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ATKINSON, FRANK . . . INTERVIEW

#12125

236

ATKINSON, FRANK

INTERVIEW

12125

Hazel B. Greene,
Journalist,
November 12, 1937.

An Interview with Mr. Frank Atkinson,
Fort Towson, Oklahoma.

I was born in Georgia but when I was a baby we moved to Arkansas. We lived at various places in Arkansas, Winthrop being the last. Then when I was about ten years old in 1906 we moved to the Indian Territory and stopped at Swink in Choctaw County, and rented one of the small farms that composed the large estate of Johnny Wilson who was about a quarter breed Choctaw Indian. He had a big farm made up of a number of tenant houses and a few acres for each tenant to work. The one we rented was on Doaksville Creek. There were about four or five acres of land in a patch at the house and the balance was across the creek and about a mile west from the house. We raised cotton and corn and worked about forty acres in all. We raised about a thousand bushels of corn that year. That was about the best corn crop that we ever raised and it was late when we got there to put our crop in too because we did not get there until

ATKINSON, FRANK

INTERVIEW

12125

- 2 -

February 6, 1906.

When we lived on Doaksville Creek we were just about a quarter of a mile from what was known as the witch holes. And they were supposed to be on the site of or near to the original Doaksville. There were plenty of signs of a settlement or a town having been there but the most noticeable sign was the old brickyard. About four hundred yards east of the creek were two of the witch holes which look like wells about five feet across and must be twenty feet deep from the top to the water and those two holes of water are connected by a deep ravine which is always dry. This ravine is perhaps two hundred and fifty yards long. Between the southernmost hole and Doaksville Creek is another body of water, shallow at the edge which seems to grow deeper as it extends back under a cliff.

Then fifty yards or so to the west of that is a large chalybeate spring in the edge of the creek and another on the opposite side of the creek and the water that flows from those two springs is identical with that in the witch holes.

ATKINSON, FRANK

INTERVIEW

12125

- 3 -

I believe the witch holes are the source of those two springs. We used to throw large rocks in the holes and watch the bubbles rise for five minutes, and finally we would hear a sound like the rock striking something hollow like a tub or barrel. It is possible that there is a cemetery somewhere east of the witch holes. The holes were always so interesting that there was where we always stopped. We lived on the banks of Doaksville Creek for a year then in the Fall we moved to the "Thousand Acre Field" or rather to one of the farms into which the "Thousand Acre Field" had been divided. The "Thousand Acre Field" was supposed to have been a plantation of a thousand acres which had been in cultivation so many years prior to our going there that pine trees had grown up on it so large and so tall that as many as four and five cross ties could be hewn out of one tree. Yet the plowed ridges were plainly discernible between those pine trees.

The "Thousand Acre Field" began about a mile and a

ATKINSON, FRANK

INTERVIEW

12125

- 4 -

half north of Swink and extended east, west and north. It was no doubt a big plantation worked by someone long years before any of us came to this country but when we got here it had been cut up into small farms. There were only about forty acres in the place where we lived. I heard various stories as to who had cultivated the thousand acres but that they were cultivated is beyond doubt. W.O. Keys, an intermarried citizen, lives now on a part of it and it is a part of his filing.

One old darkey told me that the soldiers at Fort Towson were the first to cultivate this land but that is doubtful because of the distance from the fort. There was so much tillable land nearer to the fort. For miles one can still see evidences of the land having been plowed even through the large timber that has grown up since then.

When I was a boy, I would tramp for miles and miles hunting evidences of the plantation that was said to

ATKINSON, FRANK

INTERVIEW

12125

- 5 -

have consisted of a thousand acres and that at one time had a mansion and several slave cabins on it.

I attended school first at Swink which was built on the north side of the Arkansas and Choctaw railroad when it was put through here. Later, the town was moved to the south side of the railroad because one could not get a clear title to the land on the north side of the railroad because it belonged to a minor Indian.

I attended school at Swink a couple of terms before a schoolhouse was built at New Swink. Then we moved back down on Doaksville Creek again on the Jim Harkins' place just about a quarter of a mile from the west prong of the creek and we had a corn patch in the forks of the creek when that terrible hail storm came in 1909. The hail beat our windows all out and beat the roofs to pieces and killed stock and the corn which was just about knee high down on that creek bottom patch. We had a boy plowing it. My father had gone to Valliant and I was home from school that day

ATKINSON, FRANK

INTERVIEW

12125

- 6 -

because I was puny. When my mother saw the cloud coming up she told me to go to the field and get the boy and ~~then~~ follow her to the home of a neighbor. I ran and got him but we only reached our house when we had to seek shelter. Chunks of ice as big as my ~~two~~ fists fell in our yard and the hail was so thick that we could not see a limb fall. This limb fell off of a tree not more than ten feet from where we were standing on the porch watching the hail. That limb was as big around as a man's body. The creek was so full of ice that it would have been impossible for a horse to have crossed it without being crushed to death. The timber down on Doaksville Creek shows signs of that big hail today. Where the field came down to a point in the forks of the creek it was fenced with a plank fence and the water washed debris down over the hail that had piled up in this fence corner, and three weeks from the day that hail fell a bunch of us went to that place and dug three

ATKINSON, FRANK

INTERVIEW

12125

- 7 -

wash tubs full of that ice and made ice cream with it. I have witnesses to prove it. The corn stalks and other trash that had washed over the hail had kept it from melting and then it was covered deep, too. That was the hail storm that beat the roofs off and plate glass windows out of buildings in Fort Towson. My father was in Valliant and it did not hail there that day and ^{he} had no idea of what was going on at home until he got to Swink; then he ~~began~~ to have some idea of the damage but could not conceive of the utter devastation that met his eyes.

Where there had been corn knee high to a horse the ground was not only clean of vegetation but full of holes from the size of an egg to the size of ordinary cantaloupes. We had to plant over the corn and gardens and it remained cold for so long after that that I distinctly remember walking behind a cotton planter in an overcoat and planting cotton. And our cotton must have been planted about the first of May because we never planted until in May sometime. So

ATKINSON, FRANK

INTERVIEW

12125

- 8 -

it might have been a little after May first.

The old site of the original Doaksville is just about three miles almost south of the town of Swink. It is possible that there is a cemetery east of the witch holes. The earliest records of burial at the Doaksville west of Fort Towson was in 1832. It is possible that there were earlier burials and that the graves were not marked. There is a lapse of almost ten years from the settling of the original Doaksville on Doaksville Creek to the establishment of Fort Towson in 1824 when they began burying at the Fort. Some of the tombstones are still standing.