

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 decendent 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 Coo-wee-scoo-wee District, among which were Pawpaw Creek, Okoee, 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 regretably says that most of these blessings are gone now.