

T-480

June 27, 1969

Index side B, recording time 25 minutes; interview time one hour.

Informant: Jess Mayes, 82-year-old Cherokee  
Proctor Community, Adair County, Oklahoma

Subject: On this hot afternoon Jess Mayes is sitting out under a shade tree at his home at the little town of Proctor. Out in a field there is a power company crew working on a high-line. He had been watching them, and then told that he remembers when the only light they had at night was a lighted rag wick sticking up out of a vessel of animal grease. A big event was when the family got their first can of coal oil (kerosene) and a real lamp. The light was so bright it was just like being out in the bright sunshine. Thru the years he has watched the fast pace of progress of the machine age. With the coming of electricity a whole new world seemed to open up.

He remembers when as a little boy they did not have matches. If their fire went out they would go to a neighbors home and bring home a bucket of coals to get started again. There have been times that he has watched his father start a fire with gunpowder and flint rocks.

By comparison, Proctor is not an old community, and he remembers when the Barran Fork valley was settled by Cherokees - no white men at all. Then a little store was put in and the settlement grew. An old Indian by name of Ezekiel Proctor lived in the community and was respected as a sage of his people, and it is believed that the place was named for him. This old Indian was a tall sturdy man, wore long braided hair and was gifted in many ways. Mr. Mayes is prompt to remind that this was not the same Zeke Proctor who lived at a later time and was well known for his ability to operate on both sides of the law, and with whom it is said, the government made a "treaty" to quiet his oftentimes belligerent life.

Proctor probably began to grow as a town about 1901 when the railroad came thru. At one time this part of the Cherokee Nation had big pine trees four and more feet thick. This virgin pine and hardwood forest was too much for the white men and they just could not let it be. In much less than a decade all of this fine timberland forest was cut and hauled away. No effort or plans were made to reseed or restore and today only scrub oak and brush cover the hillsides. Thanks to mans greed and ignorance generations yet to come will never see a four-foot pine growing in Proctor country.

For what it was worth to the Indians, Proctor did become a town. Sawmills dotted the scene around the whole area. Steam engines puffed away from dawn until dark. Freight trains chugged up and down the valley hauling out the fine quality lumber. John McClellan put in a big mercantile store, then other stores came in. Three blacksmith shops were in operation at one time. He remembers seeing some of the little hollows that had only big pine trees and hazelnut bushes. Now even the hazelnut bushes are gone.