

MCDANIELS, MAUD E.

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Gomer Gower,
Investigator,
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An Interview with Mrs. Maud E. McDaniels,
Poteau, Oklahoma.

Mrs. Maud E. McDaniels was born in Caddo Parish,
Louisiana, on August 11, 1872.

In the early part of 1885, she came with her parents,
William Kennedy Hoover and Martha Amelia (Bennett) Hoover,
to the Indian Territory where her parents leased land
from a full blood Choctaw Indian, a Mr. Pope, whose home
was located about three miles east of what is now the City
of Poteau, on the edge of Tarby Prairie. It was near the
Pope home that she spent her girlhood days and attended
the community schools of that period.

The Tarby Prairie School, as it was then called, was
a one-room log cabin having a dirt floor and a clapboard
roof. For light, two small windows, or rather half windows,
were provided, and these were placed on opposite sides
of the building. One of the remaining two sides was
occupied by a large fireplace and the other side by a door.
This room was approximately sixteen feet square and accom-
modated from thirty to forty pupils. During the three years

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which Mrs. McDaniels attended this school, Mr. Walter Beard was the teacher. The article of furniture which served as a desk was a small table at which all the pupils who were far enough advanced received instruction in penmanship. That table was too small to accommodate more than two pupils at one time, so, each pupil in penmanship awaited his or her time for the use of the table. As may well be imagined, this particular lack of necessary equipment caused much confusion for the reason that class recitals, in which a penmanship pupil was to take a part, were never complete. The benches upon which the pupils were required to sit were uncomfortable in the extreme. They were made of split logs, the heart, or inner side smoothed, after a manner, for the surface of the bench, while in the outer, or bark, side were inserted wooden pegs which served as legs for the bench. There were no backs to these benches,

As was the vogue in all grade schools of that period, slates and slate pencils were used instead of tablets and lead pencils. In the absence of desks, those slates enabled the pupil to have a hard and firm surface upon which to

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prepare a report of his lesson, something which could not be done with a loose leaf of paper so the primitive school slate not only provided a reasonably good desk, when placed upon the knees of the pupil, but had the added advantage of being ready for further use upon the erasure of completed work. Erasures were most easily made. The pupils usually were provided with a small sponge or cloth attached to the slate by means of a cord as an eraser but the rougher boys scorned this and when they desired to make an erasure would spit on the surface of the slate and with vigorous rubbing with the bare hand quickly remove all traces of previous work. The shirt and coat sleeves were also often called into use for this purpose.

The irritating "scream" produced by an irregularly sharpened pencil point, when applied to the hard surface of a school slate by a boy more bent on mischief than on excelling in his lesson, is a sound that will never be forgotten. This was a means often employed by the more mischievous boys to divert the minds of the more studious pupils from their lessons.

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Exceptionally cold days were hailed with great delight by the pupils as they afforded them excuses to leave their hard and uncomfortable seats and approach the fireplace to warm their almost frozen hands and feet. Not more than half a dozen of them were permitted to leave their seats at the same time for that purpose. The discomfort experienced in an attempt to keep warm in a not too well built log cabin where the heat finds its way out through the openings at the eaves and the spaces between the warping clapboards, while cold air is constantly drawn in through badly chinked openings between the logs, can only be appreciated by those who have suffered it. Only children who were endowed with vigorous constitutions survived it. Both white and Indian children attended this school and both races mingled in the recreations of the school play ground.

During the three years in which Mrs. McDaniels lived in the vicinity of this school, it was the custom of the Indian people to hold their mid-summer camp meetings under a brush arbor which was erected near the school. These camp meetings were attended by both whites and Indians.

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The principal part of the services, however, were conducted in the Choctaw language. When a considerable number of whites were present, the sermons were explained to them by an interpreter. One Jacob Jackson, a well-educated Choctaw Indian, who himself was a preacher and educator and a one time treasurer of the Choctaw Nation, often interpreted the sermons at these meetings.

Mrs. Susan Harris, an intermarried white woman; the wife of a full blood Choctaw, who lived on the west end of Tarby Prairie, was possessed of a wonderfully fine singing voice. It was she who usually led the singing. She sang the Choctaw as well as the English hymns and her attendance at religious services was eagerly sought on that account.

As was the custom of the Choctaws when holding their camp meetings, bountiful food was prepared for the occasions. Great washpots of hominy and fresh meat were cooked on the camp ground and all visitors were given a cordial invitation to join them in partaking of the repast.

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Before commencing to eat a hush was observed and grace said by one of the church dignitaries, and then all fell to seated on their hunkers about on the ground. What such a gathering lacked in modern conveniences and amenities was more than made up in the feeling of good fellowship which was reflected in the faces of the participants.