

SUAGEE, DOVA L.

INTERVIEW.

#6486

309

Alene McDowell  
Field Worker  
Indian-Pioneer History  
S-149. June 21, 1937.

Interview with  
Mrs. Dova L. Suagee,  
Route #3  
Bartlesville, Oklahoma.

Mrs. Dova L. Suagee was born January 17, 1876, at Southwest City, Missouri.

Father - Dr. Harrison Gaither was born in Indiana and died in 1893 at Wyandotte, Oklahoma.

Mother - Matilda Pruitt-Gaither-Ballard was born at Gainesville, Texas, June 20, 1851. Mrs. Ballard is 80 years old and makes her home with Mrs. Suagee, five miles south of Bartlesville.

In 1893 I married Joel B. Suagee, a quarter blood Cherokee at Afton, Indian Territory. My parents objected

to my marrying an Indian and we eloped on horseback from Wyandotte, Indian Territory, to Afton and were married under the Cherokee law by a Justice of the Peace. Some of those married under the Cherokee law were compelled to remarry, but we were not. Instead of a saddle, I rode a girth and surcingle. My father died at the old home in Wyandotte,

three months after my marriage. While he was bitterly opposed to the marriage, he sent for me and forgave me.

We lived at Afton and Grove until 1898, when we removed to a farm near Coffeyville, Kansas, across the line in the Indian Territory, where we lived for one year. We then removed to a farm in the Indian Territory and our trading post was Edna, Kansas. In 1902 we came to Bartlesville Indian Territory, in a covered wagon, and located in what is now the east part of town, where we lived for two years.

My husband bought the improvements on the John Sarcoux farm from Jim McCoy for \$1,000. This place was located five miles south of Bartlesville, and was known as Silver Lake.

The reason we decided to come to Washington County, we wanted to file the family allotment together. My husband filed himself and our four children at Vinita, and received 330 acres at Silver Lake as the allotment. I am an adopted citizen in the Cherokee tribe, but was ruled out by one year and do not hold land.

Silver Lake is quite an historical site in Washington County. The first Osage reservation and agency was located there; the first Delaware Baptist church was on the east side of United States Highway 75

across the road from the present location of the Silver Lake store. Jake Bartles and Joe Bennett established the first trading post on the banks of Silver Lake in 1873. There is a large lake, known as Silver Lake, on our allotment, from which the name of the site was taken. This is an ideal picnic ground and swimming pool. The Silver Lake Cemetery, an old Delaware Indian cemetery, is located off one corner of the allotment. The Government set aside three acres for the cemetery and there are about 500 graves. My husband and daughter are buried in the Silver Lake cemetery. The Hillcrest Country Club is located on part of the Suagee allotment.

Our first home was a seven room, colonial type house. The lumber was hauled from Lawrence, Kansas, and the house was built by John Sarcoxie, a full blood Delaware Indian.

#### FERRIES

Carry's Ferry was located two miles west of Grove, over Grand river. Mr. Carry was a Cherokee Indian and was known as "Cherokee Carry". The fare across the river was fifty cents for a team and wagon.

4

FORDS

There was a ford over Grand river near where the ferry crossed. In 1894 we were crossing the ford and the water was deeper than we anticipated. It was a dangerous ford when the water was up but we thought we could get across. The horses finally swam out but the wagon bed nearly floated off the running gears. We were not hurt but were badly frightened.

MISCELLANEOUS HAPPENINGS

When I was a child I went to the Delaware Court House, located in the hills in Delaware County, where they held Cherokee court, which usually lasted a week. I heard Col. E. C. Boudinot and Chief William P. Ross, both Cherokee Indians, make talks to the Indians, against selling the Strip country or the Cherokee Outlet.

In their speeches they told the Indians to lease the land to the cattle men; that if the land was not sold to and settled by the white man, but was allotted to the Indians, each headright would receive a section.

Col. E. C. Boudinot was prominent in the affairs of the Cherokees and a great friend of the rail road. He laid out the townsite of Vinita and also suggested the name of "Oklahoma" for our state.

Chief William P. Ross was a favorite nephew of Principal Cherokee Chief, John Ross.

CHEROKEE STRIP

When the Cherokee Strip was opened for settlement there were people called "boomers" or "intruders" who slipped into the boundaries and staked claims before the official opening. This was not legal and some were expelled by the United States soldiers, but many were not caught. This made the Indians suspicious of all the settlers and they looked upon them unfavorably. Many of the intruders became rich for they had obtained good land and improved it, then wanted the Indians to pay for the improvements. The Government finally settled for them.

The Indians were paid \$1.25 an acre for the Cherokee Outlet by the Government. He received our payment at Vinita. This money was called "bread money" by the Indians

Captain Hemson owned the first store at Grove and was the first postmaster. He was a school teacher prior to his removal to Grove. My husband hired him as a private teacher and under his supervision, finished

his education, and later taught a country school in the Cooweescoowee District.

In the early days the Indians traveled by paths and marked their trails by cutting signs on trees. The only light they had was from the fire place.

The Indians used poke berry juice to paint their faces and used the berries to decorate their ponies. They would make long streaks on their faces and bodies with the juice.

Before my marriage, I used to drive for my father on his calls and I remember one call we made to an Indian home. His name was Mathias Splitlog.

He was a wealthy Indian and very intelligent. We were there for three days and nights and when we

---

were ready to leave he asked my father to come into the house so he could pay him. He said, "I pay no man in the road." This was one of their superstitions, but I do not know its significance. They lived near Jeff City, Missouri, just across the line in Missouri.

Mathias Splitlog was an uneducated man, but he was a money maker. He built the Splitlog railroad into Muskogee. I do not know the location of this

---

railroad or what company bought it later.

The Cherokee Indians had many different customs for their burial ceremonials. One of their customs was: The cooling board was placed on two sticks of wood, one at the head and one at the foot, for the board to rest on. The body was placed on the cooling board and a large iron kettle was placed at the head in which cedar was burning. A blue smoke filled the room until the time of the burial.

Some of the United States marshals I knew were: Bud Thomas, who later served as sheriff of Delaware County; Bill Merrill, who married an Indian wife, Corentina Cheek; and Bud Ledbetter.

#### COMMENTS

Mrs. Suagee has lived over fifty years in or across the line from the Indian Territory. She has spent most of her life among the Indians and knows many interesting things about their lives in the early days. Having married an Indian, and spending her life with them, she can tell their real life.

Three generations of this family have given their histories. Mrs. Suagee, Mrs. Matilda Callard, her mother, and Mrs. Evelyn Maheras, her daughter.