T-618

July 22, 1970

Index side B, recording time 20 min.; interview time one hour.

Informant: Maggie Leigh Hardy, 78-year-old Cherokee, McKey Community, Sequoyah County, Okla.

Subject: Southwest Sequoyah County.

In the sparsely settled country along the Arkansas River of southwestern Sequoyah County of to-day Maggie Leight Hardy makes her home. She was born here and has spent all her life in the area. Her father was John Leigh. Her mother was Mary Ussery Leigh. Her mother was a very small girl when she came to Indian Territory by way of the Trail of Tears, traveling a part of the way by river boat up the Arkansas River, where the family settled in the area of her present home. Mrs. Hardy has seen much in her time affecting her community.

For a while Mrs. Hardy attended the Cherokee Orphans Aslyum at Salina. At that time W. B. Wiley was Superintendent and her teacher was Miss May McSpadden. She recalls that the school was just one big building. Many children from all parts of the Cherokee Nation went there. She returned to her home before the school burned and attended the country schools of her area. She got most of her early education at Harrison School where Mrs. Oakley Sanders Ross and Miss Florence Bailey, both Indians, were the teachers. For short periods of school terms she attended Horn School, Bluff School, Watts School, and Shiloh School. In those early days many children, like herself, ended their schooling when they finished the eighth grade. These days were from about 1900 to 1905.

She remembers that when a young girl there were no church buildings, but religious services were held in the school buildings, particularly at Horn School. During the summer and warmer months of the year several brush arbor meeting places held church services in the area.

Her home is about a mile west of Big Sallisaw Creek and some three miles north of the Arkansas River. In the earlier part of the 1900s this area was a large farming country. Cotton was the principal crop, followed by corn and the small grains. Thru the years cultivation farming diminished to where at present there are only pasture lands and much return of brush and woodlands. Noticable too are the deep cuts and high mounds brought on by a period of strip coal mining. At one time Mrs. Hardy says that all of this country used to be level. Farming was at its heighth in World War I.

She tells that the early families who helped settle this area included the Harrisons, Ussery, Payton, Sanders, Leigh, Watts, Horn, Morris, Whitsett, Foreman, Peck, and Horton, all of whom were of Indian descent. Now most of them are gone, either died out or moved away.

In her youth the community supported two country stores. One of them was located about a mile north of her home was operated by J. J. Harrison. At the Harrison country store was also the Harrison Post Office. Then just south of Mrs. Hardy's home was a country store run by J. D. Morris. These hubs of community activity have been gone a long time now.