

T-535

September 16, 1969.

Index side A, recording time 35 min.; interview time one hour.

Informant: Tom Whistler, 85-year-old Ottawa Indian,
Quapaw, Ottawa County, Oklahoma

Subject: Some of his personal history and some history of the Ottawa Indians.

The years have taken much of Tom Whistler's physical being, but his mind is still clear and he enjoys telling of the old days. Tom is blind now and lives with his relatives. As we sit out under a cottonwood tree this not afternoon he talks freely about many things.

Members of the Ottawa Tribe are scattered throughout the United States, but at one time in the Government's great plans to help the Indians, a majority of the Ottawas were gathered up and moved to Kansas. The Government hardly gave them time to erect their teepees until they again moved them to northeastern Indian Territory on a tract of 10,000 acres as their reservation. Progress and development have, for the most part, wiped out the reservation and the Ottawa families. A few are widely scattered. Tom is a decendent of Chief Pontiac. He tells that when one band of 600 Ottawas were moved from Ohio to Kansas one half of them died on the trail. He relates that the Ottawas were originally Canadian Indians and a part of the Algonquin confederacy. Many of the Ottawas migrated to Michigan and then to Ohio where they were to see their lands and homes become forever lost in the wake of the white plague that swept across the early frontiers and on to the Pacific coast.

To-day all that remains of the Ottawa Nation is the little Ottawa Indian Church and the Ottawa Indian Cemetery. As one walks among the monuments dating from the 1800s each one resting there harbors a story no other peoples or generations will ever witness or endure. For the few remaining Indians of this tribe they meet often near their old church and conduct tribal affairs with Clarence King as their Chief.

No other peoples in the history of North America have been moved around from place to place and still be able to adapt themselves to new and strange lands as have the Indians. Just one hundred years ago in the northeast corner of Oklahoma were brought the Ottawas, Peorias, Wyandottes, Serecas, Quapaws, Pias, Miamis, and Piankasnaws. Each of these tribes were put on little reservations adjoining each other and they quickly adapted themselves and lived in peace and harmony, but their new lands and way of life was eventually wiped out in the name of progress.

To the list of these little tribes of Indians must be added the Modoc, but it is told that none of them remain here now, and their's is a separate story. Back in the 1850s many an Indian sat astride his horse on a hill in the western country and watched the ever increasing surge of whitemen invading lands that the Indians had lived on beyond records of time. The words in the dust clouds of the wagon trains were saying, "Indians, we want this land and have come to take it!" The Indians believed that this was his land and he felt it was his duty to defend it. If there ever was such a condition as "Might is Right", then it is told many times as history and progress was made from the beginning of the United States. In trying to protect their lands and drive out the invaders the Modocs killed 65 people in a wagon train in the Tule Lake country of the west.