

T-554

February 9, 1970

Index side A, first part, recording time 23 min.; interview time two hours.

Informant: Jeff Tindall 77-year-old Cherokee, Rabbit Trap Community,
Adair County, Oklahoma

Subject: Places, events, people, and stories of Cherokees.

Jeff Tindall was born in Adair County and has spent all of his life in this area. He knows this country well, and as we travel around the hills of his home area he talks about the many places, old homes, Cherokee families, events and other things of Indian history.

Jeff received his education at the country schools in Adair County and also attended Elm Springs Mission and the Cherokee Male Seminary. He has never followed any of the professions, other than farming and raising cattle. He is retired now and spends his time among his many friends. He is still an ardent hunter and fisherman. Jeff's way of life is very close to the Indian way in outlook, philosophy and beliefs. At one time he was Chief of the Keetoowahs. Like many Indians he will not talk about the activities of this sacred work of the Cherokees.

He mentions that Sally Squirrel Adair was one of his ancestors, and she came to Indian Territory in the Indian Removal from Georgia when she was 16 years old and lived to be about 91 years. Also, another of his ancestors, he knew only by her Indian name of "So-sgi-nee", but she was affectionately called Granny Squirrel. She was 26 years old when she arrived in Indian Territory from the Trail of Tears march. She made her home up on Christie Mountain and he and his brother, Alec, once figured that she was about 110 years old when she died. Yet, he is not sure about her age when she came to this country, because he remembers as a small boy he had heard her tell "When the Stars Fell", which she saw as a little girl. It could be that she was telling of the 'Great Comet of 1811'. So-sgi-nee also told some events that happened on the Trail of Tears. She was with one of the first contingents to leave the east, and many of the leaders tried to get the government to postpone the removal until spring, but President Andrew Jackson bitterly refused, and had the tragic march started in October, 1838, with the last (the thirteenth) leaving some time in November, 1838. She told that it was a bitter cold winter. The government drew no line of sympathy or compassion between the old and young, or the sick and strong. She told that many died on the Trail, and at first they were permitted to bury their dead, but later the soldiers made them continue marching, leaving their dead beside the Trail. Towards the end of the march, most of the Indians were exhausted and weak. Their main item of food was beans and salt pork. He remembers well being one of little children sitting in front of Granny Squirrel's fireplace picking seeds out of cotton, and listening to her tell of her home in Georgia and the Trail of Tears. He says there is a deep hurt and bitterness about that event in the Indians history that has been in his heart as long as he can remember. Jeff tells that when the Cherokees were delivered to the Arkansas-Indian Territory line the government men told them that here is your country and turned them loose to make it the best they could.