

SIMMONS, CORA
DUNCAN, DILLARD

INTERVIEW

13478

172

SIMMONS, CORA.
DUNCAN, DILLARD.
Hazel B. Greene,
Journalist.
March 28, 1938.

INTERVIEW.

#13478.

Interview with Cora Simmons,
Boswell, Oklahoma.

I was born and reared in Logan County, Kentucky, and attended college in Bowling Green, Kentucky; I came to the Indian Territory in 1897 and lived with relatives, John and Mary Duncan, grandparents of the present sheriff of Choctaw County, Cap Duncan. They lived at the old Annette Post Office which was later called Jackson. I taught a two months summer subscription school under a brush arbor there at Annette. All my pupils were white children. Annette was on what was called Ten Mile Prairie. Look as far as you could and one could hardly see a tree, fence, or a house. Houses were five and six miles apart. It was seven and a half miles from Annette to old Bennington, and bald prairie was in between them. There was not a house on the way between Annette and old Bennington. The Indians' homes were all stuck back in the timber, usually on a creek or close to a spring.

SIMMONS, CORA.
DUNCAN, DILLARD.

INTERVIEW.

#13478.

2

We attended an old Presbyterian Church close to old Bennington which was said to have been established in 1847 or 1848. The first church house I have been told was a one-story log affair, the second was a two-story log house with the church downstairs and the Masonic Lodge room above. It burned and now there is a frame building there. Stories vary as to whether the buildings were of logs.

The winter of 1897-'98 I taught a Government school at Black Jack three miles southwest of old Bennington. It was a six months term. My pupils were all Choctaw Indian children. Now that was a job because I knew so little Choctaw and had to teach the children English.

Then Dillard and Harry Duncan moved over to Mayhew court ground and went into the raising of stock over there. They also had a store there on the old court ground. I taught a three months subscription school there in a little plank one-room schoolhouse.

SIMMONS, CORA.
DUNCAN, DILLARD.

INTERVIEW.

#13478.

3

I will say that those old settlers and their wives were a very substantial class of people. No matter how far they had to haul their cotton to market, they shared the hardships together if necessary. The wives did not object to riding thirty or forty miles on a load of cotton in order to get to town or to visit a sick friend or just to be going. A train of fifteen or twenty wagons in the fall of the year would load up with cotton, corn, oats, sheep, hides, or just anything they wanted to take to market and "truckle" out. If it took two, three or four days to go, or even a week, it was all right. They cheerfully went and sold their products and returned with merchandise for the store or neighbors and themselves. They would camp out wherever night overtook them. I liked this country and do yet. I returned to Kentucky once but I came back soon to this country.

I now own and operate a drug store at Boswell.

Dillard Duncan.

I am from Kentucky and came to the Indian Territory in 1886 when I was about grown. For the most of my life

SIMMONS, CORA.
DUNCAN, DILLARD.

INTERVIEW.

#13478.

4

I have been engaged in stock raising although for years and years I owned a store at Mayhew.

The old steel jail that is at Bokchito now was purchased by a wealthy Indian, Wilson N. Jones. They said he got to be a millionaire but I do not know about that but I do know that he got to be Governor of the Choctaw Nation. His son, Willie, was killed down on Red River somewhere in a drunken brawl. Anyway Tuck Bench and one Crowder were indicted for the murder and Jones presented that steel jail to the Choctaw Nation to use to incarcerate the murderers of his son. He said he would have not been so mad about the killing if they had only taken care of his son's body and brought it home or let him know about it, but they left him out where they killed him until he was found by neighbors. Bench and Crowder went to Mayhew for trial once but the trial was put off for some reason, or they asked for change of venue. Then while out on bond they left the country and have been told that they took the oath of allegiance to the United States

SIMMONS, CORA.
DUNCAN, DILLARD.

INTERVIEW.

#13478.

5

so that they could be citizens of the United States, thinking that they would escape being tried for the murder. They were never tried. I think Bench died in Arkansas and Crowder, with two trappers, was killed away down on Red River close to Idabel somewhere by a negro. I was on the grand jury that indicted that negro. I believe he was executed.

The original courthouse was about a half-mile east of Sunkist and took care of the business of five counties. The courthouse burned and court was held then at Mayhew. My brother and I paid to have the old steel jail moved from Sunkist in the forks of Boggy Creek to our place at Mayhew. Then they held court there. District court, it was. We had a two story log house built around the steel jail. It was really just a cell. The jail was below and a jury room above in the log house. The logs were hewn.

Officers used to be always deputizing us boys to go with them after "hoss thieves" and other criminals. I remember once there was a robbery and officers came that

SIMMONS, CORA.
DUNCAN, DILLARD.

INTERVIEW.

#13478.

6

night after us to go help arrest the suspects who were camped down on Boggy Creek in a tent. It was raining and my brother and I did not want to go in the rain but one fellow there was just a "rarin'" to go and get them. We waited till the next morning though and he was the bravest fellow in the bunch as we rode single file down the path and surrounded the camp and "began taking trees" on the camp. Then he wanted to go back and take the horses out of danger's way. We knew these men were bad but we arrested them without any trouble because we had them surrounded. We found lots of stolen stuff in their tent.