

STEWART, R. O. (REV.)// INTERVIEW 13863

357

STEWART, R. O. (Rev). INTERVIEW.

13863

Investigator, Ella Robinson,
May 8, 1938.

Interview with Reverend R. O. Stewart,
Muskogee, Oklahoma.

My father, Doctor George W. Stewart, was born in Itawamba County, Mississippi, September 10, 1836. He attended public and private schools and college in his native state, where, also, he taught school for a time. He was married to my mother, Margaret Nabours, in 1863. They came to Texas where they lived for a year. Father then decided to prepare to practice medicine and returned east and entered a medical college at Memphis, Tennessee, where he graduated. He practiced his profession in his native state for a time but the "call of the West" was too strong to resist and he returned to Texas where he practiced medicine for three years.

In 1901, having a pioneer spirit, he moved to Hobart, a growing little town in the new Oklahoma Territory. Here he became one of the leading physicians.

-2-

His work was among the "wild tribes"--Kiowas and Comanches. Had not Father been of a strong, stalwart constitution, he could not have withstood the hardships incident to the life of a doctor at that time and in that country. No conditions could have been harder than those he was compelled to undergo. There were no roads and travel was across the unbroken plains; treacherous streams had to be crossed at all times of day or night; deep snows blocked travel for weeks; floods were common, putting small streams out of their banks; fierce blizzards had to be faced all winter, and blinding dust storms and blistering sun in the summer. Father never hesitated for a minute to answer all calls, never stopping to consider the cost to his mind, soul or body. He traveled by buggy, wagon, and on horseback, and sometimes all these were impossible and he went afoot. He was called into the tepees of the "Plains" people to give medical help and comfort. These Indians came to regard him almost as super-human. He often spent whole nights in the tents of the Indians, giving relief and comfort to those on the border of the Happy Hunting

Ground, or bringing a new life into the world.

The Indians knew nothing of surgery and were resentful to any suggestion of it. I recall one occasion when he saw that an operation performed at once was the only way of saving the life of the patient. When he and my mother began to get ready for the operation he discovered the tent filled to suffocation with friends of the family, who vigorously protested against it. They howled, grunted, prayed and talked in their own language and even threatened to throw Father out. However, owing to my mother's Christian kindness and persuasion and Father's fearlessness and determination with his professional skill, the operation was successfully performed and the patient rapidly recovered. The Indians were so astonished at the result that they thought Father "next to God" in power, and that he possessed some miraculous something that only he could have. They became his fast friends and would go to our home and Father's office like lost sheep looking for a shepherd. They brought gifts of all kinds, beautiful beadwork, blankets, pottery

STEWART, R. O. REV. INTERVIEW.

13863

-4-

and all kinds of trinkets which they lovingly bestowed upon Father and Mother. Whenever Mother would walk down the street they would gather around her and in their own way express their gratitude and appreciation.

No small part of my father's success was due to my mother's help. She always accompanied him on his trips when he thought her help and presence needed. She was constantly called upon by the Indians for advice. The Chiefs and leaders of the tribes were their fast friends and Father retained that friendship and confidence during his entire life.

As he was such a busy man and away from home so much, Father saw that if he had any companionship with his little boys, he would have to take us with him on his visits, and my younger brother, George Olin, and I were his constant companions. Often we would crawl under the side of the tepee to see the sick child.

The question of money was not paramount in the mind of my father. His attention was wholly taken up in serving those unenlightened, bewildered children of nature.

The civilization of the white man was being forcibly brought

upon them and they were resentful and fearful. They had every reason to be suspicious of the "whites" and a white man had to prove himself a "friend in deed," as did my father before they trusted him.

Father always found time to take a part in all civil affairs in the fast growing little town and took a deep interest in his church.

My mother died in 1907 and some two years later Father was married to Miss Ida Wilkie with whom he lived happily for a number of years. After her death he came to make his home with his oldest son, Oscar S., superintendent of the Oklahoma School for the Blind at Muskogee. He opened an office in the Surety Building in Muskogee and engaged in the practice of medicine until his failing health compelled him to retire. The expense and hardships he had undergone during the years he spent among the Plains Indians had left their marks on his robust constitution and he was a great sufferer from rheumatism in his last years. He never forgot his Indian friends and deplored the fact that they were fast becoming victims

STEWART, R. O. REV. INTERVIEW.

13863

-6-

of the white men's diseases, tuberculosis being most prevalent among them. My father died at the home of his daughter-in-law, Mrs. O. W. Stewart, in October, 1930. With the passing of such men as my father, society has lost a type of professional men that will never be replaced.