

INTERVIEWS WITH MRS. SAM SANIERS .

By O. C. Davidson, Field Worker.

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I was born January 19, 1868, in the Cherokee Nation in what was known as the White Oak settlement, nine miles east of Braggs, I. T. My mother's people came here from Tennessee with what was known as the first settlers. My great-grandmother died on the way over here. My grandmother was only nine years old at the time. She and her father came on alone. She grew up and married Wright Ronney who was my mother's father. He died and she later married Jacob Bushyhead, an uncle of Chief Dennis Bushyhead.

My father's people came here from Tennessee also, but they came later as emigrants when the Indians were driven west. My people were not full bloods. There was some white blood in the family, but I don't know just what per cent.

My father, Thomas Ballard, ran away from home when he was sixteen years old and joined the Northern Army and fought in the Civil War. I can just remember hearing him say he fought in the battle of Bull Run and that of Bunker Hill. They are the only two battles I can ever remember hearing him mention. He and my mother were married after the war was over in 1865.

When I was real small my mother had her loom, her spinning wheel and her wool cards. Father always kept some sheep to produce the wool, and mother carded the wool into rolls, spun it into thread, then she would dye the thread in different colors, making her own dyes from the barks of different trees, such as Red Oak, Ash, hulls from green walnuts. She would then weave the thread in to cloth and make clothes for the family. She knit our socks and stockings.

The men all wore what they called hunting shirts. The cloth was woven with stripes of all colors, generally running the full length of the garment. Mother would make the garments and then trim them with fringe which she would make from yarn thread.

When I can first remember my father had a yoke of oxen that he did his plowing and far work with, but later he bought some horses.

He didn't raise any cotton in those days. Just corn and a little wheat. When they had bread, the nearest mill to grind the wheat was what we called the Cape Hill Mill, just across the line in Arkansas. When they had to take wheat to mill, it would take several days to get to the mill. Of course, every farmer had a few cows and hogs,

and they raised their own meat and of course, had plenty of milk and butter and with the gardens and we even bought a little sugar and coffee.

When we would run out of money for these things, we would sell some of our hogs. And, in addition to that, wild game was very plentiful.

We have seen many men times before deer in a drove grazing around on the hillside near our home. The turkeys were so plentiful that we would eat turkey sometimes until we would become so tired that we would not even shoot a turkey at all.

There was plenty of squirrel, raccoon, fox and opossum. The men would hunt and trap and sell the animals for their use.

When someone in the neighborhood wanted to build a house, clear a piece of ground, or make rails to fence his ground, instead of hiring hands to do it, he would prepare all kinds of meat and other foods, and invite everyone for miles around to come. The women cooked the food out on log fires in big wash pots. They would piece quilts and quilt them while the men put up the building, cleared the

ground, split the rails or whatever the job was. The man accomplishing the most work would receive a prize such as tobacco or money and the woman that pieced the most quilt blocks or quilted the most would get a cake and when the days work was done everyone danced.

My father was a member of an Indian fraternity, called the Kee-Too-Wahs Society. While my family were not fullbloods, we lived in the neighborhood of many fullbloods and they were all very fine neighbors. They were all honest and lived very much as the people live today.

Of course, they had very few churches. They would have camp meetings. People would come for miles and miles and bring their families and camp and stay for weeks at a time. They would kill cattle, hogs, and sometimes wild deer and turkeys. The meats were cooked in big pots, pits were dug and the meats were barbecued. Everyone ate together. The preacher always preached and prayed in the Indian language.

The first school I ever went to was known as the White Oak School. It was built of logs, hewed square. The school had a good board floor in it and the seats, benches we called them, were made of pine lumber, and painted.

Captain Cookson was instrumental in organizing the school and building the house. I can remember him well. He was a large man, very gruff in his ways. I was always afraid of him. He wore long beard, reaching almost to his waist line, but with all his gruff ways he was a very good man, a good citizen, and very valuable to the community.

All the fullblood children of that neighborhood went to school at White Oak. They soon learned to read, write and speak the English language. Later, I went to school at Braggs. The school there was

called South Bethel. There were many fullbloods there, also, but they were all taught the English language and the customs of the white people.

Henry Starr, who later became a notorious law, was one of my school mates. He was a very fine boy, studied hard and learned very fast. He was always very genteel and polite.

The Indian burial custom was considerably different to that of the white man. They buried their dead with singing and prayer, and when the casket had been lowered into the grave the men would all march around the grave, each one throwing in a shovel full of dirt. Then the women and children would march around, each one throwing in a handful of dirt. After the grave was filled they would go to the nearest stream and wash their face and hands. They said by doing this, that they would not be lonesome for the dead. Then months, and sometimes a year later, all the relatives and friends would gather and build a brush arbor, prepare all kinds of meats and food. Great crowds would come from miles around and a preacher would preach the funeral. I knew one man who had his wife's funeral preached several months after she had been buried, and before the crowd had been dismissed he stepped out before the preacher with a bride and was married again.

My father is buried at the Pettit Cemetery between Braggs and Gore. My mother is buried at the Cockson Cemetery.

The fullbloods used to gather all kinds of nuts from the woods, dry them, pound them in to fine bits with stones, then run them through a kind of sifter they called a riddle. A riddle was made from small strips of cane. After the nuts were run through the riddle, they put it into a mortar and pounded it with a pestle until it was a fine powder.

It was then ready for use. They would pour hot water over it and run it through a sieve and it was eaten with hominy. They called it Canuchi.

On April 16, 1898, I was married to Samuel Sanders who served for 4 years as representative of the Cherokee Nation in the Cherokee Council at Tahlequah. He was a member of the Council when statehood was declared.

I only attended two stomp dances in my life. One at Tahlequah and one at Sallisaw. They would gather for the stomp dance just like they would for the camp meetings. They prepared plenty of food and sometimes stayed for days at a time. The women dressed in Indian costume with great strings of shells off of terrapins, turtles and such, around their ankles. They always had a big log fire burning and danced in a circle around that fire, always chanting or humming and sometimes whooping.

The nearest postoffice to my old home in the White Oak settlement, until in 1882 or 1883, was at Fort Gibson, but in 1882 or 1883 a postoffice was established there near the White Oak School. It was called Garfield Postoffice after James A. Garfield, who was president at that time.