

PAYNE, MARY E.

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Elizabeth Ross,  
Investigator,  
April 13, 1938.

An Interview With Mary E. Payne,  
Muskogee, Oklahoma.

Mary Elizabeth Israel Payne was born September 18, 1860, in Goingsnake District, Cherokee Nation. Her parents were David Israel who was born in Georgia in 1837, and Martha T. Miller Israel, born January 6, 1836. Mary Israel Payne's paternal grandfather's Cherokee name was Gaid-ee-la-wee; he died November 30, 1861. There is no English name given but the paternal grandmother's name is written "E Israel", and she died March 23, 1863. The family Bible, which is more than two hundred years old, contains the above date and other dates of births and deaths of members of the Israel family. Mary E. Israel's parents were married May 10, 1856, at New Springplace, Oaks, Tahlequah District.

Mary E. Israel was one of a family of eleven children, and recalls some interesting events of early-day life on the farm. There was much work to be done in supporting so large a family. Her father used yokes of

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oxen in breaking the ground and preparing the fields for planting. Corn and wheat were grown, and a small amount of cotton was raised, enough for cotton yarn and cloth for the needs of the family. In the autumn the corn, enough for a whole year's use, was gathered and stored in the large crib. In winter evenings neighbors were invited in and a corn-shelling was held when large quantities of corn were shelled. The next day the shelled corn was taken to Beck's mill, northeast of Tahlequah and ground into meal, enough for a long period.

Wheat was threshed out by hand. A quantity was placed on a wagon sheet and the grain beaten out with small rods. Sometimes the wheat was placed in boxes and beaten against the walls of the box until the grains were separated from the chaff. When made into flour the product was unbleached but of fine quality and was mixed, and baked in large ovens over hot coals in the open fireplace. Cakes and pies were also baked in the same manner. The Israel family did not own a stove at that early day.

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Yarn was spun upon the family spinning wheel, and all the hose for the entire family, both wool and cotton, were hand knitted. In summer time both men and women went barefooted, so that not many pairs of summer hose were required. Cloth was dyed with colors made from tree barks, set with copperas and alum.

Nearly all eatables were raised on the farm. Hogs were fattened, slaughtered and the meat cured in the smoke house. Enough meat was prepared to last through the entire year. Sausage was wrapped in corn husks and hung along the rafters to cure, with the hams and other meat. Several large cans of lard were stored away at each butchering. Sorghum cane was cultivated; it was stripped and fed into the homemade grinder, and the juice was boiled in three large iron kettles set over the home-made furnace which was daubed together with mud, and kept boiling with a wood fire. Several barrels were stored away and many gallons were sold. Five or six men were employed at each sorghum-making season. Green coffee was bought and

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parched over the open fire. A small house was built for storing ashes, from which lye was run from the home-made hopper, built from part of a hollow tree. The lye thus obtained and scraps of fat were boiled into soft soap-always in the month of March, when "the sign was right".

The Israel family were now living at Oaks (now in Delaware County) Tahlequah District, the parents having removed to this place for the purpose of placing their children in school at the Moravian Mission. When Mary Israel first attended school Richard Wolfe was the teacher; he spoke both the Cherokee and English languages. After Mr. Wolfe had patiently read the alphabet so that Mary might become accustomed to the characters she was told to take her seat and study her "letters", which she proceeded to do in a loud tone to the amusement of both teacher and pupils, and to her own embarrassment. At the age of twelve years she became a resident of the home of the Reverend Edwin Mack and family. Reverend Mack bore the Cherokee name of "Cawk", meaning "grow" in English. Here she learned

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in addition to her school work, sewing, cooking and other kinds of housework. Milking and butter making were included. Each evening family prayer was conducted and each child recited a verse of Scripture.

Miss Lila Wood and Mr. Daniel Freeman were among the teachers who later were employed at the Mission. The Moravians were the first Protestant missionaries to begin work among the Cherokees in the old Nation, and their oldest station was that known as Spring Place Mission, in Georgia. It was for this historic station that New Spring Place was named.

Each Christmas season the Moravians presented a program of hymns and recitations, after which a "love feast" was observed. According to their custom large sweet buns and coffee, with cream and sugar, were also served to each one present, church visitors alike. The room was darkened and a Christmas tree, of pine or cedar, beautifully decorated, was lighted with wax tapers, and gifts were then distributed.

The home of the Israel family was a thrifty one, and each child was assigned tasks which were promptly

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and happily performed. When nineteen years of age, Mary Elizabeth Israel and John Wesley Payne were married, January 5th, 1879, at the Mission, New Spring Place. The ceremony was performed by the Reverend Mr. Bishop of the Moravian Mission. At the age of seventy-eight years Mrs. Mary E. Payne is still actively engaged in household affairs.