

February 26, 1969

Index side A, part one, recording time 20 min., interview time 1½ hours.

Informant: Jess Fields, 84-year-old Cherokee,
near Jay, Delaware County, Oklahoma

Subject: Mr. Fields talks of his paternal forefathers and tells that they were of those Cherokees who left their eastern homeland to form another Cherokee Nation in Arkansas during the early 1800s. At one time the Arkansas Cherokees were settled in a large area in northwest part of that state by treaty. Later they were forced out of Arkansas and moved into east Texas where they owned a considerable tract of land under a Spanish Grant. They had a deed to their holdings in Texas, and he believes that it be recognized the same as other Spanish grant deeds of other places have been honored. His father's people were at one time settled around Maysville, Ark., and it was there that his grandparents were born.

Jess was born and raised in the Peters Prairie country of northern Delaware county and has spent nearly all of his life here. His has been a life close to the soil, woods and waters. By standards of success Mr. Fields has been a prosperous farmer, but by hard work and common sense management. In his retirement years he looks back on a lifetime of peace and contentment with his lot.

He speaks of the days in the 1890s when trading centers were few and far between. At that time the towns of Grove and Jay did not exist. Southwest City, Mo. and Vinita, I.T. were the only towns of any size that could be called trading centers. He recalls that there were two or three stores, a grist mill and blacksmith shop at the village of Zena. Then there was a place called Salone east and a little south of Peters Prairie that had a little store, but any record of this place seems to be lost. He remembers that when they would go to Vinita they crossed the river on a ferry in west of Grove. On the other side was a little place that had a store or two that was called Titewad. When Bernice and Ketchum began to grow up the Town of Titewad disappeared. At sometime later a Seneca Indian by name of Splitlog put in a little store up on Honey Creek at the Indian meetings grounds of Cayuga.

Splitlog was very prominent in his community, in addition to operating a trading post he worked among his people seeing to their economic and spiritual needs. Splitlog came from somewhere in the north, possibly from Canada where he has been under the influence of the Catholic missionaries. While few Senecas followed this faith, about once a month he would send his buggy to Vinita to bring the visiting priest to his home to conduct mass for he and his wife and any others of their denomination. At one time the Senecas were numerous in and around the settlement of Cayuga, but today none can be found at this ancient settlement on Honey Creek. Grand Lake's waters now back up beyond this old place and it is now thickly settled thru the invasion of white people's farms, ranches, summer cottages and retirement homes. The thing remaining of the Seneca's tenure there is the beautiful little stone church built under the influence of Splitlog and the Catholic church.