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Dovey P. Heady
Field Worker
Indian-Pioneer History

Story as told by Mary Alice (Gibson)
Arendell to Dovey P. Heady, Field Worker.

Mrs. Arendell has answered the questions to the best of her knowledge. Her mind is not as active as it used to be and she cannot remember dates or names very well. She states as follows:

I was born in 1861 at Waco, Texas. I am of Choctaw and Cherokee descent. I am 76 years of age. My father, Arthur B. Gibson, was born in Kentucky. I do not remember the date or place of his birth. He died and was buried near Jimstown, Chickasaw Nation. In about two weeks, he was taken up and buried at Decatur, Texas, in a family cemetery by the side of a daughter.

My father was a Southern soldier during the Civil War. I do not remember to what Company or Regiment he belonged. He could not get a furlough to come home, so he deserted the war and come home. I remember we were living at Parker, Texas, in a one-room log house, the door had fallen down and had been walked over for several months. My mother raised the door and dug a hole just long and wide enough for him to lay in on his back,

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then the door was lowered and walked over as usual. There she kept him hidden for several weeks. He would be let out each day for a few minutes exercise. We children were taught that he was just a good man that needed protection from bad men, not until after the war did we know that he was our father. When he came he was badly in need of clothes. My mother carded and spun the cotton and made him some clothes before he returned to the war.

Mother, Francis Lu Vania (Smith Heart) Gibson, was born in Mississippi. She was of Choctaw and Cherokee descent. Her parents left Mississippi in covered wagons, pulled by oxen. They settled at Jim Town on Red River in Chickasaw Nation. They were run out many times by the Indians, because my grandmother looked like a white woman. Each time they would return to Texas. This was after slavery. My grandfather (Smith Heart) owned a large plantation and about 300 slaves. After slavery he was never satisfied and traveled a lot. He worried so over losing his slaves that he lost his mind. He would wander away in the woods. He would be gone for several days before someone found him. Once he was gone

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several days and when found, he was sitting by a tree with a shotgun between his knees, the barrel pointing to his head. A string was tied to the trigger and to his big toe so he could commit suicide. He was found just in time to save his life. A few weeks later he was found dead a few miles from his home with his throat cut and a razor in his hand.

My grandmother (Smith Heart) then remained in Texas until her death.

I remember when my parents first came to Oklahoma, Indian Territory. It was in about 1870.

Several families travelled in covered wagons. Many times we were attacked by Indians. They were in droves and at a distance they looked like timber. Sometimes they took our horses, food, bedding, cows or goats. We usually had goats because they were less trouble to travel with. When the Indians robbed us, we had to travel on foot until we came to a farm house. There the men folks would work out some horses and another place maybe some cows or goats. We then started on our journey.

I remember on the same journey. A white man by the name of Abe Lee and his family were traveling with

us. Before dark we camped and made a big log fire. Just after dark a drove of Indians on horses came to our camp, there must have been three hundred of them. They rode around and around our wagons. Finally several of them got off their horses and came up to our wagons and walked around and looked at the horses, then at the women and children. They never said a word, even when our men folks spoke to them; finally a big Indian who must have been the Chief, shouted something and they grabbed me and Mrs. Lee and five children; they killed Mr. & Mrs. Lee and oldest daughter and threw them on their horses. They then tied the other three children, (Susana, Johnnie, and Francis Lee) on their horses and rode away shouting something. We never heard what become of the children, until I was about grown, that was in about 1880. Susana married and came to Jimstown and settled near us. It was then that she told me the story of her life with the Indians.

The Indians scalped her mother, father and sister and threw the bodies away. They put the scalps on sticks and tried to make the children dance across Red River and carry the scalps high in the air. A squaw objected to this because everyone would have to walk.

Instead, they were tied on the horses and made ride across and carry the scalps on the sticks.

The squaws were good to them but the Bucks were not. Susana was sold three times among the Indians. Each time she was sold, she was branded across the forehead and around the wrist. She still bore the three scars across her forehead and around her wrist. The children were with the Indians so long that they didn't want to leave them.

The Government cut off their food until they released the white children. I wish I could tell more of how the Government forced the Indians to give up the white children.

When we came to Oklahoma, Indian Territory, there were few white families. Mostly Cherokee Indians. What few families that were here, were farming small tracts of land.

We all worked, even to the small children. Each child had a chore to do before supper and before going to bed. Before supper we had to bring in water, or wood, or chips, etc. If we failed to do our chore we didn't get any supper. After supper each child had to separate from the cotton a pint of cotton seed or pick burs out of the sheep wool

so mother could card and spin it and make it into cloth.

Cloth made of cotton was called linsey and was used mostly for dresses, sheets, etc. Wool cloth was called jeans and was used mostly for blankets, coats and men's clothes.

My mother was a self-educated person but she had a good education. She taught in many of the Indian schools. There was a great demand for her as a teacher because she spoke many different dialects. I do not remember the names of any of the schools or location, I only know they were in Indian Territory.

My mother did a lot of nursing the sick. She really was the Doctor for the neighborhood. She made many medicines from roots and herbs. She made many different teas, bitters, etc., and kept a large quantity on hand in case of emergencies.

I remember a few of the medicines that she made. A laxative was made from a weed we called Baldonia, this was made by boiling the tops of the Baldonia weeds. When made it was a dark brown tea. We made our table tea by boiling sassafras roots, call sassafras tea.

Sarsaparilla tea was used as a blood tonic and was made by boiling the roots. Bitters--used as a kidney

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medicine or blood tonic was made by boiling together the roots of Black hall bushes, butterfly roots, and Ice weed roots, some whiskey was added to this after it was made.

For chills and fever, a medicine was made from Prickly Ash bark or cherry bark. This was made by boiling the barks and water to a thick tea. Many other medicines were made of roots and herbs but I can not name them.

Very few things were bought in those days. Everything was either made or grown at home. We used flint rock, gun powder and cotton for starting fires. This was done by putting the gun powder on cotton and striking two flint rocks together to ignite the powder.

We made wooden spoons. We grew large gourds for which were used as containers for water, sugar, lard, meal, etc. We made ash lye soap every spring. The lye was made by pouring water over ashes and catching the drippings. Corn was ground into meal by a hand grinder and later a coffee grinder.

Dyes and paints were always made at home. Many

dyes were made from barks and berries. Walnut bark would dye cotton brown and silks and wools yellow. Poke berries dyed a purple but was easily washed out. Copperas was used to set the colors of different dyes.

We painted our face with what we called Indian paint root. Cut the roots and rubbed it on our face. This was the way the Bucks painted their bodies.

Most of our entertainments were in connection with work. We would have, cotton dances, corn gathering or corn shucking dances; Candy pullings.

People for miles around would bring their families and pick cotton, gather or shuck corn all day and dance at night. These dances were given until every person's crop was gathered. We then had Brush Arbor Church meetings. Everyone turned their stock out on open range and came to the meeting and camped. Sometimes the meetings lasted for a month or maybe longer.

I never knew of a preacher to be paid for preaching. He worked for a living just like everyone else. Most all of the people in my immediate locality were what we called Duncans, now known as Hard Shell Baptists.

Most of the houses in those days were made of logs,

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with log or rock fireplaces with clay chinking between the logs and rocks. Some people lived in dugouts on the side of a hill. Water would run in them if they were dug on level ground.