

7-470

June 5, 1969

Index side A, recording time 22 min.; second part. Interview time 1 hour.

Informant: Swimmer Henry, 78-year-old Cherokee,
Little Rock Community, Mayes County, Oklahoma.

Subject: Swimmer is the son of Tom Henry and Betsy Corntassel, and was born in this community when it was known as Saugee Prairie. He has spent all of his life here and is one of the few Cherokees still living on his original Indian allotment land. His father was a native of Saugee Prairie, and his mother came from the John Corntassel family that lived in the Pawpaw Creek country west of Vinita.

Thru the influence of his mother, Swimmer attended a school near Vinita which was the old Estella School. This was his mother's community and many Indians lived in the area then. In later years he attended Wyandotte Indian School but quit because he felt he was getting too old to go to school.

He recalls that back in 1909 all the people of his area, which included the present Snake Creek, Iron Post, Rowe Prairie, and Wickliff Prairie, were Indians, except for a few intermarried and storekeepers. In that day the only whiteman he recalls was a man who run a store at Rose, and a doctor there by name of Shotts.

He says in early days Saugee Prairie was named for Saugee Sanders, who was a leader among the Cherokees of his community, and was president (representative) to the Cherokee Court from that district. John Blossom and Old Man Wagon were also leaders among this settlement of Indians. He speaks about them with a note of pride for having lived in their day, and tells that they are both buried in the nearby Little Rock Indian Cemetery.

Swimmer talks of the old days when Red Cloud Duncan lived in this area. Duncan home was just east of the Henry place, and Swimmer knew him well. Prominent also in those early days was Jim Buckskin and Joe Downing who worked to better conditions for their fellow Indians.

Important to the Cherokees still are the Snake Creek and Little Rock Churches which have existed since before statehood and have been the center of activity for these adjoining communities.

He reflects on the changes that have come to his country. He remembers when there was lots of open prairie on the high flats. But now it is so different. All the country is fenced up and most of it is owned by whitemen. Much of the country he knew has been allowed to grow up in timber and brush. He remembers when there was lots of farming by the Indians, but with the coming of the whiteman all this has come to an end. Where there was once many nappy Indian families there is now many whitemen who do not seem happy because they cannot get enough of the land.