

INDEX CARDS

Muskogee
Porter, Pleasant
Schools--Creek Nation
Perryman, J. M.
Language--Euchee
Clothes--Creek
Food--Creek
Names--Euchee
Neighborliness--Creek Nation
Hotels--Creek Nation
Stage Routes
Churches--Creek Nation
Brown Family

EXPERIENCES OF PIONEER TEACHER
OF INDIAN TERRITORY DAYS.

Mrs. Anna Peterson Shortall, Porter, Okla.
Interview given to Miss Ella Robinson, Field Worker
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Peterson Carl G. Patterson and *Peterson* Chlore Kathleen Curren Patte-
son were my parents.

My father was born in Sweden near Norkoping, in 1839. He emigrated to the United States in 1869, at the age of thirty years. He located at Nanticook, Pa. There he was employed by the Pennsylvania Railroad and Mining Company. He was married to my mother at that place in 1874. She belonged to an Irish family who had emigrated to this country during the earliest settlement of the colonies. In 1878 he came to Muskogee, taking a position on the M. K. & T. Railroad as Foreman of the car repair and inspection department. He remained in the employ of the company for 30 years with only two weeks lay-off during the time he was in a hospital. I was born in Avoka, Penn. and was 27 months old when my parents brought me to Muskogee. We lived in a little box house down on the west side of the tracks near the west end of where the viaduct now is. As Muskogee was only a village of a few houses, being near the center of town was most desirable. Our nearest neighbor was Mr. Pless Porter. That was during the lifetime of his first wife the mother of his children. His little boy, Will,

2

persisted in playing on the tracks. I attended school at the Rock Church at the corner of Okmulgee and Cherokee. Brother Brewer was pastor of the Methodist Church and had established the school a few years prior. Mrs. M. T. Locke Brother Brewer's sister, was my first teacher. I had already learned my letters from studying them on the box cars that stood on the tracks in front of our house and on the front of my mother's stove. I learned M. K. & T. the first ones. The room in which Mrs. Locke taught was in the back yard of the church and she lived just across the street. Brother Brewer taught the higher classes in the church building. A little later I attended private school taught by Mrs. Edwin Burke, an experienced teacher from Kansas City. Her husband was a nephew of Mr. William Madden a prominent contractor in Muskogee at that time and who erected the building known as the Madden Building and now occupied by the Y.M.C.A. Among the students in the school was: Ted Wisdom, son of Mr. D. M. Wisdom, Indian Agent, Ralph Dresback, the first white child born in Muskogee. Three of the Tufts children, Ella Rob-

inson whose home was in the country, Fred and Tommie Madden, my little brother Carl and Myself. Mrs. Burke was a most excellent teacher and thoroughly believed in enforcing the law. The building in which she taught stood between Main and Second Street just north of where Court Street now runs. Col. and Mrs. Tufts lived where the Railway Exchange now stands. Little Carl Tufts was only five years old. After sitting quietly for an hour or so he would become so bored, he without leave of absence, would take himself home. It kept his mother busy giving him a switching and bringing him back to school as he made several trips a day. Mrs. Burke was compelled to close the school on account of the illness of her husband. The next year I attended a private school by Miss Kate Shaw, a young Creek Indian woman, who had been educated at Northfield Massachusetts. The Presbyterian Boarding School for Indian girls had been opened prior to this time but had not admitted white students, however, arrangements had been made whereby they could attend and I started to school there. Miss Kate Cox, a lady from the North was in charge of the school. I completed the prescribed course and was ready for something to do. I didn't know exactly what.

On learning that one of my friends just my age, 16 years was going to teach, I announced to my parents that if she could teach school I could too. My father said: "Do you think you are smart enough to teach school?" My reply was "I think I am smarter than she is, at least I made better grades in school." Then father said; "If you take the required examinations and pass I will give you a gold watch." And I wanted the watch and a lady's watch at that. I shopped for clothes that would impress the School Board with my dignity and give me more mature appearance. My hat would have looked well on a woman of 80., My dress was made with a bell skirt and touched the floor all around. Thus attired I journeyed to Bufala to stand the ordeal of examination, inspired with the promise of a gold watch and the ambition to do something for myself, gave me courage. Mr. J. M. Perryman was Superintendent of the Creek Schools at that time. Taylor Chisso, George Tiger, and William Harvison, composed the School Board. On returning home my father asked: "Well what are you going to do?" I said: "I am going to get a watch". That explained to him that I had passed the required examination. Shortly after I received, not a teacher's certifi-

cate as I had expected, but an appointment out in the Creek Nation, designated as Pole Cat School. As I had never heard of the place I inquired of Mr. Pleas Porter as to the location. He said: "I never heard of the school but I know where the Pole Cat Creek is, and that perhaps is the place." Which it proved to be. It was located in the third Judicial district near where the town of Slick is now located. I began teaching September 5, 1892, and taught there one year. As there had been no school there, and they did not expect to have one, there had been no provision made for a house in which to teach. However, there was a vacant log house on the land belonging to Mr. and Mrs. Tiger. He was familiarly known as Tiger Jack. I boarded with them and was well treated in their home. This house had been used for a corn crib and had no door shutters. It was heated with a wood stove and it fell to my lot many times to cut the wood. There were forty full-blood Euche children in school and not one of them understood a word of English. Neither did I know one word of Euche, however a solution to the problem came in this way. Mrs. Tiger's household duties did not consume all of her time and her husband had all the time there was and they both were a great help to me. She spoke English and Creek. He spoke Creek and Euche. I would tell her

something in English. She would repeat it to him in Greek and he would interpret it to the children in Tushee. As the school was near their home they spent a great deal of time with me and were very much interested in the school as they had a little boy whose name was attended. The ages of the pupils ranged from six to twenty-two years. The boys as well as the girls had long hair and all had sugzers; something had to be done about it and that without delay as I too had long hair and those little animals were no respecter of persons. Tiger Jack held the boys while I cut their hair and Mrs. Tixer and I applied soap generously and washed all their heads. And in that way eliminated the most disagreeable feature from our group. In warm weather the boys up to the age of 11 or 12 years old, came to school clad in long shirts minus trousers and underwear. When the boys put on a clean shirt they didn't take the trouble to remove the dirty ones and by Spring-time they had on several. It was there that I first learned to eat Indian food. Mrs. Tiger made grape soup, made from wild grapes that ripened in the Fall. They were cooked and the juice strained and dumplings

7

made with corn meal were added. It was good and I liked it. I also had my first sofka there and I liked it, too. As many of the children had no names I had to distinguish them in some way so I gave them a name that suggested something about the child. For instance; the boy that wore a red shirt would be known as Red shirt. That was safe until he learned his name for they rarely changed their shirts. The larger boys were supposed to cut the wood but they soon found out if they were late to school, they would not be compelled to do it as I had already cut it. I paid \$8.00 a month for my board, and did my own laundry.

As it was a custom of all Indians to give food and shelter to their friends in trouble, I would see Mrs. Tiger go down through the timber every day with a package. One day as I started for a walk she asked me if I would take a bucket of lunch and set it on a certain stump in the woods. I did so and before I got away a rather unpleasant looking Indian man came out from where he had been hiding and said; " You must be teacher"

"I thought Mrs. Tigor would bring lunch." and I told him I was glad to do it for her. I stayed one year but did not return the next year, as I was sent to Green Leaf School near Okemah. That was in 1893. It was an all day drive from Okmulgee on the stage. They stopped at Lee, a half way place for dinner. The hotel was kept by a negro couple named Lee. The woman was a famous cook and they served fine meals for twenty-five cents. This school, got its name from a nearby creek. It was a full-blood Creek settlement. There had been a school there for sometime and the children had been taught to read parrot fashion by former teachers and did not understand the words they read. Some of them were in the third and fourth grades. I put the entire group back in the primer and started them at the beginning. I boarded with a widow, Mrs. Cinda Mulgussie, a sister of Holulgee Fixico. His English name was John Smith. Here, too, was a problem to be solved as the children could not understand English. I took a book home and with Cinda's help learned to read the primer in Creek. A lesson at a time. When the children found out that I could read a little bit in Creek they were

delighted and it seemed to inspire them to learn to read English. In that way the pupils seemed to grasp the meaning of the lessons and we had wonderful success. The attendance was poor in bad weather as there were no good roads. I taught in a building used by the Baptists for a church on Sunday. It was built with logs, standing on on ends, and the seats were of split logs with the flat side up, with heavy pegs for legs. During the church services the men sat on one side of the room and the women on the other. And every Monday we had to scrub to the floor clean up the tobacco. Mrs. Mulgussie had a daughter, Kate, who was a bright intelligent young woman and had a good education. She was a great help to me in my school work and we became good friends. She married a son of Mrs. Alice Brown Davis, a sister of John Brown, once Chief of the Seminoles. Kate was the mother of John B. Davis, a prominent attorney living at Okemah. We had plenty of Indian food, well cooked, and it seemed that it agreed with me as I gained in weight from 90 pounds to 140 during the school term. Sweet potatoes and sofka were always on the table. I stayed one year. Not only was the teacher expected to be able to instruct the children but she must know every-

10

thing else as well. I was called upon to prescribe for a sick man and a sick baby. Being rather familiar with the common diseases and the remedy of the country, I was successful in both cases and they made rapid recovery. But when I was called upon to prescribe for a sick horse I felt that matters had just about reached the climax. But as the horse had only a bad case of colic and the standard remedy of a soda drenching followed by one of salts, he too recovered and added to the list of testimonials to my ability. Had it been in their power I would have been awarded a medal for bravery when I investigated a ghost scare one night. As I did not believe there were such things as ghosts I set out to find what the strange thing was. It proved to be only a garden hoe with a black blade hanging in a tree that cast a weird light, and frightened grown folks as well as the children.

In 1894 I went to teach at the Creek Boarding School for orphans at Okmulgee. Moty Tiger was Superintendent of the school. Mrs. Tiger acted as matron and Miss Minnie Fryer Finnegan was matron and taught sewing. Miss Bessie Trent of Muskogee was one of the teachers. At mid term Moty Tiger resigned and Peter Ewing and his wife, usie McCombs Ewing, took charge. They had one child, a baby, who became ill and died during the term. I was helping them care for him and he died while I was holding him. Near the end of the term, 1895, my young brother, Carl, living in Muskogee with my parents was killed in a railroad accident.

I felt that if I was going to teach it would be necessary to have a college course, and in the Fall of 1895 I went to Oswego, Kansas, to take college work. After completing a four years college course I returned to the Orphan's School and taught again for two years. George Tiger was Superintendent for one year. He was the eldest son of Moty Tiger. Then Johnson Tiger, his younger son and his wife, Lula Benson Tiger, took charge.

During the time I was there we had two small pox epidemics. A number of the students died. Two boys died one

12

one night when I was alone in the room with them. Dr. Claude Thompson was the school doctor and was put in charge of the situation and he did all he could. But that was not all we had. We, or at least the children, had the itch. Miss Bell, right, one of the teachers, a northern lady, spent many miserable hours fearing she would catch it, but as we teachers used all precaution none of them had it and we cured the children of it. After teaching there for three years, I went to Buffalo and taught in the Creek Boarding School for girls for one year. I resigned and married Mr. Frank Shortall who was also teaching there. The next year Mr. Shortall and I took charge of the Wheelock Academy in the Choctaw Nation. This is one of the oldest schools in the Indian Territory. The school was named in honor of a teacher in Dartmouth College who had been greatly interested in the education of the Indian. I became ill and came home near the end of the year. We moved to Porter, Oklahoma, where my husband went into business, and I taught for nine years in the public school there.

13.

During that time and after, I obtained my degree from Tulsa University. I am the mother of five children, four of whom are living. We have made our home continuously in Porter, Oklahoma. All teachers certificates I ever had were issued to me by the different superintendants of Creek Schools up to 1899 when I received my first one from Mr. John B. Benedict, after he was made ^{superintendent} Superintendent of the Indian Schools.