

1-396
March 20, 1969

Index side A, second part, recording time 25 min.

Informant: Ned Downing, 83-year-old full blood Cherokee of
Rowe Prairie, Mayes County, Oklahoma

subject: Mr. Downing was born on Peggs Prairie just south of his present home. He recalls in his young days all of this country was prairie grassland or timbered areas. Long ago he says the timbered land would be burned off during the winter or spring to kill ticks and insects, and to kill off sprouts and underbrush. This he believes was a reason they had lots of big trees then. Now, in most places brush, sapplings, and small trees are allowed to grow choking out efforts of the timber to achieve any size. Timber and grassland management was practiced to an advantage long ago, making today's attempts at land management seem pitiful feeble. He recalls when most anywhere in the woods you could see for a quarter of a mile with nothing but big timber standing. No so to-day. Wild hogs roamed the woodlands and acorns were a good part of their feed, which kept some of the tree growth under control. Cattle fed in the timber lands during the summer also, and during the winter they were taken to the cane breaks along Spring Creek and Snake Creek where they fared well until spring. Cultivation of the prairie country did not begin to any extent until around statehood. Before that time, if a man cultivated twenty acres, he had a good-sized farm. Corn, oats and wheat were the main cultivated crops. Peggs, Lowrey and Rowe prairies all joined each other and was originally known as the cattle country.

Ned built his present home out of hewn logs some 60 years ago. In recent years he has covered the outside with lumber and finished the inside with modern wall board. He lives here alone after raising six children who all have left home and made themselves successful in the world. Fifty feet up on the high south bank of Snake Creek is Ned's home in one of the most beautiful settings in the whole valley. It is here he intends to live out his days. He has been a successful cattleman and farmer, and still keep a small herd of cows on his ninety acres. But one of the things he enjoys most he says is that he is dependent on no whiteman to look after him in his old age. He has watched the many changes in his time affecting the way of life for the Indian. When the whiteman was permitted to invade the Cherokee Nation, that was the beginning of sorrows for the Indian. He says he can remember when it was a pleasure to deal and trade with people. But with the coming of the whiteman, there came a strange characteristic where they talked out of both sides of their mouth. Now, it has come to the point where they find it easier to tell a lie than to tell the truth. What the next change they bring he wonders. He says he has lost confidence in people.

Ned remembers the days when the Saline District Courthouse was the center of activity for a wide area. During this time he had been attending country schools at Iron Post, Liberty, and Johnson Prairie. It was in these schools that he learned to speak and read English. He tells of visiting his grandmother who lived over on the River near what is now Murphy. He recalls she always had a big herd of hogs that fed in the winter in the pecan groves, and produced the finest tasting meat he ever ate.