

T-572

April 13, 1970

Index side B, recording time 22 min.; interview time one hour.
(first half of tape.)

Informant: Kenneth Oyler, 65-year-old Cayuga,
Commerce, Ottawa County, Okla.

Subject: Cayuga-Seneca country.

Of all Indian tribes in Oklahoma the Cayuga probably number fewer than any other, except for the Wea, Piankashaw and Kaskaskia. A few members of these disappearing tribesmen are still to be found. Mr. Oyler is very proud and lets it be known that he is a Cayuga. Mr. Oyler was born and raised on the Cowskin River in northern Delaware County and has spent all his life in northeast Oklahoma, and at this visit he tells some things about his people.

The history of the Cayuga Indians begins in the early recordings of the native people of North America. Their original home was in New York State, and were of the Iroquois Confederacy as one of the five Nations. In the 1700s a large part of the tribe left New York and went into Canada, while small bands went into Ohio to join with other tribes of the Iroquoian linguistic family, that became known as Senecas, while at the same time each tribe recognized its individual origin and identity. The prime reason for the several bands of Indians living together was for protection and strength thru unity. Early historical accounts tell that the Senecas (which were made up of bands from the Erie, Conestoga, Oneida, Onondaga, Mohawk, and Cayuga) came into Indian Territory as early as 1822. Since that time Cayugas have been living in northeast Oklahoma, and for tribal business matters and recognition their name is incorporated now as the Seneca-Cayuga Tribe.

Mr. Oyler's original home was in what is known as Bassett's Grove area on the Cowskin River in the extreme northern part of Delaware. Bassett's Grove is the location of their old meeting place, their church, stomp grounds, and the homes of many Cayugas and Senecas. Bassett's Grove, along with Beaver Springs Stomp Grounds of the Quapaws, is one of the few Indian meeting places existing to-day where the old religious ceremonies and traditions are continued each summer. Each August the Seneca-Cayuga gather to observe the Greencorn ceremony, a ceremony of thanksgiving to the Great Spirit. The ritual of the Greencorn ceremony is the same as conducted by grandfathers and great-grandfathers of these people, and even to-day it has lost none of its meaning. Many outside visitors attend the ceremony, but to them, for most, they cannot know or feel the meaning as does the Indian.

Some of the older Indians still living in the Seneca region include the Spicers, Logans, Oylers, Bucks, Charloes, Long, Young, and Thompsons. The advance of progress and development has spared the Seneca-Cayuga country much of the change experienced by many other Indian settlements. Much of the hill country of these people has been untouched by whiteman's progress, and in those woodland hills they continue a way of life they cherish.

Very close to the Seneca-Cayuga is the Council House, which is primarily now used for church services. A community building is located by the church where much activity of these Indians takes place. Adjoining the church yard on the west is one of the old Indian burial grounds, well kept and maintained.