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TWENTY-THIRD INTERVIEW
CHARLES W. WILSON.

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Elizabeth Ross,
Investigator,
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An interview with Mr. S. W. Ross,
Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

Cherokee Yellow Pines

Along some of the steepest and most rugged slopes of the Cherokee hills, principally east of the Illinois River, small groves of yellow pine trees may be seen. In the winter season when the deciduous trees which grow upon the hills are devoid of leaves the green foliage of the pines are visible at long distances. These comparatively few specimens are all that are left of what were once numerous large and lofty pines.

When the Cherokees established their nation in Indian Territory nearly one hundred years ago, the far-flung hills were covered with large oak, hickory and walnut trees and extensive groves of the hardy yellow pine. Within a few years an occasional sawmill was established and workmen became engaged in felling numbers of pine trees which were sawed into lumber. These few mills were miles apart and access to them was over narrow and rugged trails or roads through prairies

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and woodlands. Persons who were able to purchase lumber built homes which were more commodious than the log houses usually were and thereafter the sawmills for many years were busy and gradually increased in number. The sawmills were established on the banks of unfailing streams as near as possible to the pine trees. So numerous were the pines in some sections that sawmills were sometimes maintained at one location for a number of years. But when at length no more pine logs were available, except by hauling them from long distances, a new site was selected and the sawmill was removed to that place.

In connection with the making of lumber in the earlier period, the Hildebrand sawmill was often mentioned. This mill was situated a number of miles north of Tahlequah; the Ross sawmill was at the mouth of Bungarner Hollow (now called Pumpkin Hollow) on the Illinois River, eight miles northeast of the town of Tahlequah. There were a few other early day sawmills. After the close of the Civil War other sawmills were established among the hills and have been in operation ever

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since. The pine trees have been almost destroyed during the many years which have passed since the first mill was established but a few pine logs are yet obtainable in some sections. But in these days (1938) lumber from oak trees is the principal output of most of the sawmills.

Some of the notable buildings of the old Cherokee Nation were constructed of native yellow pine. The plank-
ing used in the National Seminaries, as well as in the Capitol at Tahlequah was procured from sawmills in the hills. A number of the Tahlequah residences and stores were also built of pine lumber from a mill in some instances miles away. The sites of the earliest sawmills are yet discernible. In some places there are numbers of small and slender pines, which if protected, would after the lapse of many years grow into trees of considerable size.

The ferry boats which were maintained at several points along the Illinois River, from the earliest days of the Cherokee Nation, were constructed from lumber made from the yellow pine, evidently a very durable material, as some of the boats were in use for years before being replaced.

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Before and during the 1880's and perhaps later the
dried portions of yellow pine trees were often used in
the rural homes as a means of providing light for reading,
knitting and other occupations. The rich and oily pine
gave abundant light and was also much used for fuel in the
homes.