

STEPHENS, SPENCER SEAGO

INTERVIEW

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Mary J. Stockton,
Field Worker
July 14, 1937.

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LIFE STORY OF SPENCER SEAGO STEPHENS

Spencer S. Stephens, as he usually signed his name, died more than twenty years ago. Those about his time have since died, making personal information regarding this man hard to obtain. What appears in this article has been obtained from various sources and is, therefore, somewhat fragmentary, but the writer believes it is absolutely accurate. Some of this information was obtained from Dr. J. C. Busbyhead and W. K. Barber, an attorney, both of Cherokee, who knew him personally, and from Mrs. Catherine-Ann-Isaw, Mrs. Spencer Abijah Stephens, surviving widow of his eldest son, who now lives in California but is here, July 14, 1937, visiting friends in and around Cherokee.

According to Mrs. Stephens the elder Spencer (Seago) Stephens was born in a covered wagon, near the present city of Little Rock, Arkansas, about 1840. His parents were in their party, along with the other emigrant Cherokee, from the old Cherokee Nation in Georgia to their new home in the west.

His father was "Os-sie-a", a Cherokee Indian, born in Georgia. The father died when Spencer Seago was a young boy, and his mother died a few years later.

He was then eight years old. In early manhood he married Sarah Rosalie Hicks, daughter of Charles Hicks, prominent in Cherokee affairs in Georgia under the old regime. She was born in Georgia five years before the general immigration to the west and came to their new home along with others of her kindred, and they became parents of six children.

Mrs. Sarah Hicks Stephens graduated at the Cherokee National Female Seminary at Tahlequah with the first graduating class. She was valedictorian, and her granddaughter, Mrs. May Smith, of Claremore, Oklahoma, has a written speech as delivered by her grandmother, and bearing her autograph.

Spencer Seago Stephens was educated at the Cherokee National Male Seminary, near Tahlequah, about the time his future wife graduated from the Female Seminary, the exact date being unknown. ^{was} When a young man he/ appointed by Chief John Ross as "Tax Collector" for the Cherokee Nation. The Cherokee, as such, paid no ad valorem taxes, but a tax was levied on various lines of business and it became his duty to look after this taxation. This was in about 1858 or 1859. He later served as Superintendent of all National schools.

An effort to secure exact dates has not been fruitful, but it was, evidently, long ago.

His children were given the best school advantages of the time and at least two of them became teachers in the Cherokee Schools.

An old time photograph, owned by Attorney William R. Harper of Claremore, shows one of the Cherokee neighborhood schools near Claremore, of about forty years ago. This school was called "Justus" and was located about two miles northwest of the present brick school house of that name. It was about one mile east of the Claremore Dam, built but a few years ago. Mr. Stephens' daughter, Indianola, was teacher and her picture appears at one end of the group of pupils while that of her father, who was probably visiting the school at the time the picture was taken, shows up well at the extreme right in the group of forty-five. The old boxed-house, not now in existence, and trees surrounding it, make a beautiful back-ground. Mr. Harper prizes the picture highly; but says he might be induced to let the Oklahoma Historical Society take charge of it.

Spencer Abijah attended school at Sedalia, Missouri, and the State Normal at Kirksville, Missouri, after completing his work at the Cherokee Seminary. Ernest attended, and probably graduated, from the Seminary near Tahlequah. Indianola attended the Female Seminary. Ida was educated, or completed her education, at Northfield, Massachusetts. Florence graduated at a Conservatory of Music at Boston, Massachusetts, and Jessie graduated at Henry Kendall College, Muskogee, in 1892.

Spencer Seago Stephens grew up on a farm near Tahlequah and had as boyhood friends, Dennis Bushyhead, later Chief of the Cherokees, Gideon Morgan, Cherokee Statesman, who died but a few months ago at an advanced age, after serving as a member of the Oklahoma legislature after statehood and making an unsuccessful race for Lieutenant Governor of Oklahoma. His home in later years was at "Morgan's Inn, on Grand river, in Mayes County; also William Eubanks, Cherokee philosopher, author and translator, and John Lynch Adair, for years editor of the "Indian Sentinel" at Tahlequah. Mr. Stephens was a Union Soldier during the Civil War, along with William Potter Ross, later Chief of the Cherokees, and is buried in the National Cemetery at Fort Gibson. He died at Westville, Adair County, Oklahoma, in 1912.

Spencer Seago Stephens was regarded as one of the leading educators in the Cherokee Nation in his day, and received wonderful aid and cooperation from his wife, whom he designated as the "Power behind the throne."

He taught at the Male Seminary and also at the Orphans Asylum in or near Salina. His daughter-in-law, Mrs. Spencer

Mr. Stephens, said that he had been in the
 office of the State - Dept. for some time. He had
 to do the same as when he was in the State. Stephens also
 in the name of Mr. Dennis [unclear], and Dr. Jess.
 on [unclear] [unclear] [unclear] [unclear] [unclear].