

PARISH, ELIAS

INTERVIEW

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CHOCTAW ALLOTMENT #7246

STRUGGLE FOR STATEHOOD #7690

Pete Cole
Interviewer,
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An interview with Elias Parish
Choctaw Indian, age 62.
Darwin, Oklahoma.

Referring back to the discovery of North America for a moment, when the white man set his foot on this continent, a new country, he called its inhabitants Indians, sadly mistaking the discovered land for India, the country to which he was searching for a short route when he landed here. North America was a new country to him but its inhabitants, so-called Indians, had been here for ages. There is no proof of when, how and where this race of people existed, nevertheless the Indian was here to greet the white man when he arrived.

There is only one method that the Indian knew and remembered and had always lived by and that is "Where there is a will, there is a way". and the "Lord will provide." He did not at any time give thought for a moment what he must eat, drink or wear but he prayed and trusted his Lord and all necessities to life were furnished him. If it was wild game for meat, he had it. He did not dare to kill such game for sport or waste. If it was fish of the water, he killed what he could use. If it was all for the betterment or best interest to all concerned, it went that way or if contrary to all concerned it must be that way.

Yet they lived. The country was rich in soil for miles and miles. Trees were large and abundant. The country was sorely in need of improvement. This the white explorer of the new country saw and, in his vision, saw what could be done. He took the old country from whence he came as a pattern and saw what could be done in honor of his Majesty. He asked the Indians for a night's lodging. The Indians consented and by the rising of the sun on the next day, he had planted a cross in honor of his ruler across the sea and planted a colony. Next he asked of the Indian a few acres of Tom Fuller land where he could plant and raise corn for pasiofa and sour bread for his living. The Indian consented and he built a town. The Indian was asked for a few more acres or miles for improvement and when he consented the white man claimed the state. The white man came to him again with fingers sticking up in the air and pointing at the sun signifying that "We are friends," and that "the sun will acknowledge our friends: it toward each other," saying, "Indian, we must have more land, we are many and we have not enough land where ^{we} can make a living on so small a place. You do not need all of this land, but rather you go west to the land that will be selected for you by the Government where you can live and that will be your

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Hunting Ground. We now claim this land and you must hunt another place."

As time rocked on, treaties after treaties from 1830 1855, 1865, 1866 and Atoka Agreements have been made with the Government. Finally the Indians agreed to leave the State of Mississippi and migrated to this country. A new country that they knew nothing about and through many hardships they came with the promise from the Government that they shall be given good care. On their arrival Congress read to them the boundary lines of their new country, beginning at a point on the Arkansas River, one hundred paces east of old Fort Smith, where the western boundary line of the state of Arkansas crosses the said river, and running thence due south to Red River; thence up Red River to so many degrees west longitude, thence north along said meridian to the main Canadian River; thence down said river to its junction with the Arkansas River; thence down said river to the place of beginning, except the territory bounded as follows, to wit; beginning on the north bank of Red River, at the mouth of Island Bayou, where it empties into Red River, about twenty-six miles on a straight line below the mouth of False Washita; thence running northwesterly

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course along the main channel of said Bayou to the junction of the three prongs of said Bayou, nearest the dividing ridge between Washita and Low Blue Rivers, thence northerly along the eastern prong of Island Bayou to its source; thence due north to the Canadian River; thence west longitude; thence south to Red River; and thence down Red River to the place of beginning.

Upon this new Agreement the removal of Choctaws from Mississippi to this new country known as Indian Territory was at its best. After their arrival and after getting settled, they organized their own laws and their own form of government and under its laws that history is made as to their carrying out of their laws to the letter.

Time came when there arose two parties, the Progressive led by the McCurtains, the Union Party led by Jacob B. Jackson or the National Party. The main question this time was whether or not Oklahoma or rather Indian Territory should become as a state.

There was no doubt but that Indian Territory should become a state sometime but the people were not ready for statehood and it was on this ground that the National or Buzzard Party opposed this country becoming a state, but the

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Progressive or Tuskahoma Party with its leader, the inter-married citizens of the Choctaws and the half breeds fought for statehood so that at times there were troubles where the two parties would engage in a fight and there were several killings by waylaying and night riding.

The leader of the National party in his message stated, "We are for statehood, its advancement, and are in favor of the improvement that is of best interest to the people, but at this time we are not ready for Indian Territory to become as a state; and when we do the settlers will come to this country, build towns, railroads, telephones, our large hunting grounds will be converted into large farms, our rights will be taken away from us and the time will come some day when our own land where we live will be taken away from us, that we will be subject to pay heavy taxes on our property that we may own, and that the people shall be classed according to their color, and unless you are in standing with some clan or organization you shall be denied as their member, and that the Indian Territory Choctaw Indians will some day be classed as servants, as they did when they lived in Mississippi." These were the words of J. B. Jackson in his day, where he lived and died near Shadypoint, Oklahoma.

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The Progressive or the Tuskahoma Party promised if we let Indian Territory come in as a state, our country will be open up to settlers; large bare prairies will/come large farms; the land allotted to us will be ours, and we may rent it out to white farmers that they may work for us; good paved roads, towns and cities will be built, and all modern improvements will be held in common; that our children shall attend school with the whites in the same school, intermarry, hold office, and have the same privileges as the white brother.

On these two propositions they reasoned, talked, argued until they hated each other. They quarrelled, organized night riders, and would go out of a night and raid the homes of their opponents. The offenders would be arrested and on several occasions they would be taken out and killed. They caused trouble, declared war and fought at several different times under their different chiefs, until Chief Wilson Jones ordered the militia to quiet the trouble makers. The worst and the last trouble among the Choctaws was in the year 1893 near Antlers, when there were several killed on both sides before the militia took charge and restored order.

It was at this time when Green McCurtain, Principal Chief of the Choctaw Nation, saw that in order to have peace among the Choctaws, it was necessary to surrender all

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tribal laws, Indian affairs, government and customs to the United States Government and let them live under the white form of government, and it was at this time that the Indian form of government was done away with.

A short time afterward the wishes of the Progressive Party came true. In the year 1899 the whole country was surveyed and the Choctaws and the Chickasaws were permitted to allot lands and in September, 1903, the Indians began to allot their lands according to Atoka Agreement. A land office was established in Atoka, for the Choctaws, and at Tishomingo, for the Chickasaws. The Dawes Commission made an agreement at Atoka in the presence of Green McCurtain, Principal Chief, Henry Anderson, and Wilson Jones, with provision that the final settlement with the Choctaws was to be made within eight years from date, but when the eight years were up, nothing was done. Then Congress asked an extension of time to twenty-one years. At the conclusion of the time they failed to settle and in 1931 failed again and now Congress has set the time to see if something can be done about winding up of the Tribal Affairs by April 26, 1956.

Such was the condition of the olden times in this country when my grandmother, Julia Durent, came from Mississippi

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with the rest of the early immigrants. She was seventeen years of age when they first came to Indian Territory and settled near what is now Broken Bow, in McCurtain County. After their arrival in this country, she married Tony Parish, who was my grandfather. He was later killed by one of the United States soldiers. After remaining here for a few years she moved to near Boswell, Indian Territory, then later to her brother's home near what is now Bentley, a country post office in Atoka County. This was where my father, Tom Parish, was born and raised to manhood and died in the year 1900.

When my father was about twelve years old he was attending school at Spencer Academy, an Indian Government School, when at one time some Confederate soldiers raided the school, claiming that they were authorized to do so. Finding everything to their satisfaction, members and faculties being for the South, no harm or damage was done to the school and the soldiers proceeded on their journey.

After my father became of age, he lived near what is now a country post office of Bentley; an Indian community at that time as it is at the present time. There he married a granddaughter of Aaron Blanche and to this union were born four boys and one girl.

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My father was a deputy sheriff for four years under John Wesley in Jack Fork County. He was a member of the Progressive Party at that time.

In those days the law of the Indian was strict. If the defendant was found guilty of charges against him he was sentenced, and unless good evidence was produced to satisfy the court of his innocence, the punishment was usually meted out to him and rather than to show fear he met his fate cheerfully and with a smile on his face and his last words would be "Friends, if you have to kill a man for your protection, do so but don't be a coward". In other words if you kill a man don't say I killed him because I was afraid of him. He did not know what it was to be a coward.

The Indian class of people will kill and take the life of other people regardless of class, tribe or color because of some prejudice or because one has been mistreated by some one for some cause; but since this country has been classed as an enlightened nation, and humanity has taught that it is wrong to do evil to others, the country in which we are living is considered as a civilized nation and not as a savage country.