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Indian-Pioneer History S-149  
August 10, 1937.

INTERVIEW WITH W. M. GARDNER  
Tuskahoma, Oklahoma.  
Born November 4, 1864, Saint  
Charles, Missouri.

I was born November 4, 1864, at Saint Charles, Missouri, and moved to Talihina, Oklahoma, then Choctaw Nation, in 1887. My sister, a man by the name of R. B. Hendricks, and myself together moved here and located at Talihina. My father died in Missouri, and my mother died in Jack County, Texas.

We came over in a covered wagon drawn by three yoke of oxen. When we located at Talihina, we lived in a sawmill shack. We had no furniture except what we brought in our wagon, and that was very little. When we got located I went to work on the mountain, logging for a sawmill. The sawmill was owned by a man named Jerome Clayton. I logged with oxen. The country around there was fine as it had good grass, and we did not have to feed our stock but very little. The oxen I had to log with had to be fed. I left there and came to Tuskahoma, a small town on the Frisco Railroad,

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where I logged for the Long-Bell Lumber Company who was running a sawmill near Tuskahoma in the mountains. I still used my oxen to log with. I then quit there and went to logging for Al Chaney, who was running a sawmill out in the mountains. I used eight yoke of oxen on this job. I worked for him for a while, then quit and went to logging for R. N. Hurd, who was running a sawmill near there. I was using my oxen on this job. We had to use oxen for the country was yet wild and no roads anywhere. We had to make our own roads to get out of the mountains and it sure was rough country. It was on the Kiamichi Mountains where I was logging at that time. The mountains were full of yellow pine timber and it was fine timber too. They were supposed to pay the Choctaws royalty on every thousand feet they cut, but I am sure that some of them did not pay the Choctaws anything. They just stole the timber from the Choctaws; thereby the Choctaws lost the best timber they had. At that time the country was full of cedar and white oak timber; in fact, any kind of timber any one

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would want and it was fine at that time.

When I first came to the Nation the Frisco Railroad had been finished about a year. There were very few white people in the country; there were some around the sawmills and in the towns but none out in the country. This was a fine country then before it was settled by the white people.

There has not been anything very important happened while I have been here. The Choctaws never had anything like the western Indians. It seemed they just didn't care to have them. They had some dances but they were just like the white people dance. I have lived here for a long time but I never did see war dances. I have heard of them but so far as I know I never did see the dance.

I saw an Indian Ball game a long time ago. I don't know just what county played, but I know they sure pulled off a hard fight before they started to play the game and they had fights all during the game.

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When I quit logging I rented a farm from an Indian by the name of P.J. Hudson, and lived there for about 20 years. I was farming near the Choctaw Capital where the Choctaws held their Council every year. We raised plenty of corn and lots of everything else. We did not raise any cotton for there were no gins around the country and it was too far to haul it to Paris, Texas, or anywhere else. We raised cattle and hogs. We had some ponies; they of course became wild and were hard to handle, for the country was open and no fences to be seen. The only way we could catch our ponies was to build a corral out in the woods by cutting down trees and making a wing about a mile long. Then we would get after the ponies, run them for about two days, then get them into the chute and in the wing that leads to the corral; get behind them and run them into the corral before they knew what was up.

We came over here thinking that we could make some money. That is what the white people thought when they

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came over in the Territory so we came over for that purpose. I thought that I would make enough money to put me in good shape then I would move back to Missouri. I did make the money; it was the best opportunity I ever saw for any man who wanted to do what was right and treat the Indians right, and try to make money, which I did. I made lots of money, but I finally decided that I would stay here, so I am still here in the Old Indian Territory, now Oklahoma.

When we first landed here, wild game such as deer, turkey and fish were plentiful; wolves, panthers and bears were in the mountains. All a person had to do was to put his gun on his shoulder and go out a few yards from his house to kill a turkey or a deer. People at that time did not waste game by killing it and letting it stay out in the woods and rot. Nothing like that was done. There were a few bear hunters. There were<sup>a</sup> good many bears in the mountains, but they were hard to find, unless there was a bear hunter to find one to kill.



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I used to pay a permit to the Choctaw Nation every year. That was the taxes we had to pay. It cost us \$5.00 per year to live here and the man, who was just a hand without any team, paid \$2.50 per year. That entitled him to have as much stock as he wanted, and was just like any Indian. The only thing they could not do to any one was they could not prosecute him in their courts, but he was subject to the Federal Court which was located at Paris, Texas, and at Fort Smith, Arkansas. We used to have all the game and fish we wanted to eat, and do anything that any Indian did after we paid our permits.

When we located at Falihina we traded there for we could get anything we wanted at the company store. It belonged to the sawmill man and we who worked for him had to trade with him, and it was the same at Tuskahoma.

I have lived with and around the Choctaws ever since I moved to the Nation, and have made lots of trades with them, and I have found them to be honest

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and dependable, their word just as good as gold. I never had any trouble with any one of them in these fifty years I have been with them and lived around and among them. I have been in the hotel business for several years here at Tuskahoma, and I have fed lots of Indians during the time.

The Choctaw Capital was at Tuskahoma, and the capitol building was standing when I first moved here. The Choctaws would meet every year and hold their Council. I had a livery stable then; I used to haul them to the capitol day and night. Of course I made money by taking them to the Council House. Had a man by the name of J. H. Sommons <sup>to</sup> drive the hack. He had lots of fun out of the Indians who came on the train about half drunk, and some times all drunk.

The female Academy was built after I came to Tuskahoma. It was a good girls' school and there used to be lots of girls attending that school. They came from everywhere to this school and my hack was always ready to take them to the Academy. This school finally burned down and was never rebuilt.