

January 29, 1969

T-372

Index side B, part one, recording time 20 minutes. Interview time two hours.

Informant: Ora Layton, 74 years old, of Cherokee ancestry,  
Murphy Community, Mayes County, Oklahoma

Subject:

The little hill country town of Murphy has witnessed its own rise and decline. On the east side of Grand River a Cherokee family by name of Murphy settled long before the turn of the century. Rich farming lands along the river, good fishing, and the wooded hill country appealed to many of the Indians who lived in the area. Around the Murphy homestead were the Cherokee families of Balleu, Panther, Thompson, Keener, Bat, Adair, Tadpole and others. The town took its name from the Murphys on whose allotment the village was later built. Mr. Layton has lived in and around Murphy nearly all of his life and has seen the many things that have come and gone thru the years.

Somewhere around 1910 a man by name of Stamper put in a little store at the Murphy community crossroads and also had the little post office. About the same time Sam Stevenson put in a little general store. Locating at this crossroads was not doubt prompted by the staking and activity of the K. O. and G railroad people, as the railroad did materialize in 1912. From that time and for many years after, the people of Murphy were proud of their growing little town. Mr. Layton remembers when there was five stores, cotton gin, depot, switch track for loading logs and ties, blacksmith shop, barber shop and other places of business. At the west edge of town was the Murphy School which served a large area.

About 1938 Murphy awoke to the stark realization that its best days were numbered. Plans were being made by the Government to build Ft. Gibson Dam. During the 1940s the people watched helplessly as the government took some of the richest farming land in Oklahoma. They saw their little neighbor town of Yonkers swallowed whole by whiteman progress. They saw their loved Grand River changed to where it no longer was the fine fishing stream for trotlining, cane poling, and night giging. Water was to cover land where fine corn had grown, and with it went the good squirrel and quail hunting. The once plentiful woodcock was to disappear completely. The Indians again moved farther away from whiteman progress as nothing of his way of life was left to enjoy.

Farming was the livelihood of the early days of Murphy area. Before the days of the stores and railroad there, people went to Peggs or Chouteau to trade, have their corn and wheat ground, and to sell grain, railroad ties, and other products.