

T-518

September 5, 1969

Index side B, recording time 30 min.; interview time two hours.

Informant: Jenks Ross, ~~87 years old~~, son of a Cherokee Freedman,  
Nowata, Nowata County, Oklahoma

Subject: Life and experiences in the old Cherokee Nation.

In the early days of the Cherokee Nation around Tanlequan, a most colorful figure was Stick Ross. Stick Ross was once a negro slave of Chief John Ross, and as was the custom, took his own family name from his one-time master. It has often been said by old timers that there was a time when there were color barriers in the Cherokee Nation. Stick Ross had a home just west of the old Cherokee Male Seminary a mile or so, up on a mountain, and since a very early day the place has been known as Stick Ross Mountain. Stick Ross was a colorful figure in the Indian Territory days around Tahlequah, well known and respected, and at one time ran for a political office in the Cherokee Nation.

Of the several children of Stick Ross, there is only one now living. He is Jenks Ross, now in the autumn of his life, and a very friendly and pleasant person. Jenks was born on Stick Ross Mountain and grew up with full blood Cherokee children. He spoke the Cherokee language before he spoke English. He has seen much of the Cherokee Nation and the many changes that have come to that area that became a part of Oklahoma. Among his many experiences much has been enjoyable, yet there have been some unhappy times. Some things relating to Indian Territory history are related by him.

In his later years Jenks came to live in the Big Creek area of Northern Nowata County in a Negro settlement. Here he met and married Alice Reed. Alice is now 90 years old, still in good health. She also adds many things to this interview.

Some time around the turn of the century Jenks was sent to the Cherokee Colored Seminary which was located about seven miles northeast of Tanlequan on Double Springs Creek. He tells that the Seminary was a big three-story brick building with beautifully well-kept grounds. Sometimes there would be as many as seventy-five children attending school here. He recalls that it was always a big event on the beginning of a new school year when parents would bring their children to stay at the school. Travel then was by wagon or buggy and there would be many of these vehicles parked around the school for two or three days. He tells that some of the teachers there were Bud Brown, Mrs. Lucy Lowrey, and Mervin Johnson. He has always been grateful for the opportunity of attending this school as it was the only education he got. The course of study there was as prescribed by the Cherokee Nation and included all of the elementary and essential studies. When the parents left after bringing the children to school, there was always many tears shed as the oxen- or horse-drawn wagons disappeared over the hills, as it would be months before they would see their folks again. Discipline was always strict at the school, but the children enjoyed the school. He tells when someone got unruly, they would be taken out and tied to a tree until they cooled off.

Mrs. Ross was born in Arkansas near Ft. Smith, and came to the Big Creek country when she was 18 years old. She has seen many things come to this country. The greatest change, she says, has been in the attitudes of people. Her first husband died when fairly young and left her with nine children to raise. She did raise them all to be good people and she is proud of them. Seven of them are still living.