

T-544

November 17, 1969

Index side A, second part, recording time 15 min.; interview time 1 hr.

Informant: Bessie Skinner Nelson, 70-year-old Cherokee,  
Lick Bend Community, Mayes County, Okla.

Subject: Lick Bend country.

Across the county road from the well-known Union Mission site is the farm home of Mrs. Nelson. She has lived on this farm for the past thirty years or more, and was born and raised in this same community. She talks of some of the history of this area along Grand River.

In the early beginning of the Indian Territory a couple miles north of her home was the location of one of the largest natural salt wells in this part of the country. It has been related that fine quality salt was hauled by wagon from the salt works there to Ft. Gibson for shipment by river boats to distant places. So strong was the saline content of the well that it is said that eight gallons of the salt water would produce one gallon of dry salt. It is believed that near this Salt Springs was the location of the first Hopewell Mission built to benefit Osage children. The mission at this location was short lived due to fighting between the Cherokees and the Osages. Another mission, known as the New Hopewell Mission, was built soon after closing the one at Salt Springs, and was located at the confluence of Big Cabin Creek and Grand River. Operation of the newly located mission was also short lived.

Mrs. Nelson remembers well the Salt Springs long after salt making was discontinued. She tells that her mother used to bathe the children in the salt water as a sure cure for sores caused by chiggers, mosquitos, and other insects. The waters of Ft. Gibson Lake now cover this historic site. Mrs. Nelson says that one can still see the bubbles come up from this old spring and smell the salt-like gas it discharges.

Her interest in historical places places Old Union Mission among the first. Just across the county road from her farm home is the little mission cemetery owned and maintained by the Oklahoma Historical Society, as well as a large monument across the road commemorating the establishment of the first printing shop in what was to become Indian Territory - The Union Mission Press. The Mission was established in 1821 with the Rev. Epaphrus Chapman as head of the institution. The Rev. Chapman died in 1825, but the mission continued to function for many years.

According to Mrs. Nelson the mission had at least eight or nine buildings at one time. The first buildings were of stone, and one of the later building, which was used as a school building was constructed of bricks. She tells that the bricks were made at a clay bank near the river, and at one time she remembers seeing the site of the brick making plant. Evidence of the foundations of some of the buildings, as well as a stone wall enclosure for protecting and keeping the livestock, remained for a long time.