

GEORGE KEYS, CHEROKEE
INTERVIEWED BY: J.W. TYNER
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INFORMANT:

George M. Keys, 79-year old Cherokee, Welling Community, Cherokee County, Oklahoma.

SUBJECT:

Elm Springs Indian Mission, Welling, Indian Territory.

(Information on the history of this old mission, is obtained from Mr. Keys through interview and from notes he had prepared and kept over the years. Some of the account is taken directly from his own written records.)

No yard stick could measure the educational and religious influence of the historic mission that moulded the minds of men and women for more than seventy years.

It had its beginning in a prayer meeting, which was kept going by John Ross who lived across the Illinois River. He was a devoted Cherokee, whose father had been a notable Indian leader of his people. The Christian Cherokees were faithful to early meetings held in the home of Shake Manus. Manus and David Smallwood served as interpreters when teachers and preachers who spoke only English came to the Cherokee community.

The appeal that brought about the opening of the mission came from a little Cherokee boy who wanted to know more about the Jesus story. The mission was organized March 10, 1886. The name came from the cold clear mountain spring just west of Welling, which was shaded by a huge elm tree. The Presbyterian Board of Mission had sent Miss Caroline Montgomery to the Cherokee Nation early in 1886 to work among the Cherokees, while she was a teacher at Kendall College in Muskogee; she had as her co-worker a Miss Jeanne McRiver. They saw the need for such a mission and it is through their efforts that the project was organized and started.