

August 6, 1969

T-511

Index side A, Recording time 10 min.; interview time two hours.  
Index side B, recording time 23 min.

Informant: Mary Ballentine, 83-year-old Cherokee,  
Vinita, Oklahoma

Subject: Miss Ballentine is a life-long resident of Craig County. She has been a school teacher, and spent many years working with the Craig County government. She is the daughter of Houston B. Balentine, an early settler and later a merchant in Vinita. Her grandfather is the Rev. Hamilton Balentine. Rev. Balentine is best remembered as having served as Superintendent at the Cherokee Female Seminary, but to many others his missionary work among the Indians was more important. A few miles north of Vinita, the Pheasant Hill Church was established in a log building in 1869 and Rev. Balentine was the first minister to preach there. Here was a man who done much to help the Indians progress to something better; a white marble marker in the Foster Cemetery in Cherokee County reads "Rev. Hamilton Balentine Missionary 28 years among the Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws and Cherokees. Born in Pennsylvania 1817. Died near Tahlequah Feby. 21, 1876."

The Pheasant Hill Church also had a Mission School for the Cherokee children of those frontier days. It was here in the 1860s that Rev. Ard Hoyt and Rev. William Chamberlain had spent some time, although their work was throughout the old Cherokee Nation. The establishment of the Mission was thru the efforts of William Chamberlain's son, Amory Nelson Chamberlain and his wife, Eunice Hoyt, with Rev. Hamilton Balentine and his wife, Anna Hoyt. Mrs. Chamberlain and Mrs. Balentine were granddaughters of Rev. Ard Hoyt. In the area at that time there were not many families and all of them were part or full-blood Cherokees. That was in the 1860s, and the town of Vinita (or Downingville, as it was originally known) did not exist. Neither was there a railroad at that time, and their nearest trading center was in Kansas, Missouri, or at Ft. Gibson. The early day Pheasant Hill Church many years later became the first Presbyterian church in Vinita and this year the church will observe their 100th anniversary.

Miss Balentine brought out a copy of a photostated manuscript "Historical Sketches of the Cherokees". This historical 70-page document was written by her great grandmother, Lucy Lowrey (Hoyt) Keys, under her Cherokee name, Nah-ne-nau-hi, and she was a full-blood. The original of this manuscript is in the Smithsonian Institute, numbered BAE MS 2191. Just one of the many interesting passages in her writings is reference to a time in Georgia when Sequoyah was at her parents home getting ready to return to Arkansas Territory, and which was the last time he was ever seen by his people in Georgia.