

November 11, 1968

T-346

Index side #1, first part. Recording time 20 minutes

Informant: Robert White, Longview Prairie, Craig County, Okla.  
74-year old life long resident of this area and a  
descendent of pioneer mixed blood Cherokee and white  
parents.

At times Mr. White assists the Craig County Museum  
in gathering early day artifacts, papers and documents,  
Indian history, historical facts regarding Craig County  
and the Indian Territory. Some of the information he  
gave is on tape, and some from notes at interview.

Subject: Mr. White was born on Cabin Creek about eight miles  
south of Vinita, and has spent all of his life in  
the area. He has seen the changes that have come to  
and affected this early Indian country, and herein  
relates some of these things.

To-day Vinita is a busy crossroads city in northeast  
Oklahoma. The Frisco and the Katy railroads roll  
their long trains through town. Four main highways  
join with the Will Rogers Turnpike carrying motor  
traffic around and through this 100-year-old plus  
community.

Vinita has not always been known by that name. Mr.  
White showed a copy of the town plat dated 1871 when  
it was known as Downingville, and so called in honor  
of Chief Lewis Downing. At that time and before the  
community was mainly populated by Indians. Also during  
those days other Indian communities were known in that  
region of the Coe-wee-scoe-wee District, among which were  
Pawpaw Creek, Oknee, Cabin Creek, Ketchum, Hollow, White  
Oak, and Cocklebur. The building of the Katy railroad  
thru Downingville in 1871 seemed to guarantee the  
permanency of the town. Later that same year the Atlantic  
and Pacific railroad built their road thru town, crossing  
the Katy tracks providing rail outlets in the other two  
directions.

Chief Downing figured prominently as a leader of the Cherokees,  
and worked to direct their way of life toward building a strong  
and prosperous Cherokee Nation. The many Cherokees who later  
became good farmers, successful cattlemen, professional men  
and civic leaders attest Chief Downing's own efforts.

Most of the Indians of those early days, both Cherokees and  
Shawnees and a few Delawares, were men of the soil, who  
loved the farm life. Those pioneers were no strangers to  
the bountiful plant life growing wild and knew their uses  
for food, medicines, weaving, and even decorations. Wild  
animals and birds were plentiful and conservatively used.  
The streams provided fish at any time. Mr. White regrettably  
says that most of these blessings are gone now.