

McGHEE, JAMES MONROE. INTERVIEW #7355

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LEGEND & STORY FORM  
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION  
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

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Field worker's name Nannie Lee Burns

This report made on (date) August 27 1937

1. This legend was secured from (name) James Monroe McGhee

Address 116 G. NE. Miami, Oklahoma

This person is (male ~~or female~~) ~~White, Negro~~, Indian,

If Indian, give tribe Cherokee

2. Origin and history of legend or story \_\_\_\_\_

from memory

3. Write out the legend or story as completely as possible. Use blank sheets and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 13

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Nannie Lee Burns,  
Interviewer,  
August 27, 1937.

An Interview with Mr. James Monroe McGhee,  
116 G. N.E. Miami, Oklahoma.

My grandfather was Ambrose McGhee, a full blood Irishman, who came with the Indians over the Trail of Tears to this country in 1839. My grandmother was Juda Cochran or Chu-tak, a full blood Cherokee, who also came at the same time. They grew acquainted on this trip and were married shortly after they arrived in this country.

They were the parents of the following; Albert C., John R., Thomas J., Mary Ann Harlan, Eliza J. Fields, David A. McGhee, Elizabeth B., Frances Curry, and Susan Dick. Of these children Thomas Jefferson Oh-Kill-tah was my father and he married Marth J. Hanna, a white woman from Washington County, Arkansas. My father was born May 11, 1844, at a place west of Southwest City, Missouri.

My parents had ten children, James M. Gina-stwo-eas-tah (myself), Thomas J. Jr., Bert S., C. Slaton, Quil or Q.P., J. Fox, Fannie Prather, Rose Preston, Ola Dennis, and Clebra Allen.

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Grandfather's Early Days.

Grandfather with his two brothers, Pleas and Lark laid out Southwest City, Missouri, which is on the State Line and began trading and doing business. My grandfather married a Cherokee and two years after they had established themselves at Southwest City, he left his brothers and established himself two miles west on Honey Creek. Here he established his headquarters and began trading for himself. ~~He traded merchandise to the Indians for buffalo robes,~~ etc., and would leave here with seven to ten wagons, some drawn by mules but at first he had more oxen than mules. He would travel slowly through the Cherokee and Osage country and this trip would end at Baxter Springs, Dodge City or maybe Kansas City where he would ship or sell his furs.

McGhee Street in Kansas City is named for him and he was known here as an Indian Trader.

Again, he would travel through the Delaware and Shawnee country circling farther south. It took at least sixty days to make one of these trips.

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He also had another trading station on the south side of Big Timbered Hill in Craig County and this was in charge of Aunt Sallie Mitchell and her husband whose name was Don; she was a Cherokee.

Here my grandfather, Ambrose McGhee, had a rude building and also built pens like a stockade for stock and oftentimes in his trading he would acquire Indian ponies and this also provided a place for his guests to keep their ponies while they were there. Sometimes a party would come and stay here several days and during this time he would have to feed and entertain them. They were able to get some whiskey which then sold for 20 cents a gallon and this sometimes made them troublesome to entertain and his son, my father, would play the violin for them and I have heard him say that sometimes he has played most of the night as the guests would always respond to the music and be manageable while he played the violin.

~~Sometimes~~ Sometimes after the traders were gone they would try to return and steal the ponies that they had traded so the ponies had to be watched. My grandparents settled on what

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is now known as the Sam Glen place and there being few banks in those days, the money which Grandfather received in his trading business was in gold and this was turned to my grandmother on his return from his trips and she took care of it and buried much of it for safe keeping so they had plenty of money to carry them through the Civil War days and they also helped many of the people around them during these dark days.

It has always been thought that much of their money has never been recovered for after the Civil War during her last illness when my grandmother would call some of the family to her bedside some Pin Indians would always appear in the room and she would not talk so she passed on without our learning what she had wanted to tell us, though I heard a short time ago that a jar containing some gold had been found on Grandmother's old home place.

There being no schools in those days, my grandfather built a small log building with a dirt floor and with puncheons for seats and hired Sammy Melton for a teacher and here my father and his brothers and sisters attended

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school, a privilege which my grandfather extended to the neighboring children and this was the beginning of the old Cave Springs School.

When Grandfather was away on his trips, the teacher whipped my father and Grandmother was angry because her boy had been whipped and she did not send him back to school and as Father had a pony and liked to fish and hunt he was having a good time when his father returned and on his learning the reason of his son's absence, punished the boy who was later my father and took him back to school.

#### My Father

My father, Thomas J. McGhee, served as First Lieutenant under Captain William Eckridge whose company was a part of the Second Cherokee Mounted volunteers and took part in the battle of Pea Ridge.

My father and mother after their marriage settled near a place which is the present location of Dodge east of Grove. They controlled a thousand acres of land. Mother was the manager and looked after the farm and the raising and selling

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of the stock. She also rented out a part of the land and raised much wheat which was sold at Seneca, Missouri.

rather, following the example of his father, continued to trade in a small way with the Indians and would trade them things for rails which I have seen him and Mother place after dark. They at first had a little two room box house where I was born but later they built a large full two story ten room frame house with a double porch in front.

For the first four years after the Civil War, Father was Tax Collector for the Cherokees. At that time they collected 50 cents per head for the cattle that were pastured here and one instance, I recall hearing him speak of was that of Abe Mills of Chetopa, Kansas who was running a thousand head of cattle here and who told my father that he could not pay the tax of \$400.00 which he owed so he turned over to Father four hundred head of cattle which Father sold for \$400.00 which paid Abe Mills' tax.

The next four years Father was District Judge of the Delaware District and after that served eleven terms of two



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years each as Clerk of the Delaware District, which completed thirty years of continuous service.

Preliminary trials were held in our home and until the large house was built our home was very crowded as sometimes there would be from fifty to seventy-five persons there to attend court and in those days people came and stayed. We had to feed all these people and would furnish beds for as many as possible, the others being compelled to sleep out-of doors. Father never made any charge for their food or lodging though the witnesses and those connected with the trials received a fee of \$1.00 per day in scrip which when presented at Tahlequah was redeemable in money. Little of this scrip was presented by those who had earned it as various persons would buy this scrip at a discount from those holding it and then would cash it realizing a nice profit for themselves.

Father was a rapid penman and took down in long hand the evidence given at these trials.

Father was always ready to accommodate a friend or neighbor and many people would come to him for money and he

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would let them have it or if he didn't have it he would ask Mother to loan it and he never took a note or required security from anyone who borrowed from him.

Because of feeding so many people and having a large family, a large amount of groceries was required and these groceries we hauled by the wagon load from McGannons at Seneca and we also traded at Neosho.

One payment, I remember when the Indians received their money some fifteen or twenty of them bought new wagons and when they started home with them up a steep hill not knowing the use of the brakes they threw them on and it was very hard for the teams to pull the wagons up the hill.

#### Building of the Railroad

Between 1898 and 1900 when Bailess started to build the railroad from Bentonville, Arkansas to Grove, he found the people very indifferent and found it hard to get a right of way for the railroad and became discouraged and came to

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my father who told him to take as much land as he wanted and then father was able to help him secure the right-of-way from those around him and in return for father's help, Mr. Bailless told father that he would establish a depot on his place and lay out a town. This town was named Dodge in memory of the fort that had once been established on the adjoining place, the old Tom Rogers Place.

#### Our Home Life

Father insisted on our going to school and kept us there as long as we would attend. After I was sent to the Male Seminary, I decided that I did not like it there and that I would go home. So Richard fields and myself ran away and hid in the buck bushes. After we thought we were safe we went to Mrs. John Stapler and asked her to loan us some money; she tried to persuade us to return to school and when she saw that we would not she loaned us \$2.00. On that trip home Mrs. Zeke Beck gave us our breakfast one morning. I had been at home some four or five days when one morning my father told me to get into the buggy with him and he took me back and told the guards that if I should leave again to go after me and he would

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pay them. My companion was punished and returned even sooner than I was.

Our home life was very pleasant; there was a large family of us and there were always a great many people around us and in our jokes we sometimes became pretty rough though never intentionally.

One such time I recall; my father always kept whiskey in the cupboard by the fireplace and those who came to our house often, knew it was there and would help themselves. Uncle Jim Harlan came to the home and knowing that he would take a drink, we boys emptied out about a third of the contents of the whiskey bucket and filled it with lye. They had two doctors with him for a week.

Mother found this out and punished us; she was strict and we decided when Uncle Jim left that we would get even. When we went to saddle Uncle Jim's horse we found an old jaw bone of some animal with the teeth still in it and this we placed under the old army saddle and when Uncle Jim got into the saddle and the teeth began pressing into the horse, the horse threw Uncle Jim.

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The Fourth of July was looked forward to by us as a "great day and one evening when we were feeding the stock I asked father for some money and he handed me \$40.00. The next day I would walk around and look at things and then put my hand in my pocket to see that my money was still there and during the day I could not make up my mind to spend any of it and in the morning returned it to my father. I was miserable with so much money.

Another time, Father bought a new cultivator and he went to the field and was going the first round to see how it worked. I had a buggy whip and to start the horses, George and John, I gave them a slap with the whip and they ran away breaking off both shovels.

My brother, Jeff, soon began to like to trade horses and well I remember one trade which he made with some gypsies. He swapped them two good mules and a saddle and got in return two doped horses.

During his term as clerk, Father married many of the folks of the community and later married their children. He married

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my wife and me. Mother died at the old home in 1898 and later Father who was not a farmer sold the farm and died at the home of his son J. Fox McGhee on Horse Creek, February 25, 1909.

#### Marriage

July 2, 1891, I married Martha Ada Nix, a Cherokee, and settled for awhile in the little house where I was born.

My wife was born April 16, 1872, and I was born June 28, 1873. Soon, we moved about six miles west of Miami and for awhile lived in a native lumber, two-room house northeast of a little timbered hill now the Jim Carrigan place.

My brothers, Bert and Jeff, had also come to this locality and had settled near but soon all of us had located on the hill where all of us built better homes for our families and as we had other near neighbors secured the establishment of a Cherokee Day School and the community built a small box schoolhouse where all of our older children started to school. Miss Nannie Lee Burns taught the Cherokee Day School for two

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terms. We all liked to trade and one of us kept a store on the hill which was called "Dawes Store". Sometimes one of us would have the store then he would sell or trade it to another but this store always belonged to a member of our family.

#### Later Life

As our children grew up and we realized the need of education, one by one the three brothers sold out and all finally moved to Miami, and since both Bert and Jeff have passed on. My wife and I had six children, Robert, Oliver, Walter, Ethel, Lorena, and Juanita.

#### Conclusion.

Mr. McGhee and his wife are spending their days comfortably at their home in this city gladdened by visits from their children all of whom are living except one son, Oliver. For the past several years Mr. McGhee had engaged in the loan and real estate business and is still doing a little of the latter business.