

June 24, 1969

Index side A, recording time 13 min.

Index side B, recording time 20 min.; interview time two hours.

Informant: Charles C. Ross, 80-year-old Cherokee,
Simms Community, Muskogee County, Oklahoma

Subject: In the southeastern part of the Canadian District of the old Cherokee Nation one of the Ross families settled at the beginning of the the Cherokees arrival from Georgia. Charles Ross, best known to all as "Cotton" Ross, has spent most of his life on the land settled and cleared by his forefathers.

The Simms Community is probably named for Joshua Simms, an early settler who operated a little country store long ago. Mr. Ross remembers the store when he was a small boy and used to go there with his father. He remembers the unusual floor in the store, in that the boards were all placed edgeways which made a wood floor some four to six inches thick. Apparently old man Simms planned to stay there a long time, and at least wanted a strong floor. But the store burned down.

It was in this country that the Starrs, Youngers, and others who lived and practiced the fine art of bank robbing, train holdups, and the like. His father knew most of them and while not approving of their work, got along with them. Belle Starr was of the outlaw faction, but was not related to the pioneer Starr family of the District. Cotton was well acquainted with Pearl Starr the daughter of Belle. Pearl's father was Cole Younger, but Belle always used her maiden name and so named her children, although a son, Ed, took the name of Reed. So it was when Belle married Jim July, a full-blood Cherokee, and made Jim change his name to Starr. George Brown, a Cherokee, was U. S. Marshall who lived at Webber Falls and he experienced several encounters with the outlaw gangs that lived in the Younger Bend country. Mr. Brown was the father of Jack Brown of Tanlequan.

The old Indian Territory District Courthouse for the Canadian District of the Cherokee Nation was located about two miles south of Webber Falls. This place of law served one of the wildest and unsettled areas of the early days. Although the convicted were punished at the whipping tree there, the hanging sentence for murder was held at the Nation's Capitol at Tanlequan.

Following Ft. Gibson; Cotton says that Webber Falls is probably the next oldest town in Oklahoma. Situated on the bank of the Arkansas River Webber Falls saw the early emigrants come in wagons or by boat. It also saw the early day river boats that went up the river as far as Ft. Gibson. Many of the early day settlers driven from their Indian lands in the east came thru Webber Falls to eventually find home in one of the four directions from the river port.