns in the section, like Hartshorne. Some of the miners who worked in the mines at Dow lived in Hartshorne; they rode to work every morning on a big wagon or two, and back home after work.

I used to hear the miners brag about the team they had just before I came to Dow, in 1903. A man named Snodgrass was on the team, and Henry Fields, Doc Carlock, Tom Crowder, and a man named Collins, and I don't know who all.

In the spring of 1903 they played Eufaula their first game and beat them three to two. Then they played other places, among them Tishomingo and Wapanucka. They played Tishomingo three times, once there and twice at Hartshorne.

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Tishomingo beat them there. Then the Tishomingo team came here and got beat.

The third game was to play off the tie. There was plenty of money around here in those days; the miners always had money to bet. Tishomingo was giving odds of two to one, and hundreds of dollars were bet on that one game. The game was tied one and one at the ninth inning. It went into the thirteenth inning before Dow made a score and won the game.

I dug coal; there were lots of different jobs in a mine, like mule driving, and company work, but I was a digger. I got seventy-two cents a ton. We had to place our own shots to shoot down our coal, and all the blasting was done "on solid", which means the vein wasn't undercut. We couldn't get but three or four cars a day; either; for some reason we couldn't get the boss to send more coal cars to our rooms. I guess there were too many men working in the mines at Dow.

Anyway, that same year, in 1904, I quit working at Dow and went to Cambria. That was the old original Cambria

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mine. It was about three hundred yards west of the mine that is in operation there now. It was a slope, with a steam plant for hoisting power. And we used mules down in the mine to pull the coal cars; there weren't any electric motors. Motors aren't practical in a slope; and that was before motors came into general use, anyway.

The mine was a pretty large one. It was owned and operated by the Kali-Inla Coal and Mining Company, though I don't know who the main officials of the company were. A man named John Hilling was the pit boss. If I remember right, the mine had twenty-three lifts on each side of the slope. That was after it was fully developed, though at first it only worked about sixty men.

The Baker-Reidt Mercantile Company owned the store at Cambria. The place was just a mining community; when I first went there the miners mostly lived in tents. There were maybe four houses. But in a year there were about thirty families in the camp. As the mine was developed the community grew even larger. It was just across the county line in Latimer County.

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I brought my family into the Territory to live with me, and got a company house to live in. I had been paying board up until this time, and that was around three or four dollars a week. There was a mine between Cambria and Gowen called Mine Number 40; I used to work at "Forty" off and on when Cambria shut down for short periods.

I have always mined; I never did anything else, except raise a garden and maybe a small patch of corn. Maybe what I have told will give one side of the picture of those early days when this was the Choctaw Nation, Indian Territory. For the coal mines were an important part of the development of the Choctaw Nation. This part of the country would undoubtedly have been settled in time anyway, but the discovery and development of coal and coal mining hastened that settlement by at least ten years. Coal and coal mining played a big part in the history of the Choctaw Nation---and of Eastern Oklahoma.