

SHELL, WILLIAM

INTERVIEW

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Gus Hummingbird
Field Worker
June 22, 1937

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Interview with Mr. William Shell.
Stilwater, Oklahoma.
Father-Toss Shell
Mother-Jennie Walkingstick.

William Shell, a fullblood Cherokee, was born in Goingsnake District, Cherokee Nation, June 2, 1872. His parents were Toss Shell and Jennie Walkingstick, Cherokees, both natives of the Cherokee Nation.

John D. Shell, the father of Toss Shell, came from North Carolina in 1838. He settled about three miles east of the town of Westville now. The place is now owned by Jim Welchel. John Shell is buried on this farm. Shell branch was named in honor of this old settler.

Old John Shell's children were Jesse, Toss, Jim, Charley, John, Jr., and Susie. They are all dead.

William, better known as Bill, was the son of Toss, the second child of old John Shell.

Toss married Jennie Walkingstick and to this union there were eight children born, namely: William, Laura, Lydia, Sallie, Susie, Ada, Jonanna, and Jesse. The latter still lives on the old home place.

EARLY LIFE

Most of William's early life was spent on a farm operated by his father on the Shell branch about three

miles southeast of the present town of Westville, Oklahoma.

The family lived on this farm until William was about ten years old, then they moved farther down the branch on the place known now as the Henry Downing place. His father traded for this place from some Cherokee, giving in payment a small pony.

After moving to their new home, they started farming on a larger scale, the new farm consisting of about twenty-five acres. Corn was the principal crop among the full bloods at that time. This could be used for food in so many ways. The land was fertile in those days and averaged about forty bushels to the acre.

Wheat was also raised on farms that were older where there were not many stumps. William was reared in what people would term in those days a well-to-do family. They usually raised plenty to eat on the farm and owned several head of stock, and usually William's father would have the woods full of hogs.

William, being the oldest member of the family of Shell children, was forced to farm with his father at a very early age. He was taught everything that went with farming. He was a good teamster with oxen when he was twelve years old.

He remembers the summer that the Kansas City Southern Railroad went through the Goingsnake District. The contractors worked some foreign people who were very fond of cucumbers. Mr. Shell planted about three acres of his land to cucumbers and they sold every cucumber they could spare. The same on watermelons. This railroad went through about 1884. William has spent many days watching the workmen when they were building the two bridges across the Baron River and the Shell Branch.

They lived on the Downing place five years. Then they moved to a place east of the Whitmire plantation. This place was known as the Bill Morton place in the east Peavine community.

Bill Morton was an old Georgia Cherokee. At this time William was about fifteen years old. After moving to this place he attended school at old Peavine, completing the fifth grade, at that time considered a fair education.

Charlotte Whitmire was one of his teachers, and among his school mates he recollects at that time are William England, Isaac Crittenden, Hooley Blackwood, Martin Blackwood, John Hogner, Joe Proctor, and Ben Knight.

CHURCH

The earliest church that he remembers anything about was the old Peavine Church which is sometime called Big Shed. This was one of the earliest churches established in the Cherokee Nation. As told to him by his father, Toss, this was a place of worship before the Civil War. There was no building at that time. Every summer they would build a large arbor. The Cherokee people called it the *ig shed* in their language and it was just called that in English.

After the Civil War this place was replaced by a building that the Cherokees built. William, himself, attended services at this place several years later. The building was of log construction, partitioned into four large rooms. The chimney was built in the center of the building. There was a fire-place in each room. Among the early day church workers were Nelson Terrapin, Mr. Critts, Wolfe Coon, Johnson Spade, Cornsilks, Redbirds, and the Mitchers. This old church was located about five miles north of the present town of Stilwell, Oklahoma. An old cemetery marks the location at the present time. Some of the old ministers of that time are buried at this place.

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After statehood this building was torn down and moved to the present Baptist of Antioch farther down the branch. At this church will be found some old benches that were made before the Civil War. A record book of Captain Smith Christie during that war is also found at this place. Smith Christie was a Captain in one of the armies during that war, whether Northern or Southern is not known.

This book was the property of the Government, how it came to ^{be} there or who brought it there, no one in this community knows. This book gives the account of the expenditures of his army for one year.

INDIAN COOKING

The fullbloods ate the simplest of food at that time. What was to be found on most of the tables in this community was Bean-bread, beans, wild meats and some kind of dried fruit. The fruit was easily found as it grew wild in most places. The first orchard that was ever planted in this part of the Cherokee Nation was by an old Cherokee by the name of Ta-Neu-Woo. His place was located about five miles northeast of the town of

Stilwell. The Cherokees laughed at this man when he was setting out his trees. He told them that he was going to cultivate them.

Every thing grew wild in way of fruit at that time. Indian peaches grew in the woods. This peach was a black peach. The Cherokees would gather them in August when they ripened and dry them over a fire. They did not dry peaches as they did the apples. They dried apples in the sunshine on the roof of the house.

There were no fruit jars as there are now so there was nothing canned. All of the fruit was dried. Berries were not put up as we do now. They were eaten while they lasted in the summer. The strawberries at that time were as large as tame berries are now. Some Cherokees would pick them and sell them to the merchants at Evansville, getting twenty five cents per gallon for them.

Squirrels were so thick that some summers they would ruin corn patches by gnawing on the roasting ears. Squirrels emigrated every four or five years in those days.

Wild meat was also found on almost every table at that time. Deer, turkeys, squirrel and many other small animals

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were found in abundance. There was no trouble to go out some morning and find as many as ten or twelve deer in a bunch. Same in turkeys. At one time the turkeys were so numerous that it was impossible to raise beans as they ate them up.

Bean-bread and hominy were their chief foods. Hominy was different from what we call hominy now. What we call hominy now was called "skin-corn" at that time. This hominy was made from corn that was beat up in an old mortar. The grits were then cooked, making lots of juice in the cooking. This was set until it turned sour. Many old timers would drink a cup of this hominy and a piece of Bean-bread for breakfast. They would go to the woods and stay all day. When you would see some old Cherokee in the woods in those days, he usually had a piece of this famous bread in his pocket for his mid-day meal.

Some Cherokees were good hunters. They had made arrangements with some of the merchants in the towns so they had a market for their kill. Old John Chewey was considered the best hunter in the Goingsnake District.

The old man was wichey in his hunting. He could tell when to go and when not to go. He was the same way about fishing. He could catch any kind of fish he wanted. He knew where the different fish fed. Same in the hunting.

There was not a family in the Cherokee Nation that did without meat if they had the get-up about them to get it. Hogs were wild and everybody had a claim in the woods. No one would say anything if you killed one for your own use. Just so you did not sell it.

Most of the early cooking was done out in the yard. There were no cook stoves in the Indian country. The bread was baked in an old time oven out in the yard. The meats were all cooked on the fireplace in pots.

DYES AND PAINTS

The Cherokees did not paint up, as other Indians did. The only thing they painted was their baskets. They dyed their yarn that they made. All the dyes were made from bark of trees. The willow made a yellow paint. Walnut made a green.

There was not a house in the Goingsnake District that was painted before the strip Payment in 1893. The Cherokees

then builded better homes and all almost alike. They erected two story buildings.

INDIAN MEDICINE

All of the medicine at that time was brought from the woods. Herbs were used to cure sickness. And doctoring by fire was another way that the Cherokees cured sickness. There were not so many kinds of communicable diseases at that time. The only thing that was common was the Summer Chills. The most dreaded disease among the Cherokees was Consumption. Later this disease was called T. B. The Cherokees claim that this could be cured. But they are very particular in the way they doctor this disease. They were dead shots in doctoring snake-bite, burns, ear-ache, tooth-ache, and colds. For the ear-ache and the tooth-ache they used tobacco. They fixed this tobacco for the patient to smoke. The tobacco made you sick, if your pain was gone when you awoke you would never have another tooth-ache in that tooth. It would fall out itself.

For burns they doctored with water. For snake-bite they used fire. They still can doctor these at the present time.

TRADING AND MILLING POINTS

The early day first trading points were Evansville, Siloam and Cincinnati. They did all their trading at Cincinnati but after moving to Peavine community, they did their trading at Evansville.

Siloam was the early day town. After the strip payment this place became a busy town for all of the Cherokees built new homes and they bought all their lumber from this place.

Their wheat milling point was Cincinnati or a little south of the present Cincinnati. There was a mill operated at this place called Moore's Mill.

Their corn milling place ^{was} at Eli Wright's place on Baron Fork Creek. Their water mill was located about two hundred yards west of where the Dutch Mills and the Evansville Creeks form the Baron River. The Baron was dammed up at this place with large sycamore logs.

There was also a small store operated at this place a little later. Many Cherokees went to this place every Saturday. Most of the milling was done by the women folks.

There was also a saw-mill at this place a little later. It was also operated by the same man. This was about the first saw-mill that was established in the Goingsnake District.

Sometime later there was another saw-mill erected at Duncan Springs, near the present village of Baron, Oklahoma. This was operated by Joe Starr.

The first mill mentioned was ran by water power. The logging was all done by ox teams.

Gill Henson was the best logger at that time. He lived near the Wright Mill. He usually drove about six yoke at a time.

CIVIL WAR

Bill does not know much about the Civil War, only what was told him by his father and his grandfather. His grandfather was a Captain in the Confederate Army in the Cherokee Nation. Jesse Shell, his uncle, was also a Captain in the Confederate Army. Jesse was in the battle of Cane Hill, the largest battle fought in the Civil War. The Shell part of the army routed the Federals. There were many men killed on both sides in this battle. Toss, his father, was also in the army in that war.

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POLITICS

There were only two political parties in the Cherokee Nation in the early days. They were the Downing and the National Parties.

The National Party was the bunch that remained with the Union in the Civil War. The Downing Party was the bunch that favored the South. The Cherokees until this day are divided on this issue. William says it does not take much discussion to get those two factions to fighting. In the election of 1890 there were several men killed. In this election Johnson Whitmire and Jonathan Whitmire, brothers, ran for the Cherokee legislature from this District. Wolfe Coon ran against the latter for Senator and they tied for the place. A special election was held at Peavine where the election stealing was supposed to have taken place, and at this election Whitmire won by three votes. The discussion of this incident was the cause of Joe Crittenden getting killed. He was one of the counters.

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ALLOTMENT.

All of the Shells were in favor of the Allotment. They believed in each Cherokee having his share of the public domain in which he lived. By allotting this per capita they could improve their homes. So in the election about Allotment they all voted for the law.