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Hazel B. Greene,
Journalist,
Feb. 3, 1938.

An Interview With Frances Ollie
Mills Byrne, Fort Towson, Oklahoma.

I was fifteen years old when we moved to the Indian Territory. We moved from Lamar County, Texas, to old Parson Miller's place upon Long Creek, about five miles northeast of where Hugo is now. Old Parson Miller and his wife were both full blood Choctaw Indians. Mrs. Miller could not speak a word of English. Mr. Miller was educated and would preach in both Choctaw and English. He'd preach anywhere that he thought he was needed; he would even preach to the negroes in their church on Long Creek.

We came over from Texas in wagons, and the roads were awfully rough; so rough, in fact, that some of our furniture was almost broken to pieces. One thing was my mother's sewing machine. It was not broken beyond repair, but it was a long time before we got it fixed so we could sew on it. We had bought up a lot of dry goods to be made up; we knew that in this "God Forsaken" country we could not

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buy dress goods. But we soon found that we had been misinformed. We got to the old Miller place and moved into our new home, then went over and with some little grandchildren of Granny Miller's for interpreters, we rented two sewing machines from her. She put them in a room for us and we sewed there nearly every day for a couple of weeks and ate dinner there every day. We paid her for the use of the machines and our dinner each day, in corn. She surely was a good cook and had lots of good things to cook, too. That is where we saw the first Tom Fuller and shuck bread. I never stopped then to wonder why that old full blood Choctaw Indian woman would possess two sewing machines. Since then I have thought that perhaps one of them had belonged to the mother of those little grandchildren whom she was raising.

The Miller family cemetery was out back of the house. There were no tombstones but each grave was housed over.

I am reminded of an incident that came under my observation while we lived on Long Creek. An old negro woman lived there whose son was houseboy for old "Uncle Bill Spring. "Uncle" Billy had gone to Paris, Texas,

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and drawn out \$700.00 in gold to buy some cattle. He had brought it home and put it in an unlocked trunk. That night the boy stole in and went to his mother's place and buried five hundred of it under a dogwood tree close to the house and he kept going. United States Marshal Red Harper and his Antlers deputy Rick Davenport caught him next day at Fort Smith, Arkansas. He had spent nearly all of the two hundred dollars. He had bought a fifty dollar watch and had had a hole punched in a twenty dollar gold piece and was using it for a watch charm. He would not tell what he had done with the balance, so they brought him back to his mother's place and put a rope around his neck and the end over a limb of a tree and told him they would hang him if he didn't tell. He went and dug it up then. And "Uncle" Billy would not prosecute him.

After we moved into the Indian Territory we never lived near any school so we never got to go to school any more after we came over here. Churches were far from us, too. Our main diversions were parties and dances. I remember once a Mrs. Oakes, who lived somewhere out on the prairie east of where Hugo is now, was trying to get up

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some money for some just cause, somebody who had lost their all in a fire or something equally as worthy. She cooked up a lot of pies and cakes and boiled and baked some hams, and put out all kinds of luscious pickles, preserves and good things to eat that she had, and sent out invitations for everybody in the country to come to her home to a dance and a midnight supper. She charged one dollar per couple and she made plenty of money for her purpose, too. A bunch of us loaded into a hack as long as one could hang on and went from Long Creek over to that dance and we danced all night. We had plenty to eat, too. We youngsters thought nothing of going twenty-five miles to a dance.

We stayed there on the Miller place a couple of years and then moved on up to Dick Locke's place on One Creek. The house that we had rented was not available for about a month after we moved up there so we pitched a tent about a hundred yards from the house and waited for the people to move out. Father would build up big log heaps of fire at night, out in front of our tent, and they would keep us warm and comfortable even though there was snow.

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everywhere. We had an unusually cold spell while we were camped there.

We could stand in our tent door and see droves of deer and turkey, sometimes thirty-five and forty in a bunch. We nearly lived on game and fish. We caught those even in winter. And Oh! there were so many wolves. They'd howl around all night and skulk around in daytime. I think when snow was on the ground that hunger drove them near us looking for food. We heard lots of tales of their attacking a man on horseback, or at least attempting to do so. We heard of their treeing men who were so foolish as to start out afoot and the men had to sit in a tree for hours. There were panthers, too, up around the place where we lived. I have heard them squall many and many a time. We used to go fishing at night and carry pine knot torches to keep them at a distance and then build up a log fire to keep them away while we would fish. But

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we would hear them out in the woods. A big bunch of us would go fishing together, and carry a wash tub along to put our fish in and divide them when we'd get home. We went at night because we could catch more catfish at night than we could in day time.

Our neighbors were tie-hackers. Tie-hackers were a class of people who depended upon making railroad cross ties for a living. They would camp in groups. A group of them were camped about a mile or so from us. Their tents were floored and walled up and had stick and dirt chimneys. Some of them had been there for years and were raising their children without any schooling or Sunday School and they just depended upon the older ones of the bunch for treatment when one was sick. If they were very ill it was just too bad. I remember once a runner came to our place and wanted me to go down there to see a woman who was desperately ill, and see if I could do anything for her. (By then I was a married woman). I was there alone, so I just hitched up the mules to the wagon, with the help of the little boy who had come for me, and we

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drove the couple of miles over to the camp. It was in the night and snow all over the ground. By the time I got there the woman had died, so one of the women and I bathed and laid her out, and then sat down to watch the night through beside her. A big old brindle dog slipped past us and got up beside her and would not let us put him out or approach her. We had to awaken some of the men to come and get him away from her. Then he got outside the tent right against it at her head and howled the balance of the night, and the wolves came up and sat in a circle close up and they howled, too. The woman's new born baby had died that morning and they had buried it on the hillside, but they took her to Antlers and buried her in the old Choctaw cemetery.

There were some full blood Choctaws living off in the woods miles away from us but we would never see them except when they rode along the trail, single file on their little ponies, on their way to the store or the railroad or some place. They never paid any attention to us and never spoke unless we spoke first and certainly never did bother us. Sometimes one would get drunk and go whooping

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by and shooting his gun, but that was just an expression of the whiskey that some white man had sold him. I do not know where they would get their liquor; I never heard of a moonshine still until after Statehood came in. The Indians usually wore red bandanas on their heads and blankets around their shoulders. The men wore long hair and usually rode ahead of the women who rode side-saddle. I never saw a full blood Indian woman astride a horse.

While we lived up there on One Creek a woman relative of ours came from Texas to visit us and we took the oxen and wagon to meet her at the train. I don't believe we had a team of horses or mules then. The men folks were forever trading and trafficking around with our livestock. She said she had ridden lots of ways, but that was her first trip riding behind cows.

We didn't raise cotton, it was so far from a market for it. We raised corn, beans, potatoes, both sweet and Irish, pumpkins and the usual garden truck, then, too, we canned and dried fruits and vegetables. We cut the pumpkins in rings and hung the rings on poles to dry in the smoke house. We dried green beans and shelled some dried

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ones, too, some that had dried on the vines. We cut peaches off the seed and laid them out on clean cloths to dry. Sometimes we would lay them on a scaffold and sometimes on the roof. When it looked like rain and when we brought them in out of the dew, we could pick them up quickly on cloths, just gather up the corners of the cloths.

We fished the streams and shot the game, of which the woods and streams were full, including hogs. Any hog over six months old that was unmarked was considered a wild one and common property. Just anybody had a right to it. Occasionally an Indian would trade us some Tom Fuller or shuck bread, and we were always glad to get it. No white person could make either of those as well as an Indian could.

Our greatest fun was attending dances. I guess we were ten miles from Antlers but we'd go in about once a week to a dance. There used to be a hotel there that was called the "B. I. T." House, that was short for the name of Beautiful Indian Territory. They'd give dances there often. Another place where we went often to dances was

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to the dance pavillion down by the old depot by the big spring that was there then. I think the railroad company dug it out and deepened it and made a well of it. Frequently at the dances those days, some of the boys would get drunk and shoot the lights out "just for fun".

Somebody would produce some more lamp globes, re-light the lamps and go on with the dance. They'd usually get outside of the dance room or pavillion to do their fighting, but they had just so much of that to do, and a killing a week on the streets of Antlers was the rule rather than the exception in the 1890's. It was really wild and wooly there then. I remember that a fellow by the name of Smith was shot to death by one McDaniel by the public well in the middle of the street. McDaniel served time for it and is now living at Cloudy, Oklahoma.

Nearly every woman who ventured from her home alone carried a gun of some sort, sometimes a pistol and sometimes a Winchester rifle. One of the most cultured ladies I ever knew carried two guns sometimes. She rode a three horned side-saddle, with big saddle pockets covered with long Angora wool, and she carried a gun in each one. She

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was Mrs. Harriet Willard Turnbull, a white lady, whose husband was a full blood Choctaw Indian minister. He and she were both called upon frequently to minister to the sick and distressed.

I have lived in almost every kind of a habitation, from a tent, a log cabin, sawmill shack, a good log house up to palatial hotels. I never will forget one sawmill town we moved to down in McCurtain County because there I saw such a peculiar thing. It was so swampy that log wagons could not go to where the men cut logs so they took a contrivance that they called a "lizard" and hitched oxen to it and snaked the logs out of the swamp. The men wore hip boots to cut the logs .