

February 4, 1970

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

Informant: Ernest Walker, 81-year-old Cherokee,
Spavinaw, Oklahoma

Subject: Spavinaw country history.

The history of Spavinaw extends far beyond the early-day settlement of the present resort village. In olden times much reference was made to "The Spavinaw". In referring to an event, meeting, someone's home, or a related feature on "The Spavinaw" could have been anywhere from the stream's mouth on Grand River to its headwaters near the Arkansas Line on Beattie's Prairie. For example: *Major Harden writing to Col. W. P. Adair in May, 1864 about activities of the 2nd Cherokee Vol. Regiment, mentions a small battle "on the spavinaw", placing that activity near the Arkansas line. Again, in recent years one Cherokee was visiting another on the street in Vinita, and the first asked the other where he lived. He replied, "Way down Spavinaw, 1/4 mile this side, white hill on a house." A few years ago Amos Wolfe was squirrel hunting up in the woods east of Grand River Dam. In inquiring about where he lived, he simply said, "On Spavinaw Creek". It was later learned that his home was in the Cloudcreek community, yet near the Spavinaw Creek. If someone said he was going to Spavinaw Hills, without being specific, his destination could cover a big area of northeastern Oklahoma. We can see a glimpse into the size of "The Spavinaw", when viewed from the Cherokee outlook.

For seventy years Ernest Walker has lived in the village of Spavinaw, and was born and raised in the "Spavinaw Hills", near Old Eucha. Beginning long ago when the Mormans came into that country and built a grist mill on Spavinaw Creek, and probably even earlier when French explorers traveled in that area (and are credited with giving the name Spavinaw), all of this country has been the scene of one continuous change brought by whitemen. The first big change was the building of Spavinaw Dam by the City of Tulsa, wiping out much of the beautiful Spavinaw Creek valley and the old town. With that act new Spavinaw town was moved east up against the hill, and the hundreds of Indian homes and farms were destroyed by the formation of Spavinaw Lake. Sure, the Indians were paid for their lands in money, but it did not compensate for the the loss of their love for their homelands. Even after hundreds of years the whiteman still cannot comprehend that the Indian would rather retain his land than exchange it for a pitance of silver. Throughout the Indians' history this is an old story, and he has seldom had a choice, especially when dealing with the various governments.

When Spavinaw Dam was built some forty years ago, the town's cemetery was known as the West Cemetery and was located on a little flat area on the east side of the valley well above the high water line of the new lake. But to make way for whiteman's boat docks and other features of recreation and pleasure, the graveyard was moved up north near the Ribbon Church.

* See 'CHEROKEE CAVALIERS, Dale, p.162.