

ROSS, S., n.

EARLY DAY FOX HUNTERS.

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Interview with S. W. Ross
Park Hill, Oklahoma.

Early Day Fox Hunters.

According to persons who some years ago personally recalled events of the past, there were several fox hunters of Tahlequah and Park Hill, who participated in the sport before the Civil War time, and some of the same men, following the close of the conflict have been referred to as taking part in the chase.

One of the largest packs of hounds was owned by Major George M. Murrell of Park Hill, some of the men of a long past period have related. There were several other fox hunters in the locality and all rode together on occasion. The country for miles around was unobstructed by fences and foxes were more plentiful than in recent years. Consequently, some great races were had, in the course of which large sections of country were ridden over between the beginning of nightfall and daybreak. There were occasions when the hounds pursued the fox far down in the hills along the Illinois River, getting completely out of hear-

ing of the hunters.

A very strange occurrence was once related in connection with a chase in which George M. Murrell, James E. Latta, and others of the Park Hill locality participated.

The hounds, as the story said, gave chase during a number of hours but never overhauled the fox, as the object of pursuit was thought to be. Midnight came and hounds could be heard in the distance in full cry. The hunters followed far behind. Then the hounds circled about in wide detour. Time continued to pass until the gray light of early dawn appeared. At that time the hounds passed at no great distance from the hunters. From their excited baying the fast-running animals were apparently quite near their object of pursuit. The hunters urged their horses to speed and soon were directly behind the hounds. Major Murrell and Mr. Latta were close together, and upon coming near to the hounds saw, running at great speed, immediately in front of the foremost hounds, a dwarf-like being with long black hair streaming in the early breeze, ran on a short distance and then suddenly vanished, leaving no trace nor track. Immediately the hounds lay down, panting and weary.

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The men with Major Murrell expressed great astonishment. One of the men declared that never again would he visit the section on a fox hunting expedition. But Major Murrell was unimpressed. "There are some things we do not understand" he is reputed to have said, as he blew his horn and rode away for home, followed by his companions and the hounds.

At "Hunter's Home", previously the home of Major George M. Murrell at Park Hill, there hung in the large dining room a series of colored scenes depicting the English Fox Hunt, which scenes were a source of pleasure and imagination to visitors, both old and young. Mrs Arminta Vann, a sister-in-law to Major Murrell, lived for some years at Hunter's Home, where friends and relatives received a cordial welcome. Major Murrell and family never returned to live at "Hunter's Home" after the period of the Civil War. At the beginning of the War the family had removed to Lynchburg, Virginia.

In the early days there were no red foxes among the Cherokee hills, but gray foxes were to be found in various sections. They were of the variety to which the pioneer hunters often gave chase. Today, 1938, there are both

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gray and red foxes among the Cherokee County hills. Both varieties are now protected by the state game laws and may not be killed. Veteran fox hunters have noted that great antipathy exists between the gray and red foxes, and between the sections in which they live there is a sort of neutral strip.