

HARLOW, PEGGY ANN.

INTERVIEW

#13573

75

Interview with Peggy Ann Harlow
Welch, Oklahoma

Journalist - James R. Carselovey
Indian-Pioneer History, S-149
April 12, 1938

My name is Peggy Ann (Ewers) Harlow. I was born in Cherokee County, Kansas, April 11, 1866, where my father went during the late Civil War to evade the depredations being perpetrated on the Cherokees and other Indians living in Southern Kansas, then a part of the Indian Territory. My father's name was George W. Ewers and my mother was Peggy Ann (Wolf) Ewers. They were living in the extreme northern part of the Indian Territory during and before the Civil War and when the Cherokees all over the nation began to line up with the South, the Northern soldiers began pressing the Indians living in the north part of the Territory to line up with them and if they did not do so it was not safe to stay any longer and that is why my father moved out. I only have one full brother, George W. Ewers, Jr., still living in North Craig County. Shortly after the war my father moved back to Kansas, then Indian Territory and lived there until he died.

After my father's death my mother married James fields, and they were the parents of James Fields, Jr., Martha, Emma and Mary Fields.

About 1880 the United States Government and the Cherokee Nation agreed on a new line between Kansas and the Indian Territory and all the Indians living in the vicinity of Chetopa, along the Neosho River and on west to Coffeyville, had to move out and down into the Indian Territory. About all the Indians there were north of the new line lived around Chetopa, and they all moved down to a place about twelve miles southwest of the new line on Cabin Creek and formed a new settlement, known as the Rogers district and this school district still bears the name of Rogers.

INDIANS WHO MOVED OUT OF KANSAS.

Some of the Indians who moved out of Kansas when the new line was made were Henry Wolf, James Fields, George Walker, Silvester Hurst, Louis Rogers, Lark McGhee. These Indians did not receive any pay for their improvements when they left Kansas, but were allowed to bring their stock and all personal property. They did not have much to leave either, only a few log cabins and some cultivated

land. During the War the Northern soldiers had burned all the houses and even the town of Chetopa was completely burned, on the ground that it was Indian property and the Indians had rebelled against the Government.

HAD TO START ALL OVER AGAIN.

That move was a pretty hard blow to our parents, even though they did not have much to leave. When they reached their new homes, they had to build log cabins for their families, fence their land and break out new fields, all of which required much time and labor. These Indians were a long time in getting started again, as they were very poor, and had it not been for the small payments they received from the Nation from time to time I do not know how they would have gotten along, but they were real pioneers and stayed right on their places until allotment came and then had the land allotted to them.

I MARRIED A WHITE MAN IN 1881.

In 1881, when I was only fifteen years old, I married a white man of the name of Golahugh Harlow. Mr. Harlow had known our family back in Kansas, and his parents were among those who had been burned out during the War when

the Northern soldiers burned the town of Chetopa, Kansas. We went west to Goodys Bluff in what is now Rogers County, and lived a few years, then went to Claremore, a new town on the Frisco which had just started. My husband went into the mercantile business there with his brother, Jack Harlow, and they continued in business there for eight or ten years. While in business there we met early day settlers of Rogers County, many of whom had settled in the Dog Creek Hills, around Claremore, as early as in times before the Civil War.

SOME EARLY DAY SETTLERS IN ROGERS COUNTY.

My husband, although an adopted citizen, took a great interest in the Cherokee elections and in this way became acquainted with many of the early day politicians and most of the early settlers. Some of the very first settlers I recall hearing him mention were Joe Chambers who had two sons, Willie and Teesee. Joe Chambers was likely the first store-keeper in what was then known as Coo-wee-scoo-wee District, now Rogers County. He had a store in the Dog Creek Hills long before there was any town at Claremore. He also had a little postoffice in connection with his

store. The mail for this postoffice was carried on horse-back from Chetopa, Kansas, and went on through to some Indian agency in what is now Western Oklahoma, known as the Sac and Fox Agency, which was then called the Ponias postoffice.

Other early day settlers there were Major and Jake Lipe, John G. Schrimsher, Edward Sanders, Blue Starr, Judge Watt Starr, Clem V. Rogers, for whom Rogers County was named, John Bullette and others.

FRISCO RAILROAD COMES.

The Frisco Railroad passed through what is now Claremore in 1881, and the first townsite was laid off in 1883, and town lots were put up at auction and sold to the highest bidder. It was during this year that my husband bought a lot and put in his store. He was allowed three years to pay for the lot, paying one third down and a third each year for two more years. The lot was purchased in my name and the store was also conducted in my name, as my husband and his brother were both white and were not allowed to go into business in their own names. If a white man went into business and did not

have an Indian wife, he had to conduct his business in the name of some Indian. Cattle were also grazed on Indian land in this manner. Joe Chambers and his two sons moved their store from the Dog Creek Hills to Claremore in 1882, a year before the town was platted.

ANOTHER RAILROAD COMES.

About 1889, another railroad, first known as the Kansas and Arkansas Valley Railroad and later known as the Missouri Pacific Railroad, was built through the Indian Territory, from the southeast to the northwest, striking the Territory line at Fort Gibson and leaving the territory a few miles south of Coffeyville, Kansas.

The Missouri Pacific depot at Claremore was built a half mile east of the Frisco depot and passengers were transferred from one depot to another by means of taxicabs. Sometimes when one of the trains would be late there would be an awful rush and scramble among the taxies to make both trains. Sometimes the taxicabs would all be waiting at one of the depots for a train, when the other one would whistle in and then the grand rush would set in. The cabs were all drawn by horses

and each cab would try and reach the depot first in order to get the most passengers to haul. The town first scattered from one depot to the other and it was quite a while before the town was filled up between the two depots. Joe Gibbs was one of the first hotel keepers.

CLAREMORE HAD TWO FAMOUS SONS.

Claremore had two famous sons, offsprings of the first settlers of Coo-wee-scco-wee District, both part blood Cherokee boys. The first was Senator Joe Chambers, son of Teesey Chambers and Minnie (Evans) Chambers, and a grandson of Joe Chambers, Sr., the first settler and merchant of Claremore. Young Joe was given the best of educations and finished it by completing a law course. He was elected as the first senator from Rogers County after Statehood, and was in the stormy session that moved the state capital from Guthrie to Oklahoma City. He was elected again as senator in the thirteenth and fourteenth session of the State Legislature. He branched off into the oil business and in 1920 he moved from Claremore to Tulsa where he has many oil clients. Even though his business caused him to move to Tulsa, he still looks upon

Claremore as his home county. His early day home was on the spot occupied by the Oklahoma Military Academy.

Claremore's other favorite son was Will Rogers, son of Clement Vann Rogers and Mary (Schrimsher) Rogers, both Cherokee Indians. William Penn Adair Rogers turned out to be the world's greatest humorist, but in his childhood days was a disappointment to both his father and mother. His mother, a devout Methodist, hoped that Will would develop into a Methodist minister, while his father's greatest ambition was to give his only son the best of educations and possibly develop him into a leading politician. But according to Will's own language, he didn't like to associate with politicians. He brought out this fact when he said, "I went to pretty nearly every school in the country, for a little while, except West Point. I could have gone there, too, only I was too proud to talk to a congressman."

Clement Vann Rogers, Will's father, served as an officer in Stand Watie's Regiment in the Southern Confederacy and after the War conducted a trading post among the Osage Indians. He held many offices of trust among his people.

serving as a senator in the Cherokee National Council for a number of terms, on committees to treat with the United States Commissions, on Fraud Investigating committees and at statehood was elected as a delegate to help to draft the Oklahoma State Constitution, which convention named the counties, for the new state. His home district of Coo-wee-scoo-wee was named for the senior Rogers. Will often laughed at that, and said, "Shucks, they had to change the name. Nobody could pronounce the old one." Will Rogers was born on his father's ranch, half way between Oologah and Claremore, on November 4, 1879. He claimed Claremore for his residence, for convenience sake, he said, "because no one but an Indian could pronounce Oologah." When we first went to Claremore and started in the mercantile business there was no town at Oologah, and Clem Vann Rogers did his trading at Claremore, and often traded at our store.

Will Rogers was a great favorite with practically the whole world, and especially so with those who knew the family like we did. From the time Will Rogers began to crack his jokes I was a great admirer of his, and the

10

farther he went the better I liked him. I know that his father was greatly discouraged with trying to make something out of his only son, and on several different occasions gave it up as a bad job, but I remember Mr. Rogers coming into our store in Claremore one day with a letter in his hand and he was really laughing, and his son Will had brought that laugh to his father, but more than likely he never knew it. On this occasion his father had sent Will to the Kemper School at Booneville, Missouri, thinking they could hold him down, but being a soldier was too much like riding a "stick horse", Will wrote his father, and he also wrote that he was going to quit school and go down into Texas and help some fellows dig an oil well.

That was the last straw for the elder Rogers, and he decided just to let the boy run wild. But digging an oil well wasn't as easy as riding a horse, and Will began to bombard his home with letters telling of the privations of the oil fields and his homesickness for the ranch. Will's father showed my husband the letter and told him that he believed he had his son "broke" from running around at last

11

and he was going to let him stay just a little longer, then send him money to come home on, and he believed he would stay at home.

NOTIFIED HIS SCHOOL DAYS OVER.

Just in a week or two after that the elder Rogers sent his son money to come home on and wrote him that there was a good job awaiting him, so Will lost no time in covering the distance from Texas to the Indian Territory. When he got here Mr. Rogers told "Willie," as he called him, that his school days were over and that he, Mr. Rogers, was going to turn the responsibility of running the ranch over to him.

BOUGHT WILL A WHOLE HERD OF CATTLE.

Clem Vann Rogers, then well established in the cattle business at his ranch near Oologah, bought his son a whole herd of cattle, and made him foreman of the ranch over his vast herd as well. Will went along fine for a year or two, when his own herd had grown and fattened until they were ready for market, then the rumbling spirit seized him again, and, without notice to his father, he loaded his entire herd

of cattle on board a fast freight, and billed them to New York City. He sold them there for \$12,000.00 and was ready for another ramble. In the meantime, he had taken Richard Paris, an old Fort Gibson schoolmate whose acquaintance he had made at the Male Seminary, to New York with him and when the cattle were sold they decided to go to Argentine, in South America, where they were told the largest cow country in the world was located. They were told they would have to go to England to get a boat for Buenos Aires, which route they traveled, but when they got there they were amazed to learn that the average wage for a cowhand was equivalent to \$4.20 a month in their money. This was not what they expected to find, but they had spent so much of Will's money that they decided to stay until they earned money enough to pay their way out.

Richard Paris, Will's "buddy," got so homesick that he said he did not believe he could stay any longer. They put their earnings together and only had fare for one of them to go home, and they decided to flip a coin to see which one of them would go. Will's companion won, went home and Will Rogers stayed on his job a while longer, but

decided he would never earn enough money at \$4.20 per month to get out of that country, so he got a job on a cattle boat and worked his way to Capetown, a "broke" but wiser boy. Practically every reader of Will Rogers' stories knows his travels from the time he left South Africa a broke young Indian boy. I have just told this much of his life as a contrast to any other boy his age. How many could start in South Africa, "flat broke" and work their way into the class of millionaires? I have often wondered why in some of his big ventures, like the moving pictures, his lectures, the stage, or his news-writings, he did not make a failure, but in not one of them did he make a blunder, all were successful and everyone was a money maker. What a pity that his poor old father and mother, who were so anxious to make a great man of him, could not have lived to see his success! No wonder the world mourned when Will Rogers was crashed to death in an airplane.

WE LEAVE CLAREMORE.

After we had continued in business for about ten years in Claremore, we sold out and returned to a farm on

the head waters of Cabin Creek, where our people first landed, after leaving Kansas. There we raised our seven children; Bertha, Walter, Mary Alice, James Arthur, Joel Mayes, Beulah May and Alex. When we got back to North Craig County in the early 90's we found that a good school had been established there for the Indian children, and that the school had been named "Rogers" in honor of Louis Rogers, one of the early day Cherokees, who had moved down out of Kansas.

Other settlers had moved in, and many of the older girls and boys had married and established new homes. P. B. Kinnison had moved in the neighborhood and established a store and postoffice, which he called "Kinnison." A rural route had been established out of Chetopa, which made a circuit of about twenty-five miles daily and was carried by horse and buggy. The roads were bad but as there were no section lines a buggy and team could just go around the bad places. Nothing but high water kept the mail from running. There were no bridges, and when the creeks were up there was no mail. The mail only came twice a week at first, but after a few years it was changed to a daily mail route. Several of the Delaware Indian families

settled in our communities when the Delawares and
Shawnees moved down from Kansas.