

T-540

October 24, 1969.

Index side B, recording time 15 min.; interview time one hour.

Informant: Ralph Chamberlain, 87-year-old Cherokee,  
Pheasant Hill Community, Craig Co., Okla.

Subject: Some Craig County History.

On this day Mr. Chamberlain is a patient in a nursing home in Vinita, and his age and condition will probably keep him there for some time. His entire life has been spent in the Pheasant Hill country of Craig County, and he enjoys talking about his life there. Although his voice nearly fails him at times due to some affliction, he continues, and tells of some of the history of this old community.

Pheasant Hill first started as a mission to the Indian children and was operated by the Presbyterian Church, in the late 1860s. The rev. Amory Chamberlain and his Cherokee wife were sent by their church to establish and build a mission and school, and it is believed the mission officially opened in 1868. For a while the well known rev. Hamilton Balentine assisted in the operation of the mission. For nearly 100 years a school had continued at Pheasant Hill, starting as a log structure, then frame buildings, and finally a brick building. Pheasant Hill School was closed in 1967. Yet the origin of the First Presbyterian Church in Vinita started at Pheasant Hill Mission and sometime in the late 1800s the membership and charter was moved to Vinita, and is the oldest church organization in Craig County. After the mission ceased to operate, the mission bell was removed to Dwight Mission in Sequoyah County. The original Chamberlains remained here and raised a large family. Ralph is the last of his generation to tell of this historic place and its peoples.

In the days before statehood there were for a while only two white families living among the many Indian families in that large community. Ralph recalls that some of the Indian families were Dupree, Jenkins, Arms, Marks, Frost, Bluejacket, Meek, Keys, Schrimpsheer, Harlin, Woolman, and Chamberlains.

Existing only in the days before statehood was Woodley, Ind. Terr. For many years this post office served a large community in and around Pheasant Hill. The post office was in a country store run by Bill O'Neal and he was also the postmaster for many years. It is related that the community name came from early settlers who had so named it because of the flocks of prairie chickens that stayed on this particular grassland hill. The early settlers called the wild chickens 'pheasants'. It seems that that game bird has enjoyed several names other than his own, which is Pinnated Grouse.

Through this area ran Big Cabin Creek which headed up north at the Kansas line. Along the east side of the creek was the range of wooded hills that were an extension of the White Oak Hills which ran on into the northern border state. On either side of the creek was the good prairie grasslands and rich black loam for cultivation farming. Farming and stock raising was the industry which began when the Cherokees were removed to Indian Territory from Georgia.