

RUTHERFORD, J. M.

INTERVIEW.

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Johnson H. Hampton, Field Worker
Indian-Pioneer History
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An interview with W. M.
Rutherford, a White Man,
Antlers, Oklahoma.

I was born in Wauklin County, Arkansas, on October 11, 1864. I was 21 years old when I landed in Stringtown, Indian Territory, Choctaw Nation.

I came on the train over the Katy Railroad, which road had not been finished very long. Stringtown at that time was a sawmill town.

I left my father and mother in Texas. We had moved from Arkansas to Texas, when I became 21 years old, so I left them there and came over to the Choctaw Nation. They wrote me several letters, asking me to come over saying that it afforded better opportunities for a young man just starting out in life, and they would help me to get started; so I came over and went to work at a sawmill. They were cutting pine timber and making lumber. I worked at this mill for a few years, then I came on east and landed at a sawmill over in this part of the nation. I was here (Antlers) before the Frisco built the railroad through this country. I think that this railroad was completed some time in 1887 or '88.

At the time I came here there were no white people in the country. There were in and around the sawmills and in towns but none out in the country, I have seen this country developed from a wilderness into a farming and stock country, there were but a few sawmills when I came; but they began to put sawmills up and down the Frisco railroad and finally they got to putting big sawmills where they cut from one hundred thousand to one hundred fifty thousand feet of lumber per day, and it did not cost them any much to get the timber. They were supposed to pay some royalty to the Choctaw Government. Instead of paying for them they just stole the timber. The Choctaws lost several thousand dollars in that way.

When I first landed in this country, the grass was fine. It was high as a man's head, even on horse back. It sure was God's Country then. Very few white people in here, nothing but Indians, at that time and it sure did offer a good opportunity for a young man starting out in life. I have made lots of money since I have been here and didn't have to work hard for it; but I spent it just as fast as I made it I guess. I haven't got any now but it was my fault, I made it

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and no one robbed me, but it got away from me.

There were lots of wild game here then, plenty of deer, turkey, squirrel, quail and some bear and plenty of fish in the creeks. The Indians did not kill very much game; all they killed was just when they needed it; and they would kill only enough for them to eat; they did not waste it. But when the white people begin to come in here, then they began to kill everything they saw. They killed more than they could eat, just like they did out in the west when they were killing buffaloes for their hides. They wasted the game until now there is no game of any kind, except a few deer, no turkeys at all.

I saw one Indian ball game; it was out from Stringtown on the prairie. They had ~~their~~ goals about three hundred yards apart. The game was between Atoka County and Jackfork County. When everything was ready, their goals put and their men ready, they started a fight, I never saw such fighting in all my life; they fought for a good while; then they got their men out--I guess there must have been about twenty-five on each side--they then begin to play ball but before it got started good they fought again; they fought

all during the game, I don't know whether they finished the game or not. Anyway they finally stopped the game and fought it out. They used their ball sticks to fight with and it was some fight.

The Choctaw Indians were all good people and they did not bother anybody. They would fight and kill one another but they did not bother the white people at all. A good many of them used to bring venison, turkeys, and other things to sell, and they would bring some garden vegetables to sell and the sawmill people would buy from them everytime they would come with things to sell.

To my mind there are no better class of people than the Choctaw people. They are honest, lawbiding citizens, and will do just what they say they will do-- you can depend on them; of course, they are just like other people, they expect you to treat them right, and they will treat you right. If one gets it in for you then you had better watch "you might get into trouble with them."

I never did attend any of their "crys" I have heard of them but I just did not want to go, for it was not concerning me in the least so I wouldn't go, I

thought that it was no business for a white man is why I did not attend one of them.

I have lived among the Choctaws for the last fifty-two years and I don't know of any enemy I have among them whatever. They have always treated me fine and I have treated them the same way, and have gotten along just fine with all of the Indians that I know and I know a good many of them, but there are not as many as there used to be. The full-bloods are dying out very fast. I don't know but I think that in fifty years there won't be any full bloods left to tell the tale.