

WEBBER, WILLIAM STUART.    INTERVIEW    13742.

116

WEBBER, WILLIAM STUART.

INTERVIEW.

13742.

James Russell Gray,  
Investigator.  
April 22, 1938.

Interview with William Stuart Webber,  
Hartshorne, Oklahoma.

I was born in Mississippi, near Liberty, the county seat of Amite County, September 8, 1870. My father, Henry Webber, was from Virginia; he died when I was very young, so I can't tell much about him, when he was born or where. He was a slave until freed after the Civil War.

My grandfather, so I have been told, came directly from Africa. He was lured into a sailing ship by false promises, then the unscrupulous slave traders smuggled him into the United States and sold him to some planter. My mother was born on the Island of Madagascar, just off the east coast of Africa. She was on her way to school one day when she was twelve, and slave traders seized her; she was sold somewhere on the coast of Maryland. She is dead now; she and Father both are buried in Mississippi. I'm not certain just where their graves are, but they lie somewhere outside the city of Sedalia.

I moved to Illinois with kin and I got my education there; Danville, you might say, was my home town. I want

WEBBER, WILLIAM STUART.

INTERVIEW.

13742.

- 2 -

through high school; then I attended the American Law School at Chicago for four years. When I got out of school I went into the mines; digging coal paid well then.

From Danville I went to Thurber, Texas, then to Colorado and back to Texas and finally, July 17, 1891, to Hartshorne. Like so many other people I worked at Mine Number Two, in what is now Section 19, Township 5N, Range 17E, about two miles north of Hartshorne. I worked there only a month, though, and then moved into town and went to work at Mine Number One again.

The first house I lived in at Hartshorne was a "company" house; number thirty-six in block 131 which was a three-room house built for the miners by the Choctaw, Oklahoma & Gulf Railroad Company, which company had control of the coal mines at Hartshorne. We had more conveniences, living as we did in a boom mining town, than lots of the people of that day and times, who lived in the more isolated farming communities of the Choctaw Nation. I have been told that many people then cooked their food in fireplaces, drank creek water, had to cut their fuel from the nearby forests, and in general lived under primitive conditions for

WEBBER, WILLIAM STUART.

INTERVIEW.

13742.

- 3 -

the Indian Territory was new country, thinly settled and pretty undeveloped.

We had cookstoves in our first home in the Territory and we had good furniture, plenty of beef and pork and other foods to eat and coal to burn for fuel. Times were good and everyone had a job and some money.

I was a digger and I got 62¢ a ton for mine-run coal, 75¢ for screened, or \$3.50 a yard if we wanted it that way. We also got \$1.50 for setting double timbers, either in our rooms or in the entries.

We set our own shots, at first. There were different kinds of powders for blasting; Single C and Double C, and Single F and Double F. This was all black powder, the only differences were in fineness or coarseness of grain; Single F was coarse, Double F was finer, for instance. We didn't have fuses at first either, we used a home-made contraption called a "squib." We would put in our powder for a shot, then we made a hole through the dirt to the powder with a long needle; next came the squib, then we'd light the shot and run.

WEBBER, WILLIAM STUART.

INTERVIEW. 13742.

- 4 -

I didn't know so very many Indians. I didn't get around much out in the country. I knew an Indian judge named John Perry; he was a county judge; I think, here in Gaines County. I also knew a man named Joe Hoklotubbe; he was the Choctaw who was killed about 1893 or '94 over some sort of political quarrel that the Choctaws had among themselves. A man named Silas Lewis was executed by the Choctaws for the killing. Hoklotubbe was a low heavy-set fellow; he was dark with black hair and he had a gruff appearance, though he was really a good fellow and friendly when you came to know him.

I was here when the Government built Jones Academy for the Choctaws, too. I'm not sure what year it was built but it was shortly after I came, I'd guess about 1894. At first there was only one building, though now it is a regular community by itself. It was for Indian boys and I think that the first superintendent was a man named Sam Morley.

There weren't any schools at Hartshorne for colored children, at first, then Edwin Ludlow, who was superintendent of the C. O. & G. Mines, had buildings erected for schools. A building was erected near where the Hartshorne High School

WEBBER, WILLIAM STUART.

INTERVIEW.

13742.

- 5 -

is now for the whites to have church and school and miners had a small amount taken from their pay checks every month to pay for running the schools. Colored children went to school in the church building that stood right where our brick church is now on South Seventh Street. Our teacher was Mrs. M. A. Dukes. I think she was from Texas.

Then the coal company built a place for us to have school, east of the church building, on lot 1, block 143; that was about 1894. The coal company took out part of the wages of the colored miners to keep the school going. If I remember right, single men were taxed 25¢ and married men 50¢.

Our present four-room brick school was built after statehood, in 1909. I remember about buying the land there on the hill on South Fifth Street for the school, though I'm not certain just when it was. It must have been in 1908; that was the year of the resale of lands here; the first sale was in 1904. The First State Legislature made us our own trustees, gave the colored people control of their own school and Louis Christian was our first superintendent.

In 1902 I quit mining and began publishing a newspaper which was called "The Voice of the People." I bought it from

WEBBER, WILLIAM STUART.

INTERVIEW.

13742.

- 6 -

a man named H. A. Guest who wanted to go to Washington and complete his law education. The office of the paper was on East Choctaw Avenue, at McAlester. It was a weekly, an eight-page spread and had a circulation of about five thousand. I owned and edited that paper for three years. I had a hard time with it, as I hadn't had any previous experience in the printing business and I didn't make as much money out of the venture as I expected for I had to hire so much of the work done. We didn't know what a linotype machine was then; we set type by hand and it was a slow business. We had an "Ideal" press; sometimes it got out of order and we would have to take our stuff and have it printed on the old "News" company's press. While I was operating the office of the "People" the "News" bought out the "Choctaw Capital" and the two were consolidated under the title, "The News-Capital."

I remember one of the news items I printed. There had been an Indian election and the outcome was a doubt, or at least one side claimed that the other had won unfairly. That must have been about 1903, anyway there was trouble and fighting among the Indians about it. The Government at

WEBBER, WILLIAM STUART.

INTERVIEW.

13742.

- 7 -

Washington wanted to step in long enough to preserve peace but there seemed to be a question as to whether the United States marshals or the soldiers should be in charge, so Marshal Hackett went with his deputies and so did the soldiers.

In 1904 I sold out the paper to Ed McDaniels, a colored contractor. He and his partner, Tom Curry, furnished materials to construct the Rock Island Railroad eastward from Wister to Memphis and westward from McAlester to Oklahoma City.

I came to Haileyville that year and put in a restaurant and boarding house which was just across the tracks from the coal chute at the extreme eastern end of Main Street. I called it "The Twin City Restaurant." It had nine rooms and most of my customers were railroad men; I ran the place three years. I charged 25¢ for a single meal, \$1.00 for breakfast and supper and room and \$4.00 a week for room and board. Some of the workers who were employed in the roundhouse stayed with me all the time.

At the time that I ran this restaurant I also was developing and operating a coal mine; it was in the same section of land as old Number Two Mine, north and east of



WEBBER, WILLIAM STUART.

INTERVIEW.

13742.

- 8 -

the old shaft. All the land in this section was allotable and the coal rights went with the ownership of the land. At first I leased the coal from Mrs. W. C. Powell, but later on I bought the land myself; I own some land out there now.

The mine was a slope. It was rather small, as compared with the company mines of the time; it didn't have any lifts, or entries, and the rooms were turned directly off the slope. There were eight or ten rooms and my payroll nearly always carried a dozen names. I remember some of my workers; Pa Dorsey, Alec Hammock, Alex Hopper, George Glasson, Ed Shockley, Bill Cagle, George Chambers, J. S. King, C. C. Stevenson, B. F. Stevenson, Phillip Wood, Green Mathis.

Sometimes we would break into the workings of the old mine Number Two, and the water would drain out of the new mine into the old one. The coal was good domestic stuff, about four feet high in the vein.

The vein of coal sloped south and east. We used horses to hoist the coal out of the mine; there wasn't any railroad spur out to my mine and we had to haul the coal into town in wagons. A lot of men used to haul coal for me at one time or another; Joe Hefley, Tom Vaughn, G. W. Craut, Alec Ervin, Varge Logan, Will Grady, and Tom Raburn.

WEBBER, WILLIAM STUART.

INTERVIEW.

13742.

- 9 -

Will Grady often bought coal from me, too. He had, at one time, a lumber yard and coal yard. C. S. Wingate also bought coal from me; he was my sales agent.

If I have a hobby at all, I guess you could say it was joining lodges and societies. At one time and another I have belonged to almost everything. I belonged to the Odd Fellows, Seven Stars of Consolidation, U. B. F., Knights of Honor, Knights Templar, Scottish Rite Masons, Mystic Shrine, Crusaders and the Masonic Lodge. I was Deputy Grand Master of the Masons for twenty years and Grand Master for four. While I was Grand Master we built the Masonic Temple at Boley. That cost about \$75,000.00, and it was completed in 1924. We had a membership of 7,500 then, and \$75,000.00 in the treasury and our debts were zero.

I was Inspector General of the Scottish Rite for twenty years. R. L. Pendleton was the Sovereign Grand Commander.