

FARRIS, RANSOM INTERVIEW.

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BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Gus Hummingbird

Field Worker's name _____
This report made on (date) June 10 1937

1. Name Ransom (Tobe) Parris
2. Post Office Address Watts, Oklahoma. Route 1.
3. Residence address (or location) Section 25, Twp. 19, Range 25.
4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month December Day 9th Year 1881
5. Place of birth Goingsnake District, Cherokee Nation.

6. Name of Father Aaron Parris Place of birth Georgia
Other information about father _____
7. Name of Mother Polly Irvin Place of birth Georgia
Other information about mother _____

Notes or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and story of the person interviewed. Refer to Manual for suggested subjects and questions. Continue on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 10

Ransom Parris, a quarter-blood Cherokee, was born in Goingsnake District, Cherokee Nation, December 9, 1851. He was the son of Aaron Parris and Polly Irvin, Cherokees. The Parris family came from Georgia. They settled on a prairie about two miles east of the present town of Westville, Oklahoma.

(EARLY LIFE)

Mr. Parris' early life was spent on a farm that his father operated near the Arkansas line. This farm consisted of about thirty acres. Here young Parris was taught all kinds of work that goes with the farm. He was a good teamster at the age of ten. He drove an ox team to Silosa Springs, the nearest town, which was about twenty five miles away, many times. He has hauled many loads of lumber from this town to build homes in the Cherokee Nation.

The Parris family was considered wealthy at that time. They owned several head of stock. They were successful farmers, raising all the family consumed on the farm. They did not endure poverty at any time as Mr. Parris remembers. They hired help many times with the farm work, paying the hired help with the surplus produce on the farm. This was the way that most farmers of that day paid their laborers.

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There was no machinery at that time, the only machinery that Mr. Parris ever saw was a thresher that a white man from Arkansas operated during harvest time. This outfit was made somewhat similar to, the present day sorghum mill. It was built on a frame just like a sorghum mill with rollers. The wheat was run through the rollers, the seed fell to the ground and was caught on an old time wagon sheet, the straw was removed from this sheet leaving the seed. This then was fanned by another outfit which was operated by hand.

Wheat was usually cut by cradles. Each community had a harvest crew. But corn was raised more than wheat, especially by the Cherokees. It could be used for food in so many different ways. Corn could be ground at home. Every home had a home-made mortar to make meal. Wheat had to be taken to Arkansas to be made into flour.

(Churches and Camp Meetings)

The Baptist Mission was the first church established in this part of the country that Mr. Parris knows anything about. He does not know the exact date when this church was established.

John Jones, a white man, was the day preacher at this place. He also operated a printing press at this place but Mr. Parris does not remember the name of the paper he printed. This printing press was located in a building about where Nelson Crowder now lives.

John Jones, Adam Lacie and Wolf Coon were the early day ^{ministers.} Camp meetings were held every fall at this place. Many people gathered here from miles around. These meetings would last for two or three weeks. There was also another class of preachers that would visit this church. They were called the Circuit Riders, and they went from place to place preaching to the people.

Indian Cooking)

Corn was the chief food of that time. It could be used in so many different ways. First it was made into bread at home. The machine used to make meal at home was an old mortar. The mortar served as a mill and was made out of a log, usually a dead white oak. One end of this log or block was chiseled into a bowl-like outfit. A pole about four feet in length was used to beat the corn after it was poured into the bowl-like end of this mortar. But the corn was first skinned and this was done by boiling ashes which served as lye. The

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corn was poured into this lye and in about ten minutes it was taken out. It was washed through clean water several times and the skin would come off. This corn made the finest of meal. Mr. Parris has seen his mother make this many times and he has helped in the making of meal.

Skin-corn was another dish that was to be found at almost any home. This was made just the same way that the meal corn was prepared, only it was not beat up. This food was boiled in cooking, usually making plenty of soup. The full-bloods were fond of soups.

Car-Nut-Chee was another favorite dish among the Cherokees. This was really a fine dish, but very difficult to make. The Parris family did not make this. They usually bought it from some of the full-bloods. It was made from hickory-nut goodies, and was a favorite dish for the sick.

All kinds of wild meats were to be found on every table at that time. Deer, turkey, quail, wild-pigeon and many other small game were abundant.

(Indian Dyes, Paints, and Medicines)

Dyes were made from roots of plants. The color varied in different plants. The red color was obtained

from Paeon roots. The homespun cloth was dyed in different colors. Barks of several trees were also used to make the several colors namely: Red Oak, Cherry, Walnut, and several roots.

Paints were made from several kinds of berries. This was usually made in the summer. The only thing that the Cherokees painted was their home-made shoes. They did not paint their faces as other Indians did.

Medicines were found throughout the Cherokee Nation. There were many Cherokee doctors at that time and really good doctors too. All their medicines were made from the herbs and barks of trees. Faith doctoring was also common at that time. Mr. Parris says that he would almost guarantee that an Indian doctor could stop the spasms quicker than any white doctor he ever saw, who tried to doctor for spasms. The Cherokees were a dead shot on snake bite, also, they were good to doctor for burns, gunshot wounds, toothache, earache, and headache.

(Arts and Crafts)

The Cherokees were artists in making baskets and pottery. They were not blanket weavers. They made baskets out of bark and small brush. These baskets were

sold at their trading posts namely: Dutchtown, Cincinnati, and Siloan Springs, Arkansas.

These old time Cherokees made their pottery out of clay. Sometimes bowls were made out of wood. Their clothing was homespun. Each family had a loom.

(Trading and Milling Points)

Dutchtown, Arkansas, was the nearest trading point at that time. Cincinnati was our milling point. Siloan Springs was the only trade town, and it was twenty-five miles away.

Moore's Mill was the milling point for corn and this mill was located about two miles south of the present town of Cincinnati, Arkansas. Hannah and John Moore were the proprietors of the mill. Vol English was the early time merchant at Dutchtown. Bill Ray was the merchant at Cincinnati.

The people usually went to the mill on horseback or in wagons. Ox teams were common at that time. Mr. Parris has seen people come to Cincinnati to mill from twenty-five miles away. Most of the time they would remain all night.

(Game and Fish)

Game and fish were plentiful in the early days. All kinds of small animals were to be found in the Cherokee

country. Every fall thousands of wild pigeons came to this country. One of the most famous roosts of that time was near the present home of Mr. Parris. Some people made a business of buying these pigeons. Hundreds of Cherokees would come from miles around to kill them. Arkansas white men came to buy these pigeons. They usually sold at one dollar a dozen. These then were sold at Siloam for two dollars per dozen. A Mr. Brown and a Mr. Hogan were the buyers from Siloam that stayed in the woods buying these pigeons.

(Hides and Furs)

Hides and furs were sold at Cincinnati, the buyer being Bill Ray. Most of the bull-bloods did not sell their hides. They made shoes and other things out of the leather. Chair bottoms were also made from hides. Plenty fur was to be found in the Cherokee country. The price being so small they did not hunt much. The prices ran from five to twenty five cents for skunks, opossum and civet cat.

Coon, fox, and wolf was worth about two dollars. A few otter could be found along Ballard Creek. There have been a few killed.

(Financing Farmers)

Money was not scarce in the community in which Mr. Parris was raised. But not everybody had money. Those who had money could be depended on in case one was in a tight place. Neighbors loaned money to one another. Mr. Parris' father has loaned several hundred dollars without

any security, and Mr. Parris and his father themselves have borrowed money the same way. Mortgages and notes were not known at that time. There being no banks, large sums of money were usually kept around the house. Mr. Parris himself has loaned Mr. Jim McCoy, a neighbor, two hundred dollars without security. McCoy only agreed to pay this back that fall. No one knew of the transaction except the two and that fall McCoy sold a bunch of cattle and paid the money back.

(Cattle Men)

Lew Williams was the only cattleman who lived in this part of the country at that time. He owned a ranch near the present site of Westville, Oklahoma. Parris used to work for Mr. Williams some. The nearest cattle market was Fayetteville, Arkansas and Mr. Parris has helped drive cattle through the country many times.

(Politics)

Mr. Parris did not take much part in politics. He belonged to the National party. He remembers voting at the age of eighteen. His voting precinct was at the small school at the edge of the prairie east of Westville. Sometimes the elections were held just under some shade tree. A rope was stretched around the officials of the election, and guards were placed around the voting place to keep order. The voting was done by calling the party's name you wished to vote for. There was no way of cheating a man when you told him that you would vote for him, because everybody knew how you voted.

(Civil War)

Mr. Parris remembers well when the Civil War began. He was about nine years old. His brother, Jesse Parris, joined the Northern Army. He remembers well when the battle of Prairie Grove was fought. This battle is sometimes called the battle of Cane Hill. It is important to the Cherokee people because so many Cherokees took part in it.