

MARTIN, JOSEPH (MRS.)

INTERVIEW

7949

488

Elizabeth Ross
Investigator.

10-20-37

Mrs. Joseph Martin, interview.
South Cherokee, Muskogee, Oklahoma.

The Indian International Fair held in what was then the small town of Muskogee, in 1879, attracted large numbers of people from various sections of Indian Territory and from beyond its borders. The exhibits were stored in the large long building. Later a circular building was built a hundred feet in diameter. This building stood in the vicinity of the present Spaulding Park, with wide open spaces stretching away into the distance. The grounds adjacent to the main building were filled with tents, refreshment stands, temporary restaurants and covered wagons.

There were present at the Fair more Indians than were ever afterward seen on a similar occasion. Besides numbers of Indians of various tribes in the Indian Territory there were many Indians from distant states and territories, wearing their usual costumes and head-dresses. Some of the Indians had paint upon their faces.

2

There were Sioux and Cheyenne Indians at this Fair besides members of various other tribes; their tents and tepees were pitched here and there about the grounds in vicinity of the building.

There were some picturesque warriors and leaders among the Indian visitors and it was said that the Indian was at this Fair who had fired the first gun in the battle of the Little Big Horn in Montana in which General George A. Custer and all members of his command were slain on June 25th, 1876.

Among the notables who addressed the many people assembled about the platform above which floated the flag from a tall pole, was Carl Schurz, Secretary of the Interior Department in the administration of President Rutherford B. Hayes. Preceding the secretary to the platform was Major John A. Foreman, then of Muskogee, who loudly shouted: "Make way for the Secretary!"

Secretary Schurz once a brigadier General in the Union Army who had fought at the battle of Gettysburg, was a red-bearded man wearing a tan-colored duster over his dress suit.

He rapidly ascended the platform and delivered an address appropriate to the occasion. Present among the crowd were some officers and soldiers from Fort Gibson besides notable men of the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Seminole Nations.

The Indian Journal was then a Muskogee newspaper and the printing press, type cases and other necessary equipment were placed within the Fair Building and the paper was printed there. Numbers of visitors looked with great interest upon the setting of type by the compositors and upon the printing of the sheets.

People attending the Indian International Fair in the early autumn days of 1879 travelled through hills and woodlands and across the prairies on horses and ponies, in wagons and hacks, occasionally in carriages and some visitors came afoot. The first railway trains seen by numbers of the visitors rumbled through Muskogee over the Missouri, Kansas and Texas railroad tracks.

The exhibits were of high grade, including various agricultural products and live stock. There were

4

also many specimens of handiwork in which were evidence of much skill.

Music was furnished by the Silver Cornet Band of Denison. There were contests in riding and Miss Susie Ross, now Mrs. Joseph Martin, a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Joshua Ross of Muskogee, was one of the contestants in the young ladies' class and on one occasion won the prize which was a lady's side-saddle for the best and most graceful riding. There was horse-racing; a number of fleet-footed animals being entered.

Many interesting incidents are recalled in connection with the early day fairs.

On one occasion two Indian women, not members of any of the Five Civilized Tribes, wished to compete in the Ladies' Riding Contest and insisted on riding astride; which desire was granted. White women at that time used side-saddles in riding.

One of these squaws won the prize which was a side-saddle which she at once refused and demanded a man's saddle. The committee in charge began taking up a collection of money with which to purchase a man's saddle which was bought and presented to the Indian woman. Immediately, the other Indian woman rider declared that she too deserved

5

a prize as her riding exhibition was equal to that of the rider winning the saddle. Again a sum of money was collected and given to her. To this contestant, during the night following, a daughter was born and was given the name of "Muskogee Fair".

One night during an ^{early} Fair the visiting Indians had gone to bed leaving their ponies in the inclosure of the fair-grounds. During the night some horse thieves cut the fence and stole the whole herd of Indian ponies. The Indians were amazed and angry. A sum of money large enough to purchase horses for the Indians' return home was subscribed. The Comanche chief, Toshuway, borrowed a spirited iron gray saddle horse belonging to Joshua Ross, Secretary of the Fair, on which to return home, with the agreement that the horse would be returned to the owner; but Mr. Ross never saw his horse again. The Fair at this time was held at Agency Hill, now 1937, known as Honor Heights.

Among the curios exhibited was a peace pipe belonging to Mr. Ross, presented to him by an Indian. This pipe was known as the hatchet peace pipe; the pipe had a hatchet at the end of the handle which was inlaid with silver trimmings. A man who said he was one of the

delegation from Washington, D. C., expressed a wish to hold the pipe in his hand for closer inspection which was at first refused, but later one of the ladies in charge handed it to him. He rapidly disappeared in the crowd and was never seen again to the great displeasure of the owner of the pipe.

Mrs. Joseph Martin is of Cherokee and Creek Indian blood, her father being Joshua Ross and her mother, Muscogee Yargee. Joshua Ross was Secretary for many years of the Fairs held in Muskogee.

The City of Muskogee was named for Muscogee Yargee.

Mrs. Martin's first memory of a jail in Muskogee was of a very large frame building of one square room and located in about the vicinity of the present City-Federal Jail. Later a more substantial building was erected.