

SPLITLOG, ALEX AND GROVER. INTERVIEW #12327

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Interview with Alex and Grover Splitlog
Miami, Oklahoma

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Grandmother was Eliza Splitlog, nee Barnett, the daughter of John and Hannah Barnett, Wyandotte Indians. She was born in Sandusky, Ohio, in 1824. Grandfather, Mathias Splitlog, of Cayuga and French descent, was born at Sandwich, Ontario, across from Wyandotte, Michigan, in 1812. When quite young Grandfather, with his brother, Alex, had a big boat named "Cayuga" on Lake Michigan. Here they had a large set of nets and fished, also hauling cord wood on the Detroit River. Grandmother's parents objected to their marriage so at first they had a very primitive home. Their bed was made of poles. They soon were welcomed home.

THE KANSAS HOME.

Alex Splitlog accompanied his brother and the other Wyandottes when they came to Wyandotte, Kansas, in 1840. Alex returned home. Young Mathias at first supported his family by chopping cord wood for his father-in-law. Unable to finance a home he and his small family boarded with the wife's parents.

Being of a mechanical inclination as soon as he could, Grandfather built a horse mill for grinding corn. Later, he added a sawmill. Mathias Splitlog was of a peculiar, eccentric disposition and would sometimes refuse to grind. His ideas were ahead of his time. He was always planning and building. He never mingled with the people but would always listen to those who came to see him. He gave no time to visiting. If anyone wanted to see him, they must come to see him. He would not talk business with you if he met you in the road. Before he would hire a man to work for him, he must see his wife and family. His wages here were fifty cents per day and board or seventy-five cents and dinner. He always paid in currency. He was an ingenuous man and could copy and construct any piece of machinery that he had the opportunity to examine thoroughly. He was often taken advantage of by persons pretending to have some worthwhile mechanical invention through his love for machinery. Among the family souvenirs is an ingenuous padlock that even the keyhole is concealed and can only be found by a secret spring.

Fortunately for Grandfather, the family's allotments chanced to be where Kansas City is now located and embraced a large part of the river front. The family lived in Armordale, now Connelly's Addition to Kansas City, Kansas. Three of the family received their land here. His family consisted of his wife and nine children, namely; Richard, Sarah, Philip, Henry, Maggie, Joe, Will, Tom and Annie.

During the war, Grandfather served as a "Soldier of the Cannon" under Mulligan. At his home in his later years at Cayuga, Indian Territory, he still kept his uniform, his horse pistols, bayonets and guns. They hung in one of the upstairs rooms. He owned several darkies and brought three with him when he moved to Cayuga after the close of the war. Schuyler Mundy looked after the freighting and the cattle. Patrick worked in the house. They stayed with him many years and the last to leave him was Rafe Johnson, who when he left returned to Kansas City, where Grandfather purchased Rafe a three-room house and a one-horse cab. Ever after when Grandfather was in Kansas City, it was Rafe's pleasure and he considered it his duty to place his cab at the Master's disposal and to drive him about the city on his

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numerous trips there.

Three of the children had received their land in the heart of Kansas City and with the growing of that center this land had become very valuable. To contribute his part towards its development, Grandfather gave his permission to the use of a part of his water front to the Armour Packing Plant for their boat landing, which they still use.

Selling some of his holdings in this growing city was the beginning of his success which afterwards earned him the title of the "Millionaire Indian." He began looking around and came about 1870, as a carpenter, from Kansas City, Kansas, to this state by way of Baxter Springs, Kansas.

The Senecas and the Wyandottes having been friends in Ohio, Grandfather came to the Seneca country from Baxter Springs and met the Seneca Chief, George Spicer, who offered to adopt Grandfather and his family for \$500.00. Looking the country over and seeing a future here he accepted the chief's offer and chose for his home the land surrounding a large spring near the beautiful Cowskin River and also near Grand River. In remembrance of his people and his

boat on Lake Michigan, he named the spring, "Cayuga" which name was afterwards applied to his home and the industrial center that he hoped to build. He at once began to plan to move his family here but it was three years before the move from Kansas City to this place was completely finished.

As he began to plan for his home and to assemble the material, he began to be interested in the things around him. Still interested in things mechanical, Grandfather built a saw and grist mill. This machinery was shipped to Baxter Springs, Kansas, and teamed from there. He soon erected a store-building and to widen his trade he established Copeland's Ferry. The Cherokees gave the land on their side of Grand River and Alex Copeland furnished the land on that side. Joe Whitecrow, a Seneca, owned the land on this side. The ferry-man was Henry Slack. To stimulate business, Grandfather gave ferry tickets to those coming to the mill in 1880 and 1881. This aided in his mercantile business here at Cayuga.

In the beginning, he had freighted his materials from Fort Scott, Kansas, but after the railroad had been extended to Baxter Springs, he shipped there and freighted

across the country from there. In those days, there not being any banks in this country, John Cooper of Baxter Springs was his banker. The early buildings prepared for his family at Cayuga, consisted of a two story native pine, six-room house, two barns of logs chinked and lamed and a granary. In addition there was the mill, whose power was supplied from the spring.

The store was a story and a half frame building. The store itself was on the ground floor and the upper story was a large hall where any denomination might hold religious services. Grandfather was a Catholic but he barred no denomination from the use of the hall, but of course attended only his own services. Among the many persons that availed themselves of this privilege was the early Friends' Minister and Missionary, known through this section as "Uncle Jerry Hubbard," who held many meetings among the different tribes in now northeastern Oklahoma in those early days.

A three story windmill furnished the power for his buildings. A spring house over the spring which had an eight foot sandstone foundation was topped with a cupola. A water system from here run by windmill power

and connected by cable furnished him water and was also extended to his son Tom's home, a distance of a half a mile. This line was started to the ferry but was not completed.

THE FACTORY BUILDING.

Realizing the abundance of native timber that was here and planning for the future, he planned and built the large factory building which still stands today though the windows are gone and it has been badly treated. The huge framework still stands intact. It consisted of a basement and three stories. In the basement was housed the power-plant and the heavy machinery; on the first floor was also some of the machinery; and some of the power equipment was on the second floor; but the third was reserved for supplies. The traction engine was used though the building was never completely finished as he planned it.

At this plant he made buggies, top-buggies and two seated hacks but no wagons. He had a carriage painter; the plates were struck but never put on the buggies. Alex put the boxing on the wheels. Another product made here

that has not been mentioned was coffins. A supply of seasoned walnut timber was always kept on hand. Especially when some family not able to pay funeral expenses needed help, they would come to Grandpa for assistance. Usually, said Alex, they came first to me and I would take them to him and say, "Grandpa, this is Mr. _____." He never refused them; he would ask the length and width of coffin needed and then "would you like a sack of flour?" etc. All other work was stopped and the men were put to work on the coffin. No nails were used; the corners were put together with pegs and glue. The clothing was taken from the store. He buried many people and helped many more.

In connection with the factory, there were two big lumber barns where the timber used in the factory building was cured and stored. We also had a large, well equipped blacksmith shop.

There were several more buildings on the farm including a log barn for Grandmother's horses, barns and sheds for the cattle, sheep, hogs, poultry, etc. One thing that has been noticed by so many persons is that most of the buildings

have a cupola on the top of them.

RAILROADS.

Looking ahead Grandfather saw the need of a railroad if he was to succeed in the activities he planned here--a railroad to be built from Kansas City, passing by his holdings southward to the Gulf. So, after securing the right of way and permission to build he commenced the road and completed the road as far as Neosho, Missouri, where at a celebration a silver spike was driven, August 15, 1887. From here (Neosho) he planned that a branch should be built to his Cayuga home, connecting with the main line south of him. Realizing the need of help at this time he decided to incorporate and form a company. This was done and Grandfather was to retain for his part \$160,000.00 and the rolling stock. At the meeting Mr. Bush bought for himself and associates all that was not reserved for Grandfather. Grandfather, not being able to read or write, trusted much of his business to his lawyer and some way the certificates for his part were lost and he could never recover them. This also ended his plan of connecting his home here at Cayuga with the main line and

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today all that remains of the railroad is an unfinished grade extending toward Cayuga to about a mile south of the little town of McElhaney, Missouri, but passing through the one time village of Splitlog which lies between Neosho and McElhaney.

SPLITLOG, MISSOURI.

M. W. Clay, who lived on Pool's Prairie south of Neosho, came to Grandfather with the story of a big lead strike at the place afterwards called Splitlog, Missouri.

Together they purchased from Doc Benny the forty acres of land where the strike was made and Grandfather used his money to build a town which was named "Splitlog." Here he built a two and a half story, fifty-five room hotel, which was torn down only about three years ago; a one story frame store-building; a livery stable; and a printing office.

The Splitlog Mining Company was organized, of which his son Joe was the secretary and treasurer, and Bob Dawson of Wyandotte, Indian Territory, was the assistant. They began to sink shafts and it was at this time that he extended the railroad from Neosho to this place. The

hole had been salted; there was no lead; he had been framed by Doc Benny and Clay, so this brought the town building to a close. He had not moved to the Missouri town but had driven back and forth from his home at Cayuga.

After the mining activities were abandoned, Clay went to Kansas City and sold some of the Splitlog land in Missouri, securing a down payment. Grandfather prosecuted him and Clay was sentenced to seven years in the penitentiary at Jefferson City, but somehow escaped serving any time. This land was not sold until after Grandfather's death and then it was sold to L. L. Bush of Landcaster, Pennsylvania, and the sum received by the estate was \$2,800.00 when it should have been \$28,000.00.

However, all of his ventures were not failures for he is credited with having made \$20,000.00 in twenty-four hours. He was to meet some parties at the Northrup Banking Company's office to close a deal on some Kansas City property and I went along to read the papers to him. The hour of our meeting was set at ten o'clock. He kept looking at his watch and at 10:15 he said to me, "Son, we are done, let's go." Across the street we met the leader

who said to him, "Come and go back, we are ready to do business," but he replied, "I will meet you tomorrow at ten." Next morning, they were on time and said, "Uncle Matt, we will give you the \$20,000.00" He replied, "Today is a new day and I have a new price. Today my price is \$40,000.00." They paid it.

GRANDMOTHER.

Grandmother was the opposite of Grandfather. She was very sociable and liked to have people around her and was very fond of her grandchildren. She was the farmer and looked after the farm. She would have fifty or more cows and we always milked from six to eight, sometimes more. The woods were full of her hogs and turkeys. She had her own driving team. I spent much of my time with her and drove much of the time for her, sometimes a buggy and sometimes a spring wagon. She had her own bank account and looked after her end of the business. She allowed me to sign her name as Grandfather allowed Alex to sign his name to checks, etc. Grandfather would scarcely come to the barn to see the finest animal there. All he knew anything about was the horses that he drove and they had to

be harnessed and brought to him.

Grandfather organized a band among the younger boys of the tribe. He paid for their instruction and their instruments which were silver plated. They had two sets of uniforms, one of which was much more elaborate Khaki than the other. The one they wore when traveling was of a colored material and inconspicuous. They were much in demand to play at the picnics and public gatherings and he furnished them a band-wagon to go from place to place with their instructor, who was their leader.

Another unusual thing was that Grandpa never went south of Grove but had a few friends even there.

After I (Alex) returned from Wabash, Indiana, where I was educated, I began at once to freight for the store and as Grandpa did not read or write English, I began to be with him more and for many years really was his secretary and was very closely associated with him. He was an expert on thumbmarks and could figure interest and count money. Many times, I have obtained a page of thumbmarks and would mark his on the reverse side and take the page to him. He never failed to find his own.

THE CHURCH.

Realizing the need of a church as a part of his plan, in the Fall of 1885, he had the rocks quarried for a church building but the building was not begun until the Spring of 1886, when the excavations were made for the basement. It was built the distance of a city block south of the factory building and in the corner-stone was placed a copper can about the size of a cigar box, containing pictures of his wife, himself, their biography, a coin of each dimension and some different stamps. Vandals, however, blew this corner-stone out in 1930. The church of native stone is today the pride of the community. It consists of a basement and one story. In the upper part in the front is a gallery. The altar, however, has been removed. This building is or was connected with a two room stone and basement building which stands at the rear of the church, the connection being by an underground passage. This passage was for the convenience of the priest who made the two roomed stone house his home while here. I do not know the cost of the building but to the upper part of the windows it had cost \$19,000.00. It was not finished until after Grandmother's death and after her death, losing interest in many other things, he centralized

his efforts on the church and spent much money on it. The interior was handsomely carved and finished. The bell which weighed 1600 pounds was hauled from Neosho by his son, Henry, Grover's father. It was dedicated November 25, 1896, by the High Bishop Merry-Schatt of Oklahoma City, assisted by Father W. H. Ketchum, local priest at Vinita and Father Verribe from Quapaw.

After Grandfather's death, the heirs gave the church and the three acres containing the cemetery to the Catholics, who later sold the church to the Methodists but the silver toned bell that had for years called the people to worship, and that could be heard for twelve miles was reserved by them and today is in the Catholic Cathedral at Nowata, Oklahoma. Today the large front steeple in Grandfather's church is empty but there is a smaller bell in the rear steeple. The altar has been replaced with a pulpit. The water-works were in the church but the furnace was never completed.

GRANDMOTHER'S DEATH.

After Grandmother's death, September 24, 1894, some of the heirs decided that they wanted Grandfather to make a settlement with them as she had a sizeable bank account,

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land and stock of her own. They consulted two lawyers from Vinita and one from Neosho, Missouri, who after listening to them called on Grandfather one Thursday. He listened to them and asked them to return the following Tuesday.

That day after an early dinner, he said to me, "Alex, hitch up the team. We are going to Seneca." When I drove around, he came out carrying two alligator suitcases. That afternoon at four we took the train for Springfield, Missouri, and from there we went to Saint Joe where his attorney, William H. Rush, lived. With the attorney, we came to Kansas City and to the bank where they kept their accounts. The money was withdrawn and taken to the Northrup Banking Company at Wyandotte, Kansas. On Tuesday when the lawyers returned, he told them that "she" did not have any estate and in the State of Kansas where her money was that on the death of either the husband or wife, the other inherited it. They, acknowledging defeat, departed.

THE DALTONS.

When I returned home from Wabash, Indiana, in the basement of the factory building I found feed boxes and in the attic three new mattresses and six excelsior pillows

and new red blankets. As I began to freight for the store, I would have cartons of shells and after I placed them on the shelves they would disappear. One time I bought six big yellow slickers and six or eight pair of old-fashioned reddish brown overalls. They, too, disappeared. Only Grandfather and I had the keys to the basement and the attic. Sometimes when I would go to the basement for wagon timber, I would find where horses had been fed. We had a blacksmith shop and one day five men rode up and wanted their horses shod. Albert Linkletter, the smith, told them to bring their horses inside but Grandfather spoke up and said, "It is so warm, why not shoe them out there," pointing as he spoke to an outdoor forge. Albert did so and while he was shoeing the horses, Grandfather took three of them to dinner with him. Later the other two went to dinner.

At that time, I did not know who they were. They were the ones who used the factory building. They must have had a key to the basement for no one saw them come and go. Money was always left with their order for goods. The day they robbed the bank at Southwest City, Missouri, I had driven Grandfather there and had taken the team to the shop to be shod and we went to dinner but Grandfather came out of the

hotel and sat down in a rustic chair facing the west. They rode past on their way out of town. When we were three or four miles out of town, they passed us and as they rode by they called, "Hi, Uncle Matt, what kind of a job was that? See you again, Uncle Matt."

TRIBAL AFFAIRS.

In the nineties, he was unanimously elected Chief of the Senecas. The day that he was installed, he gave a big dinner to the tribe bearing all of the expenses himself. They killed three beeves and J. C. Ferree who still lives in Grove, Oklahoma, baked 1500 loaves of bread for it. After the address to the tribe he returned to his home. He never attended a Stomp Dance and was down on Fiddle Dancing and drinking.

Shortly afterward, accompanied by his son, Tom, he went to Washington, D. C., where he remained six months. He went back the next year. He made three trips alone and always bearing his own expenses. He secured the payment of \$372.00 per capita for the Senecas.

He died in Washington, January 1, 1897. Willie Nichols, a Seneca, was with him and fourteen days later he was buried

beside his wife in the cemetery in the shadow of the church that he had built at Cayuga. After his death, the sale of his personal property alone took two weeks. W. E. Jones, of Grove, was the administrator. I was away but Mr. Jones saved me two keepsakes. One was the heavy gold watch chain Grandfather always wore and the padlock with the secret keyhole. The buildings at Cayuga were rented and a son-in-law, Bob Evans, moved into the home to look after the rents. The home finally burned, other property was destroyed, the rents dwindled and the home place of 160 acres was sold to Nat Perry of Joplin, Missouri.

CONCLUSION.

This grand old man whose ideas were ahead of his day, a pioneer in four different frontiers, is survived by several grandchildren and among them are three grandsons, Alex Splitlog who, with his wife, still lives near the old community; Grover Splitlog, the son of Henry, also living not far away and today following his grandfather's example as Secretary-Treasurer of the Seneca Tribe giving much of his time to his fellow-tribeamen; and the third grandson who lives in the nearby town of Grove, Oklahoma.