

October 29, 1968

T-333

Index side 1, recording time 30 minutes.

Informant: Jess Wright, 82-year-old Cherokee, Baron Community, Adair County, Oklahoma

Subject: Mr. Wright was born in this eastern Adair community and has lived here all of his life.

The town of Baron is named after Barren Fork River which flows thru the town. At different times the name of the early village and the river has been spelled in other ways. The present spelling is taken from the name put on the depot when the Kansas City Southern railroad came thru in 1895. The origin of the name is lost, yet some believe that it was so named after a place above Baron where the river was fairly wide and flat and devoid of trees and brush on either side. As an Indian village it dates to a period shortly after the 1839 arrival of the Cherokees from the east.

The spark that helped Baron become a town was the coming of the K.C.S. railroad in the 1890s. At that time nearly all of the people of the area were full-bloods or part Cherokee. Some of the prominent Cherokee families living there then were the Thorntons, Redbirds, Clines, Duncans, Downings, Adairs, Wrights, Whitmires, Watts, Squirrels, and Christies. Few Indian families live in Baron to-day, having moved away from the railroad and the busy Federal Highway No. 59 to find homes at Peavine, Rabbit Trap, Mulberry Hollow, and other communities. The economy has waned badly in recent years, as Baron has no industry save the small charcoal plant to support it. Long since gone are the bank, the large mercantile stores, sawmill, and other means of support. At one time Baron had a newspaper called "The Tube", to hold the area together newswise. The depot is gone and this once popular gathering place is only a memory to the older residents. At one time when money was hard to come by, the K.C.S. loaded and hauled huge quantities of gravel out of Barren Fork River bed. Loading was done by hand, team and wagon, but furnished a \$3000 monthly payroll that kept the community going until better times. In early days the main industry of the community was farming and timber work. Many car loads of railroad ties were cut and loaded out by the Indians. Some small amount of work has been made available by the charcoal plant which also buys its wood from the natives.

The first school that Mr. Wright remembers at Baron was a log building. This stood for many years, and was replaced with a rough frame building. Later, about 1909 a brick school building was erected and served the community for many years, but it was closed in the face of modern educational ideas. Children now travel by bus to Westville or to Stillwell. Yet, the old schools of Baron provided the only education some of the many Indians were able to obtain.