Form A-(S-149)

BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

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GOWER, GOMER. SHAWNEE INDIAN VILLAGE. 7947.

Field Worker's name Gomer Gower.

This report made on (date) October 21, 1937

1. Name Gomer Gower.

2. Post Office Address Poteau, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location)

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month Day Year

5. Place of birth

6. Name of Father Place of birth

7. Name of Mother Place of birth

Other information about mother

Notes or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and story of the person interviewed. Refer to Manual for suggested subjects and questions. Continue on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 7.

Gower, Gomer.
Investigator,
October 21,1937.

Shawnee Indian Village
in Choctaw Nation.
1834.

We are informed that upon the arrival of the Choctaw Indians in the new Indian Territory, in 1832-1833-1834, they found a village composed of Shawnee Indians numbering several hundred, occupying land in what is now LeFlore County, which had been ceded to the Choctaws by the terms of Dancing Rabbit Creek Treaty of 1830.

Upon the discovery of the village, the Choctaws reported it to the Indian Agents at Skullyville, with the request that the intruders-the Shawnees-be removed. The then Indian Agent, Major William Armstrong, took immediate steps to effect the removal of the Shawnees from the new Choctaw Nation, to the State, or then Territory, of Kansas, where the major part of the Shawnees had been placed on a reservation. This removal of the Shawnees, a peace loving tribe, was accomplished without serious resistance on their part, and the vast hunting ground which they had formerly occupied was left for the exclusive use of the Choctaws.

The village was located on Black Fork River, near its confluence with Shawnee Creek, on a rise which now resembles a long wide sandbar which abuts a narrow strip of lowland lying between

it and the Black Fork, on its east side, while behind it, on the west side appears a densely wooded ridge or low arm of Rich Mountain. Extending almost to the east bank of Black Fork appears another arm of Rich Mountain which has extremely precipitous sides next the river. These arms extend in a southerly direction and form what may be termed a box canyon, as their northern ends are not more than one-half mile apart and the space between gradually increases to the south.

The sand-bar , to which reference had been made, is approximately one-half mile in length and about one-quarter mile in width, and has an elevation of about twenty feet above the adjoining lowland next the river, and an elevation of about ten feet above a depression which appears between it and the ridge on its west side. The slope from its north-south center line to the east and west provides ample drainage. The area of this ideal Indian village location is about eighty acres. To add to the attraction of the already suitable location for the village, two never-failing springs of pure water are found near the base of the rise which constituted its site.

What is now the east side of LeFlore County has, apparently, been a favorite hunting ground for adventurous for many,

many centuries. Implements of the chase-stone skinning knives, arrowheads of all forms, and stone battle-axes are still being found along the entire distance from the mouth of the Poteau River to the Kiamichi. There are two unexplored Indian mounds about one-half mile north of Shawnee village site, which, if excavated under the proper direction, may show that this area served as a home for Indians long before the brave Columbus ever dreamed of a short route to India.

Seclusion and safety for the women and children were no doubt the object sought by those Shawnees of old when they left the wide prairies upon which the buffaloes roamed in Kansas in search of a hunting ground which had some similarity to the former ranges of their forefathers north of the Ohio River. This they found in the foothills of Rich Mountain far inland from the prairies where their movements could not be detected by hostile bands on murder and pilfer bent. Here, they felt, they could leave their families in a well cloistered shelter, while they went across Kiamichi Mountain in quest of the buffaloes which sometimes ranged on the lower reaches of the Kiamichi River. Failing to find buffalo here they would

wander farther westward to the more open prairie country where they were assured of a bounteous kill. Game of all kind except the buffalo, was plentiful in the vicinity of the village and the clear mountain streams provided fish in abundance, and the lowlands lying adjacent to the village were tilled for the production of corn, beans, peas and other necessities.

It must be borne in mind that these wanderers from the main tribe of the Shawnees, unlike the Choctaws who succeeded them as occupants of this area, and for whom assistance was provided in the form of food, implements and houses, were entirely on their own and were forced to win their livelihood from the prairies, forests and streams without the aid of guns, axes, shovels, knives or fishhooks, other than those improvised by themselves. Clothing, too, must have been of the most primitive type, all made of buckskin and the pelts of the furry tribe. Buffalo hides were used in the construction of the tepees and when placed upon a good thick bed of pine needles, which abounded in the region, made a reasonably good bed.

The primitive Indians were all communal by habit and of

necessity. The protection of their villages from attack by hostile forces; the protection from invading bands on their hunting grounds and their entire well-being depended upon the collective ability of the tribe to ward off opposing forces. An individual living apart from his fellows would be forever subjected to attacks which, in the face of superior numbers, he would be unable to repel, consequently, the various tribes acted in unity both for the sustenance and security of its members.

Thus, one can visualize why this small group of Shawnees, far away from their beloved Ohio and Wabash, the home of their ancestors for generations, were led to seek an environment which the Kansas prairies did not afford, due to a lack of wooded hills and vales, and collectively made their way to a region in which they felt they would be reasonably secure from attack by the savages of the western prairies.

One may visualize, too, the village life of this group, all living closely together; the children playing; the larger boys busily making bows and arrows and wandering, not too far off, in quest of birds, rabbits and squirrels and, quite often, coming across a young fawn, so innocently unafraid that

it welcomed rather than feared being caught and petted, the girls, seated in the shade, one plaiting the hair of another and adorning it with a brightly colored feather or wreath of flowers; the older women, some busy in the Tom Fuller patch; others busily engaged in dressing the deer, buffalo, and other skins, and the old men and women wrapped in skins comfortably seated in a convenient shelter, dreaming of days gone by, and anxiously awaiting the return of their sons from the hunt with a plentiful supply of meat for all the village. As all had shared in the hunt, so all shared in the proceeds of the hunt.

Obviously, there are none living at this time who personally know of this location , but there are quite a number of the descendants of the Emmigrant Choctaws who were told by their parents that the Shawnee village was on the site described herein. Obviously, too, there remain no physical evidences of its location at this point. Yet the statements of the children of the Immigrant Choctaws are borne out by the appearance of the two springs and by the finding of many relics, such as arrowheads, of various sizes and shapes, skinning knives, and a form of

tomahawk.

Its location is three-quarters of a mile south-east of State Fish Hatchery number four on highway twenty-three and about three miles north of Zoe on the Kansas City Southern Railway.