

7-470

June 9, 1969

Index side B, recording time 25 min.; interview time 1½ hours.

Informant: Mary Downing Gourd, 81-year-old Cherokee,  
Moody's Community, Cherokee County, Oklahoma

Subject: Mary is the daughter of John Hicks and Maggie Downing. She was born in the Cherokee Nation and has spent all of her life here.

Her grandfather was Johnson Downing, who, with his brothers Thompson and Dave Downing were among the early settlers of Peggs Prairie country. She mentions that Spoon Ross, Joel Bryant and Henry Ross were others of the early Cherokee pioneers in that area. Johnson Downing came from North Carolina with the many other Cherokees in that infamous move known as the Trail of Tears. She has heard her grandfather tell that he walked all the way to the Indian Territory when he and his folks were driven from the east. Her aunts, Mollie Terrapin and Rachel Coming Deer were actively concerned with the welfare and education of their people and were a great influence on Mrs. Gourd's early life.

Mrs. Gourd came to this western edge of the Moody's community when she was married in 1910. At that time the immediate neighborhood was known as the Rattlinggourd Community, having originally been settled by the family of that name. Later it was included in a larger area now known as Moody's District, having been named for an early Indian settler by name of Mu-di and Mu-di Springs where he lived.

She recalls when she went with her family to the Saline District Courthouse in 1893 to receive their Strip Payment. She recalls also going to Tanlequan when the government paid again. She says they got \$133.19. As a young girl then she was more impressed at the large gathering of people, the most she had ever seen in her life. In those payment days the old main road from the north came hardly a stone's throw from her home which went to Tanlequan.

Not far southeast of her home was the old Downing Convention Grounds. Each August the Cherokees came here to spend several days to hear speeches, preaching, singing and enjoy Indian ball games. Not the least of activities was the eating, where large kettles of food were kept cooking all during the meeting. The meetings were not without some disturbances when individuals would cross hatchets and hunting knives and settle arguments. Nearly always someone would want to liven up things and would bring a jug of moonshine. Kindled with a belly full of sour corn juice it was no effort to start a fight which usually drew several participants. But when it was all over and on their way home, most conceded that a good time was had by all.