

INDEX CARDS

Journey to Oklahoma
Steamboats--Arkansas River
Skullyville
Tamaha
Webbers Falls
Immigration--Cherokee Nation
Farming--Cherokee Nation
Wild horses--Cherokee Nation
Border towns--Fort Smith, Arkansas
Fort Smith, Arkansas
Freighting
Coal--Choctaw Nation
Coal--Creek Nation
Mining--Quapaw Agency
Schools--Cherokee Nation
Churches--Cherokee Nation
Game--Cherokee Nation
Social gatherings--Cherokee Nation
Neighborliness--Cherokee Nation
Stage routes
Trails
Texas Trail
California Trail
Ferries--Arkansas River
Ferries--Illinois River
Ferries--Canadian River
Railroads--Kansas City Southern
Railroads--Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific
Railroads--Missouri Pacific
Salt works--Cherokee
Ranching--Cherokee Nation
Finance--Cherokee Nation
Banking--Indian Territory
Cattle--shipping
Elections--Five Civilized Tribes
Outlaws--Indian Territory
Food--Cherokee
Burial customs--Cherokee
Medicine--Cherokee
Bows and arrows--Cherokee
Pottery--Cherokee
Basketry--Cherokee
Clothes--Cherokee
Furniture--Cherokee
Dances--Cherokee
Law enforcement--Cherokee
Courts--Cherokee
Land cessions--Cherokee Strip
Allotment--Cherokee
Payments--Cherokee
Political Parties--Cherokee
Elections--Cherokee
Mayes, Joel B.
Bushyhead, Dennis W.

Interview with
Bill Swimm

by
L. W. Wilson, Field Worker
April 13, 1937.

I was born in Mississippi in 1868 and came to the Indian Territory in March 1883 and now live at McLain, Oklahoma.

Henry Swimm, my father, was born in Mississippi, date unknown to me, and was killed from ambush after the close of the Civil War.

My mother, Lizzie Bean-Swimm, was born in Tennessee, date unknown to me. Died at McLain, I. T. in 1903. She was 56 yrs. old when she died.

Father and mother's names sound a little Indian-like but they did not claim to be of Indian descent, therefore, I am duty bound to say I am a white man.

REMOVAL TO INDIAN TERRITORY

There was three families of friends and relatives of my mother coming to the Indian Territory, believing it was the land of opportunity. You see mother was a widow and I was only a boy in my early teens and they told her, maybe, that some of the unassigned lands of the Territory may be opened up to settlers by the Government by the time I was ^a young man, and I could homestead a place and she and I could have a home all for our own; as we had nothing back in Mississippi and no chance to acquire anything.

We came by train to Ft. Smith, Arkansas and from there we came up the Arkansas River by steamboat. The boat on which we came was named "The Fort Smith". Webber Falls, I. T. was our destination. We finally reached our destination after two days and nights on the river. The trip afforded me great pleasure as it was the longest ride I had ever taken on a boat of any kind. All along the banks were dense bottom timber and cane brakes, which I soon learned upon my arrival were only dens for wild animals of all kinds. We made two stops on the boat before we reached Webber Falls. One was at Skulleville. I wont forget it. The boat sounded the whistle for the landing about a mile down stream from Skulleville and by the time the boat landed all the people in the village were down to the river bank to meet it. All kinds of people, whites, colored, Indians and half breeds and all. Of course, I could understand the whites and negroes, but I looked and listened with amazement at the Indians. They were a new people in my young life.

The town turned out the same way at Tamaha, I. T. and likewise at Webber Falls. The new was wearing off and I was rather used to everything by the time we reached Webber Falls.

Soon the folks settled down and went farming. Mother and I stayed with my Uncle and family until I was large enough to care for her and I did care for her until she died. She never married again. I am now 69 years old and never married nor even came near it. Mother's life was my life and it was for her, the only woman that I ever loved, and with whom I thought I could live with and be happy, and many happy days we had together.

Oh, yes, I went with the girls. I had all kinds; white, half breeds and full bloods, but I never could love any of them but I enjoyed their company until it was bore some. I guess you call it jealous and then I was done with that one and got me another, cause I knew to prolong a courtship was doing the young lady an injustice.

AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRY

We People were interested principally in raising only enough for home use. We raised corn and lots of the common garden vegetables. We had no large acreage, just a cleared spot and with only a small plot of ground.

Of course, we produced nothing for the market. Later we started to planting cotton and raising some hogs and cattle. It was the money from the hogs and cattle, that we bought the most of our clothing and household necessities, together with furs and hides from wild varmints and animals that we would trade or sell.

We first used oxen for our work animals, then horses or rather ponies. There was a number of wild horses on Wild Horse prairie and the folks would catch these small wild horses and break them to ride, drive and work. Some of these horses, however, never made good work animals but good cow-ponies. We did our plowing with what we called a deer tongue and harrowed the ground with an "A" harrow made from a fork of a tree and the teeth were sometimes wood. We could get iron teeth at the store in Webber Falls or order them out of Ft. Smith, Arkansas. As modern farm tools came into being the people kept abreast with the times until we had plows, cultivators, wagons, mowing machines, etc.

Corn and cotton was produced extensively and became the money crops along the Arkansas River valleys.

Railroads through the eastern part of Oklahoma did much toward the changes into the life of the people and it became no more the remote country that it was in my early days. We, for a long time, depended

on steamboats and freight supply wagon trains to bring us everything.

Ft. Smith, Arkansas was the mecca for this part of the country for it was our nearest railroad station until the St. L. & Southern R.R.

now the Mo-Pac. R. R. built out of Ft. Smith, Arkansas to Coffeyville,

Kansas and later the P. & G. R.R. now the Kansas City, Southern R. R.

built south out of Joplin, Mo. to Port Arthur, Texas. There was not many railroads built through Indian Territory between the periods of 1890

and 1900 but after 1900 many roads started building and it was the

Ft. S. & W. R. R. and the M.V. R. R. that opened up the large coal fields

that exists in LeFlore & Haskell County of today as well as the P. & G. R.R.

that made the Henryetta-Dewar District coal fields and the lead and zinc

mines around Miami, Picher and Cardin, I. T.

In addition to cotton and corn and with the settlement of unassigned lands in the western part of the Territory, not so productive for cotton and corn, the people began raising wheat for a staple crop and some milo, kaffir corn and sorghum came.

Besides coal, lead and zinc, came oil and gas wells, iron ore and cement, lime, and plaster deposits so beneficial for manufacturing and building purposes.

SCHOOLS AND CHURCHES

The schools and churches were of log construction with large fireplaces. Some, however, were of native lumber.

Children came to school on horses and others walked. The English language was taught to all, white and Indians alike. We all went to school just five. I use to be a lot of English in the talk and write enough to make an old full blood understand. We all talked English and Cherokee too. We had no places for writing and arithmetic. I never got much of an education for two reasons,; First, there was not much to get, and second, I had to work.

Churches were held in the school houses. The Baptist and Methodist religion was always preached. The preaching was mostly in English but sometimes sermons were preached in Cherokee. During the summer months they would have arbor meetings. These meetings usually started in July and would last a week or two at a time.

RECREATION AND SPORTS

Fishing and hunting, I suppose, was a recreation of our people. We considered it an obligation to ourselves to be needed the fish and game for food. All streams were full of fish. The woods and cane brakes were full of wild game, such as, turkeys, deer, squirrel, rabbits, etc. We also gathered lots of nuts during the fall, to last us all winter; these nuts consisted of hickory nuts, walnuts, pecans, and hazelnuts.

We played ball, Indian ball, had horse races, foot racing and during Sundays neighbors would congregate and take care of the orphans to ride, rope calves and the like. I have seen more people on a Sunday attending some of these doings, than there was at other times.

HOSPITALITY

The people all were of a hospitable nature and did for each other, assisting in all ways possible and independently of each other.

If some ground was wanted for planting or rolling and dinner for

If one was sick and could not work, the neighbors would plant a little crop or harvest for him.

If a cabin was burned they would help to get the family out and go and build him another one.

If a child was to be born there was always some one in the neighborhood who would take care of the mother and child until they were able to live and do for each other.

ROADS AND TRAILS

The old stage line from St. Louis, Arkansas to Muskego, as I remember it, first came to the branch station out of St. Louis, Arkansas. The second stop was at Webster Falls, Mo. The third at Enlet Taylors and then Muskego, Mo.

There was also a stage line at one time that ran out of Muskego, Mo. It crossed the Arkansas River at Lewis Ferry to Ft. Gibson, thence south and east over the Ft. Gibson and Green Leaf Mountains and crossed the Illinois river over Bullett Foreman's Ferry and thence along

the trend of the Arkansas river to Ft. Smith, Arkansas, crossing the Arkansas river at Ft. Smith on a steam ferry. There was a Texas road that ran from Nevins Ferry south across Elk creek, the Canadian river and on south.

There was another branch of the Texas road that ran together some place down in the Choctaw Nation that use to run out of Mulleville. Some called it the California road and others the Texas road.

FERRIES

The Nevins Ferry crossed the Arkansas river at the mouth of Grave river.

The Bullett Foreman Ferry crossed the Illinois river about 7 or 8 miles up-stream from its mouth.

The Bob Vann Ferry crossed the Canadian river about 5 miles up stream from its mouth.

The Smith Ferry crossed the Arkansas river about 9 miles east and 2 miles south of Muskogee, I. T.

The Frozen Rock Ferry crossed the Arkansas river about 4 miles east and 1 mile north of Muskogee, I. T.

The Lynch Ferry crossed the Arkansas river at Webster Falls, I. T. It first was a pole, then a cable and then a steam ferry.

There were ferries all along crossing the Arkansas river in nearly every bottom between Muskogee, I. T. and Ft. Smith, Arkansas but I cannot recall their names at this time.

RAILROADS

The K. C. Southern built through eastern Indian Territory right close to the Arkansas line from Joplin, Missouri in 1894 and 5.

The Mo. Pac. built from Ft. Smith, Arkansas to Coffeyville, Kansas in 1887-8-9.

The C. O. & G. R.R. now Rock Island built from Oklahoma City, east, in 1896.

The Midland Valley, Ft. Smith & Western and the M. O. & G. R. R. built along during year of statehood, being 1906 and 1907.

The A. built through the Oklahoma Country a year or so after I got to the territory, must have been 1885-6-7.

SALT WORKS

I heard of the Mackey salt works that used to be over near the Illinois river on a creek close to Bullett Foreman's Ferry but that is all. We went to the salt works for our salt about six miles west of Webber Falls, I. T. on Dierdy Creek. They did not take salt for commercial purposes other than the neighborhood. In Dierdy Creek was a salt spring and this spring was protected with a big hollow gum log and from this the water was placed in large iron Kettles and boiled down.

A long furnace-like affair was dug in the ground and had a stove-chimney at the one end for the smoke to come out and so the fire would get a draught. The top was laid with rock and clay with openings on which to place the kettles. Each kettle weighed about 1000 lbs. and there was 10 or 12 of them.

I don't know that it belonged to any particular one. I think it was a community ownership for I would see first one and then the other

of the neighbors down there at work and if anybody ever paid for salt, I don't know it.

RANCHES

Bob Blackstone, about 1-8 Cherokee, ran a ranch on Spaniard Creek near the present town of McLain, Oklahoma. He handled from 500 to 1000 head yearly. His foreman was John Mackey.

The ranch buildings consisted of a two-room log house where Mackey and his family lived. The bunk-house was logs, where the cow-punchers and ranch hands slept. The cook-shack was a lean-to of native lumber on to the end of the bunk house. The corral was a stake and rider fence, a rail fence. This ranch handled some 2 or 300 horses as well as cattle. The horses were branded "III." The cattle was the Box brand. ()

The Hays ranch was near Gum Springs on Georgia Fork Creek, southwest of Webber Falls, I. T. The Hays boys were white men. They handled about 1000 head of cattle yearly. They branded with the Flying Vee (V). Some of the Hays boys I understand still live at Webber Falls.

I knew of lot more ranches but these are the outstanding ones in my mind at this time.

RANANCING

I don't recall any script being issued by anyone around Webber Falls, I. T. that was used as a means of exchange. At first, as I recall it, a farmer or anyone needing money would go to the merchant and borrow a reasonable amount, that is an assumed amount, gave no note or mortgage, this amount was charged to him and his account was debited with what he purchased or cash if a small amount was necessary. Later coupon books were issued, ranging from five cents to one and five dollars by

Gibson Bros., Hays Merc. Co., and Job Blackstone. These coupon books were something like our present day ice books but they were good only where they received them. Of course, this curtailed a lot of bookkeeping.

The closest bank was Ft. Smith, Arkansas until 1899 when the First National Bank was opened at Muskogee, I. T.

STEAM BOATS AND STEAM FERRIES

Steam boats that I remember then came up the Arkansas were, The Border City, W. D. Drew, Mary and the Yvette. All owned and piloted at times by Captain Makel. The Wm. Drew may have been owned by Capt. Lybar but I am not sure. The Lucy Walker was owned and piloted by

Captain Joe Vann, The Jenni Lee by Walter Huff and the Mauinelle, Mayflower and Ft. Smith. I do not remember who owned them. The Ft. Smith was the boat I came on to this country as I told you.

There was a steam ferry at Ft. Smith, Arkansas, one at Omaha, I. T. and one at Webber Falls, I. T. across the Arkansas river. I do not know who owned them only the one at Webber Falls. It was owned by Joe Lynch and Dock Campbell.

MARKETING CROPS

All crops were sent to market by steam boats to Ft. Smith, Little Rock, Memphis and New Orleans for sometime even after the railroads were built due to lower freight rates. Logs were bulged by steam boats down the river. Hay and corn was the principal shipments at first and later some cotton.

Little were driven to Ft. Smith, Arkansas and loaded on trains there for market. After the Mo. Pac. R. R. built through in 1888 they were loaded on cars at advantageous points on the railroad.

UNITED STATES MARSHALS

Yes, I have met and I knew quite a few of the old U. S. Marshals.

I remember; Heck Thomas, Ike Rogers, Frank Coston, Bill Tilchman, Bud Ledbetter.

Frank Coston was at one time the head of the Oklahoma National Guards and it was he that corralled old Chitto Harjo when they had what they called the Crazy Snake rebellion not many years ago. Well it was right after statehood in 1907. Frank use to be the big shot in keeping down fights after the elections in the different districts of the different Nations of the Five Tribes.

OUTLAWS

I did not know personally any of the outlaws but I have seen Cherokee Bill, Al Jennings, The Buck Gang, Pat O'Malley and others from the territory in jail at Ft. Smith, Arkansas when I was over there at different times. I did not know the Dalton boys, but I have heard others say they use to be cowboys and U. S. Marshals before they were outlaws. Frank Dalton, they say, was killed by a horse thief while he was U. S. Marshal in 1885. Of course, Gert and Bob was killed in robbing the bank at Coffeyville, Kansas and their father, a fine old, law abiding man all his days, died in 1889, near Coffeyville, Kansas. The Dalton boys was born and raised in Kansas.

I knew Chas. Floyd "Pretty Boy" well. Of course, his doings all happened so recently you know as much about him as I do, if only from reading the newspapers and they have it right from start to finish.

LIFE AND CUSTOMS OF THE CHEROKEE INDIANS

The Indians were very amicable and attended to their own business. They were natural tillers of the soil and farmed what you would call in a crude way. All of our farmin' was crude in the beginning but the Indians were slow to take up any thing new.

They raised corn, and ground it with a mortar and pestle. Some of the fullbloods today grind their corn this way. of course, they are only a few of the old ones still living. From the corn they made bread, hominy and other kinds of bread by adding buckwheat butter, bits of meat, etc.

Their meats were principally wild game. They did not care for pork or beef as long as venison, turkeys, etc. were plentiful. They oftentimes dried their venison and other meats; likewise, wild fruits such as peaches gathered from seedling trees. They also ate lots of wild berries and honey.

They bought practically all their wearing apparel at the stores.

INDIAN BURIAL

If an Indian died they would wrap him up in a blanket and put with the corpse his beads, weapons and other trinkets and then fix a comfortable place up on the joists of the cabin in which he lived and the rest of them would move out and leave it to him and build themselves other cabins.

This practice of their burial was discontinued along in the early 90's when the Government compelled them to make boxes and bury them as we do today.

INDIAN MEDICINES

The Indians doctored entirely with bark, roots and herbs. They had a cure for every ill. Some of the things used were wahoo, Indian oil wood, butterfly root, slick leaf Burdock, mullen, wisp, etc. They claimed, if they would take wisp and scrape down on it, it would purge them and if they scraped up, it would vomit them. These scrapings were made into a tea.

Burdock roots were made into a tea and that was a blood purifier. Mullen Ooze was made by boiling mullen leaves down to a thick liquid and this was used for cuts and swollen joints.

Butterfly roots were made to a tea and that would break a chill. (Took the place of our quinine). Yes, they had many remedies. I remember one old medicine-man as they called him that they confided in and who was the mastermind on the concoction of medicine. His name was George Woodard.

INDIAN WEAPONS

The bow and arrow: . . Bow was made of Bois-de-Arc; string made from deer sinew and arrow from swamp dogwood and feathered. They usually used a sharp spike in the end of the arrow so it would pierce the object struck. Of course, some had rifles but a fullblood was really good with the bow and arrow and would rather use it for hunting and even for shooting fish..

INDIAN PAINTS

They painted their faces with soft rocks of different colors, and from mixtures made of barks. Polk berries were used to paint faces red.

INDIAN ARTS

They would ^{make} bowls, cups, and bric-a-bracs out of clay. Baskets were made into all shapes and sizes out of hickory bark and cane stripings.

Stands, tables and chairs were made from split hickory branches and willow sapplings.

They made coon skin caps, paper hats and feather head gears.

Necklaces, and bracelets were made out of tiny shells and beads made from clay and colored, if beads could not be received readily at the stores.

INDIAN STAMP DANCES

They had a green corn feast and stamp dance every year, usually during the month of July or when the corn was at roasting ear stage. These dances would last for days. They would bring green corn, venison, wild game and birds of all kinds and sometimes a beef. The corn was roasted in the ashes and they called themselves barbecuing their meats but really only they could eat it other than some carnivorous animal, for blood would run out of it, it being so raw. The green corn and meats were their daily menu for the days there.

The men would sit around, smoke and drink, if they had any liquor and the women did all the work. I have seen the women with their babies (papooses) strapped to a board, standing up by a tree while they were cutting wood, doing the cooking and even while they danced.

During the dances the men wore coon skin caps and some with feather head gears. The women wore long dresses, very loud colors, shells around their wrist and ankles so as to make a noise and all whoop, sing

The women did more tottling than dancing and the bucks would paw like a horse only they kept moving.

INDIAN LAWS

The Cherokee Nation was divided into nine districts and in each district was a court house in which court was held under tribal laws. They had a trial judge, Pros. Atty. a sheriff and his deputies. There were no jails, and sentence was meted out by a certain number of lashes at the whipping post. An Indian never had to make a bond for his appearance. If he was told to be present a certain day for trial, an Indian was always there. Each of the five civilized tribes also had their own officers for their particular nation; i. e. Principal Chief, Treasurer, Representatives, etc.

All officials were elected by popular vote of the citizens of the tribe both for the Nation and the district. This form of government continued among the tribes until 1898 when Congress passed an act known as "The Curtis Act;" abolishing tribal courts, made allotments of land to the Indians and for appointment of townsite commissions etc. The land prior to the making of allotments was owned jointly by the Indians and they paid no taxes, even today restricted Indian lands are exempt for tax.

The white people in the Nation were not submissive to the tribal courts, but were taken by U. S. Marshals operating in the territory, particularly in my part of the Cherokee Nation to Federal Court at Ft. Smith, Arkansas.

OPENING OF INDIAN LANDS TO WHITE SETTLERS

While my mother came here with the intention of my being old enough to homestead some land for us if the country was opened for settlement, yet by that time we were doing well and getting along comfortably and I never did make a race.

The first opening I remember was the Oklahoma Country in 1889, then things got hot in Congress and other openings occurred in rapid succession. The reservations of the Wild Indians were opened in all parts of the country from 1892 to 1896. The largest opening during this period was opening of the Cherokee strip in 1893. This Cherokee strip opening caused lots of comment among the Cherokees because the Government only paid them seven and a half million dollars, while the cattlemen offered, at one time, eighteen million and the Government would not accept that amount for them.

ALLOTMENTS AND PAYMENTS

The Dawes Commission created by the Curtis Act went about to enroll all Indians who were citizens of the tribe so they could become citizens of the United States and accept allotments of land severally. This idea of an Indian becoming a citizen of the United States always seemed funny to me and the humorist, Will Rogers, explained this thoroughly when some one asked him if his relations came to this country on the Mayflower and he answered them by saying, "No, my people met the boat."

Allotments in the Cherokee Nation was made on appraised value of the land of \$5.00 to \$6.00 an acre and no citizen of the tribe was to receive more than \$320.00 worth of land and this accounts for some of the Cherokees only getting about 50 acres while others received 160 acres. Also when allotments were made they included negroes who had been slaves before the Civil War. The Indians, all tribes objected to this, but it was finally agreed that they should share with the Indians after much persuasion and lot of heated debates.

The Cherokees got what they called bread payments from the government every once and awhile, ranging from \$2.00 to \$4.00. Some received what they called old settlers payment, that was due the most of their parents account their removal from Georgia and Alabama in 1837. This payment was made along as I remember it a short while before the opening of the Oklahoma country in 1893 and it must have been in 1897 or 1898.

The seven and a half million dollars the government paid for the Cherokee strip was paid to them on a per capita basis in 1893 and 1897 while the negroes or freedmen, as they were called, got their portion in 1897. These payments were made to the Cherokees at Winita, Ft. Gibson, Muskogee and Hobbs Falls, I. T.

INDIAN CHIEFS

Some of the principal chiefs, located at the Nations Capitol of the Cherokees were, Joe. V. Hayes, J. J. Clark, Sam. J. Hayes, W. C. Rogers and Tom Puffington.

WORLD POLITICS

There was two factions or political groups. They were known as the Moss Party and the Downing Party. We think we have some hot elections at times now but they are all to what they were in the early days.

The Loss Party was the old Treaty Party that caused their removal
to the Territory and the Tenth Party was the old anti-Treaty Party.
I recall, even though only a boy, the year we came to L. I. They held an
election, I believe it was rules
was of the Tenth Party
The Loss Party was ready for blood
and had nothing real eyes was set
Chief.

Their method of voting was as follows: At first, the voters went to the court house in their respective districts and there they would file in and tell the clerk who they wanted to vote for and he would so record it. Of course, only citizens of the tribe could vote. The plan was just old enough to vote for the first time he would have to have a number of years for his being of lawful age which was twenty-one years. Later they would write the names of the ones they wanted to vote for on a piece of paper and hand it to the clerk and it would be checked up and given to the one he voted for. That's all.

COMMENT

Mr. Swimm is a man who bears acquaintance. He feels a little hesitancy to talk of his early life and experiences and will not dwell on the way his father lost his life. The mentioning of any of his relatives is remote save his mother. What he does tell I feel is correct for he seems to be a man that would not tell anything if he didn't tell the truth.

He is a man highly respected and loved by all his neighbors and associates and feels proud of his activities in the making of Oklahoma in his humble way the grand state that it is today.

Just, he and his mother started their lives together and being so handicaped. without a father to assist them, they encountered many hardships, but he fought the fight and today in his last days he is rather comfortably situated and takes life just as it comes. He is active and jolly, apparently he seems none the worse from all that he has endured.

