

T-618
July 13, 1970

Index side A, (3rd part), recording time 15 min.; interview time one hours.

Informant: Miss Lucy West, 64-year-old Cherokee,
Briartown, Muskogee County, Okla.

Subject: Briartown country.

At the southwest edge of Muskogee County is the little town of Briartown. No one knows how long it has been a settlement, but Indians have lived in this area long before the days of Removals in the 1830s. Just south of Briartown runs the Canadian River, the dividing line between the Choctaw Nation and the Cherokee Nation. To the west is the Younger Bend country. This is the country where Miss West has lived all of her life. For the past 18 years Miss West has been postmistress of the Briartown Post Office. Although the big stone schoolhouse of Briartown has been closed, it was there that she attended some 12 years.

The Briartown Post Office was established in 1882 with Isaac Mooney, an Indian, as the first postmaster. When the Midland Valley Railroad came thru, they railroad people called the station McMurray, after one of its men, but the name did not take, and Briartown it has always been. According to Miss West's father the name Briartown dates from a long time ago. It is said that large areas of the land between the town site and the river contained thick briar patches and was almost impenetrable and was sometime referred to as the "briar bottoms", "briar lands", etc. The name of the little settlement became "Briar Town".

The town has enjoyed populous and prosperous days in its history. At one time the town business area was along the railroad. A big mercantile store was operated by M. L. Fudge and another large general store was run by Dr. Gully. Most of Dr. Gully's activities were in his practice as the Country Doctor for the area. Then there were the two big cotton gins, and in season wagon loads of cotton would be lined up for quarter of a mile. There was also a drugstore, drygoods shop, blacksmith shop, barber shop, and harness shop. Briartown has had a public school since its early days, and the two churches have been a part of the town for as long as anyone can recall. In the days of the passenger trains the ticket agent did a good business.

As the country was settled and the bottom lands cleared, the area became a wonderful farming area. The main crop was cotton, and there was a time when vegetables were grown and shipped from the Freight Depot. Farming is a thing of the past now. The big change seems to have come with the last great flood of 1943. That was during the War years and many people left to work elsewhere and never returned. A few people live in Briartown still, and the one little country store seems to be holding its own.

Settlement of the area and building its economy in the early days apparently is to the credit of the Starr families. At one time there were many of the Starr family living in the neighborhood and as far north as Forum. In fact, Forum was originally known as Starrvilla. All of the Starr families have gone now, many of them lived their allotted time and are buried in the Starr Cemetery, west of town. Miss West tells that there is a second Starr Cemetery east of town, but was known as the Starr Family Graveyard.