

T-618.

June 24, 1970

Index side A, recording time 15 min.; interview time one hour.

Informant: Minnie Thompson, 80-year-old Seneca-Cayuga, Turkey Ford, Ottawa County, Okla.

Subject: Turkey Ford country.

In the Turkey Ford country of Ottawa County is Bassett Grove, the principal meeting grounds of the Seneca-Cayuga Indians. The some ten acres within the fenced area of the meetings grounds are the several houses surrounding the Long House. Also there are many camp lots of individual Indian families that they maintain themselves. The home of Minnie Thompson is in this fenced area and she is the official caretaker of the grounds. Adjoining the meeting grounds on the west is the Bassett Grove Cemetery, one of two burial grounds used by this tribe.

Bassett Grove was named for Joe Bassett, an early day Indian, whose land joined the meeting grounds. The area that is known as Turkey Ford was named for Mandy Turkey, a Seneca of long ago, who lived at the crossing, or ford, on Elk River (sometimes called Cowskin River).

Of the many Indian tribes to be moved to Indian Territory, the Seneca-Cayuga were among the first. It is recorded that they first came here in 1832. On a historical plaque beside a highway north of the Seneca country it tells: "SENECA AGENCY. About 12 miles south. Established July 4, 1832 near Buffalo Creek for Senecas, Cayugas, Shawnees and remnants of six other tribes that came from Ohio over a Trail of Tears as the United Nation. They signed first treaty Dec. 29, 1832, made by U. S. Commissioners Henry Ellsworth and John Schermerhorn, in Indian Territory. Ex-Gov. Stokes, N.C., headed the Commission, and was U. S. Agent for these tribes, 1836-37." This brief account of an event in history tells much more than a first observance reveals and brings on many questions: How many Indians of each tribe? Who were the chiefs and leaders? Who were the 'remnants of six other tribes'? Why did there have to be a "Trail of Tears"? Is the historical marker a memorial to the three white men and their deeds, or the epitaph of a race of people? There is no longer a Seneca-Cayuga Nation - the white men have taken care of that. But in a brief period of time in the history of the world these people did live, and it is of this span Mrs. Thompson talks about.

Before the coming of Grand Lake, the formation of Cowskin Bay, and the great invasion of white people and foreigners, the Seneca-Cayuga had another meeting ground on Elk River just south of Bassett Grove. She says that there used to be many Indians living in that part of the old Seneca Nation, but most of them are gone now. They were concentrated along the Neosho River, Elk River, and Buffalo Creek and east to the Missouri line.