

ROSS, S. W.

INTERVIEW

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Interview with S. W. Ross
Park Hill, Oklahoma

Field Worker - Elizabeth Ross
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The presiding officer in the Cherokee National Council chamber was designated as "speaker of the National Council." During the many years of the existence of the lower legislative body of the Cherokee Nation, both east and west of the Mississippi River, all speakers of the council were men of Cherokee nationality, with one exception.

In the earlier years of the Cherokee Nation in Indian Territory the full-blood or native Cherokees were largely in the ascendancy and the majority of councilmen were full-bloods. Consequently, the speakers chosen at the beginning of council, following elections held every two years, were often full-bloods. But in course of time white men whose wives were Cherokee citizens began to be elected in the various districts occasionally, and thus it came about that during the period of the nineties of the last century several white citizens by inter-marriage were among

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the number elected to the council. Also there were others who were of mixed white and Indian blood.

The National Council, composed of the Cherokee senate and the house of council convened on the first Monday in November each year, and in a year in which an election had been held, the selection of officers was in order. It was at this time that James S. Davenport, an attorney-at-law, whose wife was a Cherokee, he having been elected from the Coo-wee-scoo-wee district, became a candidate for the position of speaker of the council or lower house. Mr. Davenport received favorable consideration and was elected, was sworn in and assumed the position of speaker. At the time, considerable mention was made of the fact that the first white man in the history of the Cherokee Nation had been made presiding officer of the National Council.

Former Speaker Davenport, now serving on the Court of Criminal Appeals of the state of Oklahoma, is not only the first and only white man to become

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speaker of the Cherokee National Council, but is, so far as known, the only former speaker now living, with one exception.

In looking over old Cherokee law books and records, the lists of speakers of the National Council will be found to contain many names of persons once of note and prominence in the long past years. Some of these former speakers bore names in the native Cherokee language, while the names of others were ancestral names derived from English, Scotch or Irish ancestors who arrived in the original Cherokee country east of the Mississippi River during the eighteenth century, in instances.

The speaker of the Cherokee National Council presided over a larger body than did the president of the senate. The council was composed of varying numbers of members from each of the nine districts, while in the senate were two representatives only from each district.