

December 13, 1968

F-359

Index side A, 45 minutes

Informant: Frank Warren, 77 years old, and his wife Molly, 69 years old, both Cherokee Indians, of Peggs, Cherokee County, Oklahoma.

Subject: Peggs tornado of 1920.
Melvin, early day town now gone.
Explosion at Peggs in 1918.
A Cherokee stamp dance description.
Convicts on Iron Mtn. RR in 1902.
and other historical facts of early Eastern Okla.

Frank Warren was born and raised in the Melvin Community on Fourteen Mile Creek in Cherokee County, and lived at different places in the Lost City area, and has been in the Peggs Community for many years. Molly Warren, a full-blood Cherokee, the daughter of Joe and Martha Shade, was born and raised two miles south of Peggs, and has spent nearly all of her life in this Community.

May 2, 1920 was a fateful day in the history of the northern Cherokee County prairie community of Peggs. On that day one of the worst tornadoic storms ever to hit an Oklahoma community totally destroyed the little frontier town of Peggs. Twilight was melting into the night as most of the townspeople were getting ready to go to church. Summer storms had come and gone thru the years and the black rolling clouds building up in the northwest were looked on as another usual thunderstorm. Few, if any, had ever seen a cyclone. With such swiftness and with less warning, the sky became inky black, and an indescribable calm settled over the countryside. Then with a suddenness beyond imagination a howling cyclone dropped out of the western sky, rearing like a thousand runaway trains. In seconds the little town was engulfed in a quarter mile wide path of destruction. In less than a minute one of the most feared of nature's forces had passed thru Peggs, lifted from the ground and disappeared into the storm clouds to strike with less fury again 30 miles farther east. Stunned survivors faced a task few people will ever know. Cherokees and whites alike quickly began gathering up the dead and injured. The untouched surrounding neighborhood also came alive converging on the scene - a hundred or more kerosene lanterns could be seen coming from all directions. Word spread quickly by horseback, on foot, and by Model T. A man of the area drove a Model T twelve miles to Tanlequah in semi darkness, forgetting to turn on his lights, to summon help from the county seat. Doctors and anyone who could came came quickly by Ford, horseback, and buggy. Only one house remained in partially usable condition although blown from its foundation. With lamps and lanterns it was turned into operating rooms. As the injured were cared for they were taken to homes in the area which escaped the storm. The dead were laid out on whatever material could be gathered to await burial the next day. The walking wounded and injured found help and care with friends. Everybody was a personal friend to each other on Peggs Prairie in those days. To bind injuries, cuts, and torn flesh pieces of sheets, clothing and whatever could be gathered from