

T-553-2

January 28, 1970

Index side A, second part, recording time 15 min.; interview time one hour.

Informant: Julius Pennington, 79-year-old Cherokee,
Vinita, Oklahoma

Subject: Centralia country.

To drive thru the thinly settled and wide prairie country of northwest Craig County to-day, there is a feeling that one is seeing the country much like it was some 70 or more years ago. The few exceptions would be the fences, section line roads, and the close-cropped grass of years of cattle grazing. Yet in that far-removed country the town of Centralia once boasted of a population of some 2000 souls, with a town square surrounded by some 60 business houses.

Julius Pennington was born on this prairie and spent much of his young life there. Also his wife Emma Campbell Pennington came to that country when a small child. Mrs. Pennington is a descendant of the Shawnee Bluejacket family.

They tell that the first school to be built in that country was located about half a mile northwest of Centralia. The school did not have a name, and was a subscription school. This was the first school that they both attended.

The rich black soil and almost boundless grassland brought Indian settlers and white cattlemen to this virgin country. At one time there was extensive farming around Centralia. As the country became more settled Jud Campbell built the first house in the town in 1897. Soon other houses and business places sprang up, and by 1910 Centralia was a town, supplying all the services and necessities of that day.

Dr. Howard Elam came into Centralia in the summer of 1900 driving a little team of ponies and a buckboard. His sole possessions were his medicine satchel and 75¢. He boarded with the Holden family and established an office there, to stay for some 30 years until he died. Demands for medical services also brought Dr. Houston and Dr. Snodgrass, who both practiced their professions there for years.

Jud Campbell ran a livery barn in the town and hauled "drummers" (traveling salesmen) out of Coffeyville, Vinita, and Ghetopa to visit the country stores and settlements of Ruby, Childers, Hudson, Eagle, Cocklebur, Miles and other places.

Unlike other early day parts of the country, country schools were few and far between in that flatland. In that wide area the only schools that people remember were Wimer, Hollow, Nix, Clear Fork, Ben Sanders, and Plainview. All of these old schools have passed on and they will be remembered only in pictures someone might have kept.