

March 6, 1969

1-382

Index side A, part two, recording time 10 min., interview time 1 hour.

Informant : Mary Burge, 70-year-old Cherokee, of  
Okoe community, Craig County, Oklahoma

Subject: Mrs. Burge was born in Wagoner County, and came to Okoe community when she was about 10 years old. She has been here all of these years.

The beginning and establishment of the village of Okoe seems to be lost to memory, although it was known before the Civil war. It is known however that a group of Cherokees, including the families of Tucker, Locust, Vann, Chouteau, Friend, and Carslowry had been in this community since the early part of the Indian Nation. It would seem that some of the ancestry came from eastern Tennessee bringing the name of a Cherokee village with them, as Okoe village on the Okoe River was a prominent place in eastern Cherokee history. It has been said the Cherokee name translated refers to the 'passion flower'.

Mrs. Burge's first recollection of Okoe was that it was the most beautiful place she had ever seen. The cool clear waters of Mustang Creek flowed westward along the base of a hill. On the hill south of the creek was the wooded and pasture lands, while on the north was the mile wide fertile farming valley. There was a store on the south bank of the creek run by a man by name of Routs. John Tucker had built and operated the store many years before 1909, and he was the first postmaster when a post office was established in his store about 1901. Mr. Tucker sold his store and farmed in the valley. George Bonds had put in a store on the hill above the creek and took over the post office which lasted until about 1913, when mail service was handled by RFD mail carriers. Up the creek and on the south side was the big sawmill operated by the Quisenberrys, while across the creek from them was the grist mill run by the Arterberry family. Mrs. Burge recalls that there were many Indian families living in the community and along Mustang Creek in those old days.

The school for the Okoe community was located about a mile and a half to the south which was called Arterberry. The school closed many years ago and now busses haul the children to Ketchum or Langley. This school house, built nearly seventy years ago, has been well cared for and is used today as a community meeting center. In earlier days it also served as the church for the area. However, even before the existence of the Arterberry School, there was the Carslowrey School whose beginning dates back to the 1880s. Many of the old timers still living went to the Carslowrey school, traveling as far as 8 miles in their young days. While several families have lived in and close by Okoe, there was never a school house or a church house built in the village.

For many years the annual Okoe Indian fair held in late September was an event looked forward to by those of a wide area around Okoe. The fairgrounds was located on the north side of Mustang Creek a short distance west of the main road thru the village. Mrs. Burge recalls the acres of wagons, horses, tents, campfires, and people