



Charline M. Culbertson

Field Worker

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Interview with W. C. Riggs,
Blanco, Oklahoma
Father-Jesse James Riggs
Mother-Mariam Riggs.

I was born in Marion County, Alabama. I moved with my parents, Jesse James and Mariam Riggs, to Indian Territory in the year of 1878 when I was hardly a year old. We located near High Springs or Kullychoa in the Choctaw Nation. In coming to the Territory we came by train to Fort Smith, Arkansas, then ^{to} on the Choctaw Nation by wagon. There were several families who traveled to the Territory with us, an aunt and uncle; also the Bayless, Lackey and Jentry families. At Kullychoa there was only one store and mill combined and it was operated by Nord Jones, a full blood Choctaw, who has been dead for

several years. The reason my father located at this place was because there were more white people there than any place in the Nation. That was Nord Jones' great custom, inviting white people to settle at this little place.

My schooling was done with a private tutor and after I finished with him a Doctor of Science from

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the University of Mississippi, by the name of Bonnett, came to this country for his health. He brought with him a wagon full of books and I studied those for four years.

Our first home in the Territory was a box house with side kitchen and dining room with the front porch facing the road. We had a log barn where father kept his stock, although he didn't have a great amount of stock.

As you know we were considered non-citizens or intruders until after Statehood, however, we were never asked to get out.

My mother is buried at Ellis Chapel which is about three and a half miles north of Wister, Oklahoma, in LeFlore County. A Methodist Preacher whom we called Uncle Jerry Ellis built the school and church there. The material was donated by the people in order that the church and school could be built. Father was always very handy with tools himself, and he always made our furniture, and in later years made his living by going

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into the wagon making business.

I remember the first burial at Ellis Chapel was that of a child about four years old. He had started to the field where his father was and when his father returned home he had not seen the child and naturally they thought some wild animal had gotten him. The whole neighborhood began searching for the child and hours later my father and another man found the body floating down the creek. That was the first burial and now there are about three thousand graves. There are lots of Indians buried there as well as whites, the cemetery and is still in use today.

At the age of eight years my family moved to Kennedy, Indian Territory. There was a store there only a little country store and a school. The mill is still there. The church is not far from Wister, Oklahoma, and we could buy a few of our supplies from this little store but all supplies had to be freighted in, which made them cost so much. My father would make trips to Fort Smith, Arkansas, for supplies once

or twice a year. He would go the old Military Road which went through Doaksville and on to Fort Smith. The trail from Boggy Depot to Fort Smith went four miles north of Blanco. There were two stage stands on this trail which was the Brazil Station or Creek as it was sometimes called and which was the first stop from Boggy Depot. The next stop was the Maxey stand just south of Wister.

I remember the little war between Green McCurtain and Jacob Jackson on the question of who was the Chief of the Choctaw Nation.

Polk McKlevian; a soldier under General Stan Watie, hid in the woods adjoining our place at Kennedy until his tribe came for him. I would carry food into the woods to him. The day his tribe came looking for him I didn't know who they were, so I ran to tell Polk McKlevian what they looked like. They were riding horseback, and had red strips on their saddle horns and on their heads. They had belts of cartridges around their waists as if they were out on a bear hunt. When I told him this he began to give the war whoop, which I had never heard before,

then the other Indians began to whoop and answer him and came after him; then I knew they must be his friends.

The only ferry I remember was across the Poteau River over in Le Flore County, called the Kent Ferry, and operated by a man by the name of Kent. It was a flat boat with a cable.