

PATTERSON, WILLIAM McCLEOD.

INTERVIEW #7643

484

Journalist, Hazel L. Greene,
September 24, 1937.

Interview with William McCleod Patterson,
Hugo, Oklahoma.

Born September 19, 1868,
White County, Arkansas.

Parents Wm. McCleod Patterson,
North Carolina.
Amelia McCougall Patterson,
Alabama.

In 1879, when we lived in Lamar County, Texas, a few miles south of Paris, we took a notion to go back to White County, Arkansas, to see our folks, so we packed up, took our squirrel dog and trusty shotgun and started out. We crossed Red River at the mouth of Miami River at Captain Wright's ferry, and traveled up the Old Military Trail to Doaksville. That was easy, but it was not so easy to find the way after we passed Doakville because the roads were not so plain and there were so few houses on the road that sometimes we would go many miles without being sure we were on the right road. If we met a Lighthorseman, he would tell us the way but the full blood Choctaw, whom we would happen to meet would never tell us anything. A Choctaw would just grunt and shake his head.

PATTERSON, WILLIAM McCLEOD. INTERVIEW.

7643

-2-

We were not in a hurry, so we took about two weeks to go through the Indian Territory and out of it by Lagletown, into Arkansas. We camped wherever night overtook us, generally on a branch or creek or near a spring. We would hobble our horses and turn them loose until bed time and then would catch them and give them some feed but we kept our horses close to camp for fear of horse thieves who infested this country then.

There were bands of horse thieves operating in this country. They would steal horses and take them over into Arkansas and dispose of them. We had enough supplies to last us from one village to another by killing game as we went along and there was plenty of that. Squirrels were so plentiful that we had them three times a day to eat; fried for breakfast, stewed with dumplings for dinner and supper, and the squirrels were so fat that we would strip out the fat and fry it out and fry a squirrel in it. It was like butter, but it was easily burned though.

The full blood Choctaw Indians had a way of building their cabins away off the road. One would find a trail leading off to one side, or even crossing the regular road, and

-3-

could follow it, for perhaps a quarter or a half mile, and find a little clearing with the cabin or a group of cabins and a Tom Fuller patch. The trail usually came up to the back of the cabin. The reason I say cabin, is because the home of the full blood Choctaw Indians was usually a one-room, log cabin. Sometimes there was another for a kitchen, and another for a smoke-house, another for potatoes, etc. Frequently those cabins would have back porches with no opening. Hooks made of tree forks would be nailed upon the wall and upon these hooks would be hung saddles, bridles and harness.

Full blood Indians seldom raised gardens or chickens. They usually built their homes near a creek, a spring, a branch or a river, and nearly always in the timber. Mixed-breeds knew to take advantage of rich prairie land but even they built their homes in the edge of the timber. When we came to the homes of mixed-breeds we could buy chickens, eggs and other things. Nice fryers were ten cents each and eggs were five cents per dozen.

I do not recall a village between Loaksville and Eagle-town.

-4-

On our return trip we traveled west from Doaksville and crossed the Kiamichi River at what was called Twin Chimney Ford. There were two chimneys standing then but I believe they call that Rock Chimney Crossing now. We wondered how the chimneys came to be there. On that return trip, we crossed Red River at Slate Shoals. We forded Red River as there was no ferry.

After I got grown I kept making trips over into the Choctaw Nation and the more I saw of the country, the more I liked it and the more I wanted to move over here.

I made a trip up on Frazier Creek north of Spencerville, and saw the grass on the glades stirrup deep, the woods full of game, the clear rock-bottom creeks swarming with trout and little clearings in the creek bottoms producing almost unbelievable amounts of corn, peas, peanuts and sweet potatoes to the acre and remembered that old worn out land in Texas. Hogs and cattle roamed the range at will in the Choctaw and Nation/ even in the winter were still fat. I could stand it no longer. I saw an opportunity to have freedom from an overbearing landlord and more of the good things of life for myself and family.

-5-

We settled about five miles southeast of Hugo, near the Shoat Springs School. There was a little country store about a mile away, run by a Mr. Hulin. We begged boxes from Mr. Hulin for our children to sit upon in school, after we had completed the log school building. Long after that we all got together and made puncheon seats for the children. Then when we all got pretty prosperous we hauled planks twenty miles and made desks for the children to use. We had a splendid teacher from out of the north, somewhere. When she left it was like a funeral, the children cried so. Lots of the teachers were from the states.

Some Northern, white people supervised and taught in an Academy for negroes down on Clear Creek. It was called Oak Hill then. I believe it is called Elliot Academy now.

One Spring I was trying to get a piece of new ground ready for planting and it looked like I was going to need some help. Some Mississippi Choctaws lived about a mile away, so I went over there one Sunday to see if I could get the old man or one of the boys to help me to get my land cleared. You should have seen their house. It was made of poles, leaning from the ground to a ridge pole, thatched with grass

PATTERSON, WILLIAM MCCLEOD. INTERVIEW.

7643

and mud cats like a stick and dirt chimney. The back end was made up of split poles stuck in the ground and the West end was entirely open. They kept warm with a big fire out in front.

The man, two boys and two girls lived in there and one of the girls was on a pallet made of a piece of a quilt on that dirt floor suffering from pneumonia. The Father said he had no doctor because they had no money and he was then beating some Tom Fuller to cook and feed to her.

It looked to me as though this girl was near death then. I expected to hear that she had died, but she got well before a neighbor girl near us who was sick then with penumonia and had the finest doctor in the country. It is remarkable what those Indians could stand and live.

When we were still over in Texas, a kinsman of ours had a big plantation near Telephone, Texas. His name was Hugh McRea. The Choctaw Indians would go over there and pick cotton for him. One Choctaw quit picking cotton about the middle of one afternoon and asked them to weigh his cotton and pay him. When asked why, he said that he had noticed that the river was rising and he would have to cross before it got too high as he had to be at Mayhew the next day to be

PATTERSON, WILLIAM MCCLEOD. INTERVIEW.

7643

491

-8-

shot. He was at Mayhew and was executed the next day.