

SAN RILEY.

INTERVIEW.

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## Indian-Pioneer History Project

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CIVIL WAR EXPERIENCES OF A CHEROKEE  
WOMAN

An interview with Mrs. Susan Riley  
Gott

505 South 12th St, Muskogee, Okla.  
Miss Ella Robinson, Field Worker,  
Indian-Pioneer History, S-149  
February 15, 1937.

My grandparents were Betsie Merrill Riley, and John N. Riley. They were married in Georgia and came to the Indian Territory with the Cherokees during the immigration in 1838. My parents were John N. Riley, Jr., and Nancy Ivey Riley.

On their arrival to the territory my grandfather first settled near Park Hill on what was known as the Shelton place. My grandfather died there after a few years, and my mother with her children then moved to a home six miles east of Fort Gibson, Oklahoma. My grandparents were prosperous citizens at the beginning of the war. My grandmother owned a fine, well-improved farm home. She had numerous slaves and plenty of fine stock.

At the beginning of the war in order to save as much of her property as possible, she, in company with her grandson, John Jordan, left for Texas, taking her

stock and some horses belonging to my mother. They managed after numerous delays to reach their destination. I was born in 1857, in the house formerly occupied by Eliza Ratcliff, who was killed by a Creek Indian boy. My father had previously bought the place from Mr. Ratcliff. The prints of Mrs. Ratcliff's bloody hand were on the door when we lived there, and we children were always afraid that something like that might occur again.

At the beginning of the war my father was undecided for sometime as to which side of the conflict he wanted to join. He wanted to be true to his own people, and on the other hand did not want to fight against the Union. However, he joined the Northern forces and fought with them as long as he lived, which was only a few months when he was killed in battle. He had been home for only one visit. My mother felt that she had better stay at home and try to protect her home and stock instead of emigrating to Texas as so many of the Cherokees were doing at this time.

It perhaps was an unwise decision. While we were not molested in any way by either army, we were harrassed and robbed by the "Pin Indians". The Pins were an organization, composed principally of fullbloods whose sole business was to steal and pilfer all one had in the house and kill and drive off one's fat stock whenever they wanted it for food. The "Pin Indians" were not connected with either army although they were supposed to be known as loyal Indians and to be aligned with the Northern cause. They took their name from a little pin they wore, signifying their membership in this order. Not only did the Pin Indians take what fat stock they wanted but the United States Army stationed at Fort Gibson, also helped themselves to any beef cattle they wanted.

My mother lost heavily through them. She put in a claim for the cattle against the United States Government and several years after received pay for them. The women belonging to the Pins were just as bad, if not worse, than the men, as they ransacked the house. When the men made a raid,

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they ate all the food and drank all the milk they found. Once my mother had secured from source, material for a dress for herself. When she heard the Pina coming, she quickly rolled the dress which she was making at the time in her apron and picked up her baby and held him in her arms to hide the bundle under her arm.

As food was becoming scarce, with no crops being raised and stock being killed it was quite a problem to get a little food from day to day. I well remember my mother getting some corn from some source for bread. She would boil the corn on the cob until it was soft enough to grate, then she would grate it by hand on a home made grater, and that was what we had for bread. A grater was made by driving a nail in a piece of tin, just far enough to make a rough hole. When the tin was well covered with such nail holes it was bent and nailed to a board.

Before my grandmother left for Texas she had her faithful old negro servant take her prized possessions from the house and pack them in boxes and bury them. As she did not live to come home, and the old negro died, the things were never found. All of her hand woven counterpanes, quilts, table linens, and her silverware were buried.

As it was unsafe for a family to live alone in a house, everyone moved in with someone else for protection and company as there were no men left in the community. One old faithful negro man was left by my grandmother and he was of great help to us. My mother took us children and went to live in the home of Mrs. Mary West. Then she moved at the earnest request of Mrs. Lizzie Thompson, to live in Mrs. Thompson's home.

The last raid that the Pin Indians made on my mother's home, they killed one of her prize peafowls that she took such pride in. They decorated their hats with the feathers. The neighbors looked after one another as one family shared all they had,

be it ever so little. My mother did washings for the U. S. Soldiers and received a little money that way, which she carefully spent for things that she could not provide.

The wild varments had increased with such rapidity and become so numerous and ferocious that we children always managed to get the wood and water before sun-down for we could always see foxes and wolves skulking around in the dark.

Once a large grey fox came up on our back porch in search of food, and as we had no shutter on the door, we did not sleep very comfortably that night. They made nightly raids on the chickens and finally in desperation, mother put the chickens in a vacant run attached to the house, and in that way, we managed to keep them. I will never forget how I suffered from the fright. When my mother and the other women in the house, had to go to Fort Gibson to buy a little food and I would be left alone with the younger children, and when they would return they would find us all crying

together just from fright.

When John Jordan, my mother's nephew, came back from Texas where he had gone with our grandmother he gave my grandmother's home to my mother as her part of the property. He bought her a horse and three milk cows, and with a beginning like that, we were able to make a small crop and a fine garden. Again we had a variety of food, and plenty of it. That was at the end of the War.

It was several years after the close of the war, that the schools were reopened, and there were no church services held for a long time. Brother Using, a Methodist circuit rider from across the Arkansas line at Evansville, was one of the first ministers to hold services in our community.

Many things have occurred through the years of my long life that have escaped my memory, but nothing will ever erase the memory of the terrible days we lived through during those four trying

years.

My mother lived to the age of 65.

I was married to John B. Gott in 1873 and  
am the mother of 12 children, eight of whom  
are living. I lived in the house where I  
was married until I moved to Muskogee. I  
still own a part of the home place, and  
my daughter, Mrs. Margurite Huckleberry  
owns a part.