

M-42

INFORMANT: VANN BLY, CHEROKEE

INTERVIEWED BY: J. W. TYNER

INTERVIEW DATE: MARCH 23, 1970

SUBJECT: BLY MOUNTAIN COUNTRY

Vann Bly was born and raised on the mountain that bears his family name. Perhaps little known to most people, Bly Mountain is in east central Cherokee County very near the Adair County line. Vann's father and his mother (who was from the Spade family) were also born on Bly Mountain and spent all their lives there. Old records show that Vann's grandfather was one of those who came from southeast Tennessee in the Cherokee removal in 1838.

The one road that climbs up onto Bly Mountain forks off into smaller roads and trails on the plateau where at one time many Indians used to live. Many small plots of land had been cleared in early days to provide cultivated fields, pastures, orchards and home sites. In that long ago the families of Bly, Spade, Hensleys, Cobb, Root, Scraper, Sanders, and others lived a peaceful and contented life. Most are all gone now, and the land for the most part is owned by white ranchers, land speculators, and other foreigners.

In his retirement years Vann lives very near his old home place. He tells that the big two-story home of his father burned several years ago. But in its day the Bly home was one of the finest in the country, and its spacious accommodations welcomed relatives and friends. Some students who used to attend the old Cherokee Male Seminary in the days before statehood have told of spending weekends there. Beyond the well-kept grounds around the home, there was a large orchard, tended with much care. On other lands of the Bly family were the pastures for cattle and horses, the fenced hog pens, and the grainary and hay barns. The smoke house back of the house was a joy to see, filled with cured meat of all kinds. That was the home Vann Bly remembers of his boyhood.

Near the Bly place was the home and farm of the Spades. Old man Jim Spade died before the turn of the century, and he was another of the Cherokees who traveled that Trail of Tears and tasted the bitter cup served by the whiteman. Vann remembers the Spade family had a good farm and a large family, but all are gone now. The only evidence that they were there at one time is the little Spade Cemetery back in the woodlands.

A senior relative of Vann Bly was one John Bly. John's character and activities were a little short of being pure and spotless, in fact the long arm of the law reached out for him on occasion. John gambled and delved into other professions frowned on by society. In his time John met a girl somewhere in the Territory and they were married. They did not live happily ever after, and their story is told in a popular ballad of the long-ago, called "Nellie Bly".

Vann reflects on his life and the hard work he has seen in bringing up ten children. All of his children have made good in the professions and he is very proud of them. For many years Vann worked away from home in the oil fields of Osage country, Glen Pool, Three Sands, and around Seminole,