

JAMES, MATTHEW WALTON

INTERVIEW

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Pete W. Cole
Interviewer
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Interview with
Matthew Walton James
Stringtown, Okla.

My name is Matthew Walton James. I was born in 1869, and am now 68 years old.

I do not know how old I was when we lived on the old Military Road that came through from Skelton Depot to Fort Washita and through to Tishomingo, Oklahoma, to Fort Arbuckle, to Fort Cobb, to Fort Reno and on west.

The road that I have reference to was discontinued about the year of 1872, after the Katy Railroad was built through this country. My mother was a daughter of Daniel Folsom. My father was Jimmon James. He got killed when I was about five years old and she married William Matoy. When I was nine years old I ran away from home and worked for D. A. Riddle for seventeen years. When I was twenty-seven years old I left and went west, where I married Charloty McCarty. We lived together for several years, until one day we disagreed on a subject, and since that time I have been single.

I have lived in this country a long time and when I was a little boy, fifty years ago, the Choctaws raised

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horses, cattle and hogs and sold them. I remember when they sold their cattle for \$10.00 each head; wild ponies for \$10.00 to \$12.00 each, and hogs for \$1.00 per head, for one year old, and if he was two years old he was sold for \$2.00, and so on; he was sold by his age.

My parents were born and reared near Doakesville. My mother was graduated in Paris, Texas. Ohahta Tamaha, the name the old timers gave Armstrong Academy, was an Indian school, but during the War between the North and the South was changed to a hospital. After the war it was continued as an Indian school by the Government.

In my growing up, I attended the neighborhood school until I was eighteen, when I attended Spencer Indian Academy near Antlers, Oklahoma, in Pushmataha County. I stayed there until I was twenty-one years old when I had to return home, as no one was allowed to remain in school after attaining his majority.

The famous old Military Road came in from Arkansas to Fort Towson near Doakesville, thence in a westerly direction to Armstrong Academy to Washita, Tishomingo, thence west to Fort Arbuckle. At each station there were

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United States soldiers stationed. Later, Fort Sill was built.

I am one-half Choctaw, but I did not take any part in their court and I never was arrested in the Choctaw Court. I was present at court, though I was not charged with any crime, when a man by the name of Edmond Jones was tried, convicted and was sentenced to receive twenty-five lashes on his bare back for stealing his neighbor's sow. When the time arrived for the sheriff to carry out the order of the court, Edmond Jones was stripped of his shirt and was strapped to the whipping post. When this was done, Sheriff Calvin Beam delivered the twenty-five lashes and he was declared free and was unstrapped and turned loose. When he was turned loose he ran out and whooped and gobbled, and made a remark about how easy the sheriff was in delivering the punishment. This made the judge angry and he ordered his sheriff to bring this man before him. When he appeared, and after a brief talk by the judge, he sentenced twenty-five more lashes to be laid on his back for contempt of court. He was tied to the post and was given the twenty-five lashes on his back. After the second punishment he was quiet and did not yell or gobble.

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At another time I attended court when a man was to be hanged for murder. Everything was set for the day, the death trap in good condition. About the time of execution I got up on a pile of wood that was piled near the gallows and was waiting for the trap to be sprung. The condemned man was brought to the gallows, rope placed around his neck and after a brief service, and just as the trap sprung, I lost control of myself, over balanced and fell off the pile of wood that I was sitting on and made all kind of noises rolling down as though I was the victim. This entertained some of the visitors very much but I was getting nervous when this happened.

Another incident happened one time when Simeon Turnbull, a Scout, but a man of bad repute, maliciously murdered Rachel (Only name of an aged woman known as Granny) and two little girls. They had been killed about four days before they were found. A little boy about five years old, who was along with the family, played dead while the rest of the family were being slaughtered, escaped after the murder and was found by some of their friends. The little boy did not know the name of the man

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but gave the description.

It was through this little boy, who gave the description, that the law arrested a man by the name of Edmond Gardner, as it fitted the description given. He was tried, convicted and sentenced to be hanged on the child's testimony. He appealed his case to higher court, was convicted, and at each different trial he was defeated. At last he was granted a stay of execution for the reason that the judge was not satisfied with the decision of the court. While this was pending, Simeon Turnbull, the man who really did the killing, was enjoying life to the fullest extent when one day his horse fell from under him and broke his neck. On his death bed he confessed that it was he who had committed the crime and the last statement he made was, "Turn Edmond Gardner loose, he did not murder the woman or the two girls." The court was satisfied with the statement of the deceased and turned Edmond Gardner loose.