

T-609
April 24, 1970

Index side B, recording time 10 min.; interview time one hour.

Informant: Joe Ross, 89-year-old Cherokee,
Claremore, Rogers County, Okla.

Subject: Indian Territory days along Grand River.

Joe Ross was born and raised in what used to be known as Markham Prairie in the bend of Grand River. Now in his late years, Mr. Ross recalls some of the people and events of his homeland.

Near the old Markham Ferry was the palatial home of Dr. Felix McNair, one of the very early settlers to this part of the Grand River Valley. Joe tells that the McNair home was a big two-story house with a porch and bannister at both front and back. The kitchen and dining room extended out north from the main part of the house. A large and beautiful yard surrounded the house with many pecan trees providing ample shade. A large spring was located just northwest of the house. The main road from Coo-yi-yah and the west came by the McNair home on its way east and south to other points in the Cherokee Nation. Mr. Ross tells that before the McNairs settled and built their home near the Markham Ferry one of the early Sunday families lived on this location. The Sundays sold their improvements to the McNairs and moved on west of the Verdigris River in the Oologah country. The road that came across the ferry was one of the most traveled in that day as it was the main route to the Saline District Courthouse on Howe Prairie in what is now Delaware County. From a junction near the courthouse other roads lead toward Cowskin Prairie, border towns in Arkansas, and to the Cherokee Nation Capitol.

Joe's father was Henry Ross. Joe and his brothers and sisters were all born in a big double log house that his father had bought from Redbird Sixkiller. An Indian family by name of Childers had built this log house and later sold it to Sixkiller. Mr. Ross tells that as houses go, it was a big house with rooms 18 x 20 feet and each room had a big fireplace. Thru the middle of the house there was a 'dog trot' or breezeway. Joe best remembers that there was considerable space in the attic of the house where the boys slept. At first, there was only a ladder against the wall to get into their sleeping place. Later his father built a stairway leading up to the attic. He says old man Redbird Sixkiller was one of the most loved and respected Indians he ever knew. The old man lived to be 96 years old and was buried on his old place about a mile north of what is now Locust Grove.

In the early days that he remembers he tells that the Indians all seemed to have a fairly easy time of making a living and getting along with the economy of that time. He says they all had enough to eat and a place to sleep, and that was about all they asked for. But then came statehood, whitemen, taxes, disease, and all the other plagues, and then it was all over for the Indians. He says before statehood the Indians could build and live most anywhere they wished, with none of the worries that face the people of the present.