

TENNEHILL, NINNIAN.

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

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TANNEHILL, NINNIAN INTERVIEW 13690

Field worker's name Nannie Lee Burns,

This report made on (date) April 22, 1938

1. This legend was secured from (name) Ninnian Tannehill,

address General Delivery, Picher, Oklahoma.

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

If Indian, give tribe

2. Origin and history of legend or story As he recalls it.

3. Write out the legend or story as completely as possible. Use blank sheets and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 11

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Nannie Lee Burns,  
Investigator,  
April 22, 1938.

An Interview with Ninnian Tannehill,  
General Delivery,  
Picher, Oklahoma.

My father, Andrew Tannehill, was born in Georgia and came when four years old with his parents to Kentucky. My mother, Susan Tannehill, nee Duncan, was born in Kentucky and her parents moved to Illinois when she was four years old. Father, when a young man, came to Illinois where he met my mother and after marrying they settled in Missouri. I was born in Monroe County, Missouri, February 18, 1854, but when I was three months old, my parents settled in Saline County in the same state. Here I spent the first years of my life.

We had a big farm of two sections of land in Saline County, with good improvements for those days and while father was a preacher and trader and did not believe in slavery, Mother owned about forty slaves and they did the work on this large farm, raising corn, wheat, oats, flax, hemp, and tobacco. I was the youngest of the three children, all boys, and I had a negro mammy, Aunt Till. Branching

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out before the War, father bought a large tract of land in St. Clair County where he intended to raise cattle but the War came on and we could not finish paying for it and so lost it. Before the War we had good schools and I got a start in school but of course, I was too young to learn much.

At the beginning of the war, my father entered and fought all through it under General Price. He was Captain Tannehill. The first year was not so bad and Mother with the darkies' help continued to run the big farm but the Kansas Jay-hawkers came through and took our darkies away and some of these negroes ran away from the Jay-hawkers at the first opportunity and returned to Mother but things were growing worse and many things were happening that looked bad. One morning they sent Jess, a negro, and me after the cows and when we reached the top of the hill I was in the lead and there before me lay six dead soldiers side by side. I said, "Look out". When Jess saw them he said, "Oh; Oh Lord," and started running and when I caught up with him and

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as I passed him, I heard him say, "Oh Lord." The Confederacy needed money and in the second year, Father sold our home and gave the money to the Confederate cause. I was too young to go to the War but I had an older brother who went into the army at thirteen. The other brother was with Quantrill. The battle of Lone Jack was fought in Jackson County and we could hear the cannons of the battle in Springfield, Missouri. Mother took me and went to Audrian County where we remained until the close of the War and my father returned.

We had no schools for two years after the War. Father rented a place near Elmwood which was a small village of one large general store, a blacksmith shop and post office. At that time Sedalia, Missouri, was the end of the railroad, seventy miles away, and things for the store had to be freighted from there. It took a week to make the trip. I drove one of the wagons for quite a while. Then the railroad was built through Brownwood which brought it much closer to our town.

At the close of the War we got \$2.00 per bushel for our wheat for the first two years, and then we

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received \$1.50 per bushel and as it became more plentiful it went down to \$1.00 and then we turned more to the raising of cattle. We had hauled our wheat one-hundred fifty bushel at a load to Waverly, a distance of sixty-five miles, and this trip took a week with oxen. We also drove our fat hogs there at the rate of ten miles per day, as well as our cattle. A good cow after the War was worth from \$60.00 to \$65.00 but beef cattle were not so high. Calves would bring \$10.00 at weaning time.

After leaving there, we went to Pettis County for a while, then went to Illinois and then to Arkansas where we lived for two years, one and a half miles north of Siloam Springs. I married while here but my wife lived but a short time and left me with a little son. From there in 1878 I came to Oaks, the site of the Old Moravian Mission, and I remember that the man who had charge of the Mission had an interpreter who was supposed to repeat to his audience what the preacher had said and instead of doing that one day the interpreter repeated after the preacher not what he had said but described to the audience

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a big coon hunt. Here I took a lease from Johnson Fields and farmed on the river, raised cattle and cut walnut logs. At first I built a one room log house and later added two frame rooms. My payment for the lease was the improvements. I hired a boy to do the farming and another to help me with the cattle and then I had the logging besides. We would haul the logs to the river with oxen. Of course here it did not take as many oxen as it had when I was freighting for then I have driven a string of fourteen. After four years here, I sold out and with my little son came to the Big Timbered Hill north of Vinita and worked for a short time for Campbell until I could get the lay of the country and then I went to work at the Goodridge Sawmill.

at that time this country was covered with the tall blue-stem and thousands of cattle were brought in here to graze each year. It was dangerous to be caught afoot on

the prairie; you could go from the hill to Vinita without hitting a house. Abe Mills whose wife was a Shawnee Indian borrowed \$200,000.00 from some source in England and went into the cattle business on a big scale. He operated from

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the hill north to the state line south of Chetopa, Kansas. Bill Farmer was another large cattleman, he was a white man and owner of the cattle but they were registered under the name of Hugh Campbell who handled the cattle for him. Campbell was the same man for whom I first worked and he had married a Shawnee woman, the widow McClain, who had come with the Shawnees to that section many years before and had remained there when most of her people had moved on.

There were no courts here in those days except that the Cherokees had courts for their own people but if one of the persons involved was a white person it meant a trip to Fort Smith, Arkansas. Once I was called there to be a witness against a boy for selling whiskey. They allowed you 10 cents per mile for going and \$1.50 per day while there.

I had to stay there two months before the case came up for trial. I could not leave. Out of the money paid you, you

had to keep yourself and it was a costly matter to most people and for that reason many things were never reported because nobody wanted to have to go to Fort Smith and perhaps have to stay there for months. I did not know any of the

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Cook gang well but they scouted about in this country and later were killed out. But when the Dalton boys were United States Marshals they were cold and cruel. While I was in Fort Smith the Dalton boys came to a place close to Fort Smith to arrest a boy. He was staying with his sister and her husband in a tent. As the Dalton boys approached, the woman came out of the front of the tent with her baby in her arms and they

shot her through the breast; the ball passed through her body and for some time I helped to care for her and she finally recovered. The men shot and killed her husband but the boy, her brother, escaped by leaving the thirty foot tent by the rear.

I continued to live in this part of the country and January 5th, 1896, I married Lillie Blackfish, a Cherokee girl, and became a squawman. We settled seven miles west of Miami and three miles south of the Little Timbered Hill, where I built a small two-room frame house and later allotted it to one of my sons. Lillie took her allotment on Coal Creek three miles west of Miami where we lived later. The

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most disturbance that I knew of about the allotment of land was on Little Timbered Hill where some of the McGhees allotted. A part of the land that they selected was occupied by negroes of the name of Harris. The wife of old Alex claimed to be part Cherokee and tried to hold the land and they had two sons, Bill and Alex. Bill was a bad negro and tried to hold the land by force and one day when T. J. McGhee Jr. started to fence a part of it,

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they had some difference and Bill struck Mr. McGhee over the head with a rail knocking him unconscious. This made the rest of the settlers uneasy and the matter was reported and after it was proven that the story of old Alex's wife being of Cherokee blood was untrue, Alex Harris and his wife were put off the hill by the Cherokee officials and this was the last negro stronghold in this county and is perhaps the reason why today Ottawa County has no negroes. After this, we never had any more disturbances and it was a good neighborhood to live in. We never even locked our doors when leaving home.

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The sons of T. J. McGhee or Dodge settled on the east end of Little Timbered Hill. Bert's land took in the east

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end of the hill which is about a half mile long and the west end is covered with timber while the east point is bare with a ledge of rocks projecting out of the east end and facing the south. The land around here is level for miles except this hill and Potato Mound which is a high round mound without any trees and no doubt was formed by a volcanic eruption a half a mile east of the east point of Little Timbered Hill. There is a small open cave facing the south in the ledge of rocks on Bert's land. No doubt this was sometimes used as a shelter in early days as it would be hard to approach. Down the side of the hill in the pasture they found the skeletons of five men, possibly soldiers.

When I first came to this country the large rocks which formed Potato Mound were formed into a circle on the top of the hill with lookout holes on all sides. The wall was higher than a man's head and this proved an ideal spot to stop as you could see all over the country in any direction for several miles and then, too, the steep sides would make it impossible for anyone to approach the

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top without being exposed to the guns of those within Potato Mound. These rocks are torn down and scattered now. On the slop of the hill I have found various rocks of a mineral formation most often of the nature of an iron. This is foreign to any of the surface rocks in this part of the country as all of the others are of a sandstone formation. There used to be a big square rock as large as a bedstead and several feet thick on one of the slopes. It looked like iron. The entrance to the enclosure was on the north side. Prospecting on that and Little Timbered Hill have shown there is some gas there, they drilled a hole on top of the little Timbered Hill just south of the schoolhouse and there was gas in that hole and it was plugged but we could never find out why. Later in Bert's pasture they got gas, sufficient for him to cook with. There are also three big springs that still flow today upon the hill. Each one of the three McGhee brothers had one near his house. When I came here there was little game here except farther back on the river and in the wooded sections but occasionally a few deer would stray through. I killed one on Potato Mound.

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My wife died several years ago and since her death I have lived with my sons, first in Miami, then in Commerce and for the last few years I have lived with Andrew and his wife here.