

Notice of Copyright

Published and unpublished materials may be protected by Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S. Code). Any copies of published and unpublished materials provided by the Western History Collections are for research, scholarship, and study purposes only.

Use of certain published materials and manuscripts is restricted by law, by reason of their origin, or by donor agreement. For the protection of its holdings, the Western History Collections also reserves the right to restrict the use of unprocessed materials, or books and documents of exceptional value and fragility. Use of any material is subject to the approval of the Curator.

Citing Resources from the Western History Collections

For citations in published or unpublished papers, this repository should be listed as the Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

An example of a proper citation:

Oklahoma Federation of Labor Collection, M452, Box 5, Folder 2. Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

BARNEY, FELIX

INTERVIEW

13858

415

Journalist, J. R. Carselovey,
April 20, 1938.

Interview with
Felix Barney,
Vinita, Oklahoma.

OLD INDIAN DAYS IN CHEROKEE NATION.

My name is Felix Barney. I live on South Miller Street in the city of Vinita. I was born on a farm near Prairie City, Cherokee Nation, Indian Territory.

My father's name was Charles Barney, a white man. My mother was Catherine (Ward) Barney, a Cherokee. Her father was Bryant Ward, an old settler who died in 1874.

My mother came with her parents from Georgia, with the old settler Cherokees and they settled on a farm near Prairie City, east of the present town of Fairland where I was born on June 27, 1874. After my father's death my mother moved to a place near Bryant's Chapel in Mayes County.

When I was a young man we made frequent trips to Chelsea, a new town established in the early '80's when the Frisco Railroad first passed through the Territory. There was only one house between Chelsea and Coo-way-yuk,

-2-

later called Pryor Creek. That was Blue Rider's place. He had a cattle ranch on Pryor Creek, and resided on the old place until long after statehood when he died. His sons still live in the vicinity of the old place. I saw thousands of prairie chickens and many deer while making these trips.

I remember we used to bell our horses and cows and turn them out on the range and the prairie chickens would make so much noise, shortly after daylight, that we had to get up before day to get our horses, or we could not hear the bell for the prairie chickens. Bryant's Chapel was in Saline district and there were many pigeon roosts on Fourteen Mile Creek. White men would go there and kill pigeons with clubs.

INDIAN BALL GAMES.

There was a large settlement of full blood Cherokee Indians who lived in Saline district, and they had a National ball game they played that was very different from the game we know as base ball. The ball was caught in a cup, whittled into the end of a long stick and was thrown with the same stick. The ball was not allowed to

-3-

touch the ground, and if missed with the cup stick did not count anything. The ball was thrown or carried between two high poles, called goals, much the same as our national football goals.

THE CORN STALK SHOOT.

The Cherokees had another game they called the Corn Stalk shoot. Green corn stalks were cut and placed upright in a pile, much the same as a shock of corn. Then the Indians would get back for some distance and shoot into the corn stalks with bows and arrows. The man who could run his arrow through the most corn stalks was the winner of the game. The Indians spent much time in making ~~fine~~ bows and arrows to enter into these games. The bows were made of cedax^{and} bois d'arc.

SHAWNEE FOOTBALL

Over around Chelsea, in the White Oak hills there was a large settlement of full blood Shawnees. They played a game they called Shawnee football. The men played against the women, using a football, with goals similar to the white football goals. The women were allowed to throw the ball, but the men had to kick the

-4-

ball, and they had to hustle if they beat the women. Some of these full blood girls could knock a squirrel out of the highest tree in the timber with a rock, they were so accurate with their throwing.

In the country school all the larger girls played town ball right along with the boys and could throw a ball and strike on an even footing with the boys. Two captains would choose up before the game and select the players for the two sides and I have seen the large girls chosen many times before the boys would be chosen.

ROGERS..

My mother moved to Bushyhead, in Rogers County, when the Frisco Railroad went through there. That was about 1910, but we did not stay there long as there was quite a little stir at Chelsea, about six miles further up the line where a new town had been established and for a while it looked as if Chelsea was going to make a bigger town than Vinita, even though Vinita had two railroads.

Some of the first merchants in Chelsea were Henry Armstrong, a Delaware Indian who moved a store from

-5-

Coodys Bluff down there, then Pete Couch put in a store and Fate Byrd opened a drug store. A man named Adams was the first postmaster. There was no school there when the town was established and no peace officers.

The first church services held in the town were held in the 'Frisco depot waiting room. I recall that I heard shooting on the outside while services were being held.

The sheriff of Coowescoowee District was the only Peace Officer in the district and he lived at his country home somewhere in the district. I think Jess Cochran was the sheriff when we lived at Chelsea, then came Ed Sanders and Neal Ward. They were all good officers but had their hands full as there was no way of covering the Territory except by horse or buggy and the criminal was usually gone before the sheriff got there but the officers had a way of getting them, and if they stopped long in the district they were usually waylaid and caught or killed. I remember when Jess Cochran was sheriff, he received word from Bill Howell, who lived at Oseuma up near the Seneca Nation where I was born, that a bunch of his cattle had been stolen and were

-6-

being driven in the direction of Coffeyville, Kansas. Cochran, who lived near Chelsea, with a posse of deputies, set out to head them off and overtook them camped on the Verdigris south of Coffeyville in the Cherokee Nation and a fight ensued, in which Jim Barker, well-known outlaw was killed.

CHELSEA INCORPORATED.

A few years after the town of Chelsea was established, in 1882 the town was incorporated. I do not remember the date, but V. H. Flourney was the first mayor and Harrison Williams was the first city marshal.

The town continued to grow and for awhile Chelsea looked like a boom town. It looked so good that Charley Poole, who had been an early day clerk in the W. C. Patton store at Vinita, quit his job and came to Chelsea and opened up a good sized dry goods store. Many years later when Vinita walked off and left Chelsea in the small town class some of Pool's friends asked him why he ever left a good town to come to a small place like Chelsea. He said, "I just decided that I had rather be a big dog

-7-

in a little town than a little dog in a big town."

Anyway Charley Poole stayed right in Chelsea in the Mercantile business, until he was an old man and was still in business there when he died and was rated as quite a wealthy man.

I learned the stone cutting and engraving business when a young man and when Chelsea started off with such a boom I opened the first Marble shop there and supplied monuments in that vicinity for many years. The dust finally got the best of me and I had to quit and try something else.

BECOME A TRAVELING MAN.

I wrote to the Vermont Marble Works where I had been buying my marble for many years and told them my trouble and they gave me a job as traveling salesman. I worked for them nine years and did well. When I first started the freight rates were low enough to allow shipments that far away and this company had the finest marble that was ever used here and it was easily sold but after nine years of salesmanship for them, the freight rates got so high that it was impossible to pay the high rate and the

-8-

company discontinued their service to this part of the country.

EARLY DAY BUS SERVICE.

The traveling man was greatly "hopped up" when bus service was opened up in this part of the country. I well remember the first bus line between Vinita and Muskogee. I got on the thing one day and started to Muskogee where I had a good customer. The bus got stuck in the mud on an all dirt road and the passengers all got out to push the thing out and I got so muddy that I looked like a tramp but I finally reached my destination and was rewarded by selling the Muskogee concern a car load of marble, which cost them \$4,000.00.

EARLY DAY POLICE SERVICE.

After making this good sale I walked on up town with spirits high but still looking like a muddy hog, a hobo or whatsoever name you might find for me. The first policeman I passed nabbed me and dragged me down to the police station. I thought at first it was a joke, but the more I tried to convince the police that I was a traveling man, who had been trying to push a

*
-9-

bus out of a mud hole, the harder they laughed. They said that was a new one, that had never been pulled before. They said every hobo that came along had some excuse, but they never heard of one riding a bus before.

I finally thought of my customer, whom I had just sold and called him up and he came down and told them who I was and they turned me loose. The officers apologized but I never did get over it and I still think they were a bunch of fellows who were nabbing every poor fellow who came to town and assessing a fine on him.

CHELSEA HAS A FAIR.

The city of Chelsea organized a fair association in the early '90's and built a fair ground, and for several years they had a regular old time early day fair. The race horse men all came each year on a regular circuit and they had as fine races there as I ever saw any place in larger cities. Ben Hester was the announcer and starter of the races and became so well known that he was elected as County Superintendent several terms.

BARNEY, FELIX. INTERVIEW.

13655

-10-

MOVED TO VINITA.

In 1910 I married Minnie Arwood, a Cherokee girl who lived at Chelsea, and we are the parents of one child, Jessie, who died at the age of seven years; we buried her in the Fairview Cemetery at Vinita. We moved to Vinita from Chelsea in 1912 and I opened up another Marble shop which I sold a few years later to a man of the name of Miller who still owns it. I then went into the grocery business and am still in this business.