

SMITH, MAI M.

SPENCER STEPHENS LETTER.

13878

251

SMITH, MAI M.

LETTER.
SPENCER STEPHENS.

13878

Claremore, Oklahoma.
May 21, 1937.Mr. Grant Foreman,
Muskogee, Oklahoma.

Mr. Foreman-

I regret the delay in sending you the facts concerning Spencer Stephens' life but I made a special effort to learn something more. My Aunt, Mrs. Florence Evans, in Colorado (1020 15th Street, Boulder) can give you more accurate and colorful information than I.

We are all much more proud of my grandmother, Sarah Hicks Stephens, as a personality, and she could tell you something of her as his wife.

Spencer Stephens was born enroute when the Cherokees came from Georgia. His mother was a full-blood Cherokee-whose name I do not know. His father was a white man and we have been told that he was one of those who went down the river on a flat boat never to return. There is some dispute as to whether his name was Willis D. or Jesse Stephens. His wife later remarried. This time it was a cobbler and they lived in Tahlequah when my mother was a little girl.

SMITH, MAI M.

LETTER

13878

2

For some reason my grandfather's mother did not bring him up. That was done by Dr. J. C. Bushyhead's grandmother at Westville. Mrs. Sallie McSpadden of Chelsea had a picture of her father, Clem Rogers, and Spencer Stephens when they were mere boys. At any rate he was there very young as he planted a cedar tree when he was only eight years of age which is still standing. It was when on a return trip to visit his tree and boyhood surroundings that he died quite suddenly at the old home.

Next in accurate information is his graduation from the Male Seminary. As a child I was told that he and my grandmother were both valedictorians of their classes. That would have been in 1854. I have her valedictory address but no proof of his.

After graduation he tramped to San Antonio. He thought of becoming a teacher there. However, he returned to the Indian Territory in a short time and he and my grandmother, Sarah R. Hicks were married. When the War came he enlisted with the North.

After the War he entered politics, was delegate to Washington. His radical views on allotment and the opening of the country

SMITH, MAI M.

LETTER.

13878

3

cost him his post. He urged the holding of all mineral rights, to be divided equally and was ridiculed for it. He was forced to move away from Tahlequah to have any peace. They went to Vinita. He became Superintendent of Public Instruction and held that position for seven years, visiting every school in the Cherokee Nation at least once a year. Was the first Superintendent of the new Female Seminary, Principal of the Orphan Asylum and taught in various towns, Vinita, Chelsea, Tahlequah and, I believe, Claremore.

However his interest in the minerals of the Indian Territory weaned him away from the school room. He and his wife were ardent botanists and were commissioned by the U. S. Department of Agriculture to press and analyze a specimen of every wild flower available in the Indian Territory.

He always took his satchel of rocks and chemicals wherever he went and gathered data on the mineral possibilities of the Territory. Before the oil question here was even seriously discussed he persuaded an Englishman to visit the Indian Territory with a view to starting oil operations here. Why the man went back or whether he started any movement I do not know positively.

SMITH, MAI M.

LETTER.

13878

4

Spencer Stephens' last days were spent in the employ of various oil companies as a sort of geological scout. He also sent regular reports of some sort to the Department of Agriculture. He was 76 years old at his death. His ambition to write something which would tell the world about Oklahoma's wonderful possibilities was unsatisfied. He is buried at Fort Gibson in the National Cemetery.

My one incident or historical spot is not much but you may have it. About 12 miles northeast of Wagoner at the Lometa Ranch is a large spring. Grandfather said the Union men made camp there one night when they were all worn out. It was prior to some battle I do not recall the date or time of year.

I had always hoped to be of some value if a broader Oklahoma history was to be made but it seems that it's just another one of those things that happens.

Respectfully,

Mai M. Smith

Route 4, Box 53

Claremore, Oklahoma.

SMITH, MAI M.

LETTER.

18878

5

John M. Taylor said that my grandfather was left here in the Indian Territory and that his mother went on to Texas with a group of Indians hoping to get in touch with her husband. At any rate they allowed her a claim there. It might have been that which led Spencer Stephens to visit Texas. He told me that he hunted some of his mother's people named Horn.

Additional information might be had from Mr. Herbert Hicks, Vinita.