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INDEX CARDS

Agent - Five Civilized Tribes

Tribe - Cherokee

Fort Gibson

Jesse Chisholm

Sam Houston

Military Road - Fort M~~aven~~worth to Fort Gibson

Ferry - Pooler or McClain, Milstrap

Grand Prairie

Civil War - Refugees

Skallyville

Schools - Subscription, Male Seminary

Nez Perce, Modocs- Indian Police

FIELD WORKER NANNIE LEE BURNS
Indian-Pioneer History Project S-149
June 2, 1937.

INTERVIEW WITH FRANK G. AUDRAIN
Fairland, Oklahoma,
Indian tribe Cherokee.

FRANK AUDRAIN'S STORY.

My Grandfather Audrain of French descent, was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and came with his family when my father was twelve years old to Fort Gibson as agent for the Five Civilized Tribes, where he remained four years when he returned with his family, excepting my father, to their home in Michigan. My father, James Audrain, was born in Grand Rapids, but when grandfather returned, he remained at Fort Gibson as clerk for J. B. Lyons. He later married Mary Wilson, a Cherokee, who came from Georgia in 1833. She was a young woman then. Father was 69 and mother 72 when they died. Both are buried in the old Audrain Cemetery on my son's place, four miles east of Fairland, where I was born. I, Frank George Audrain, was born April 22, 1860.

FATHER'S EARLY LIFE.

On their way to Indian Territory, they crossed Lake Michigan in a boat. A storm came up and they were forced to unload the cattle, which were a part of the cargo, in the lake to save the boat and themselves.

2

Father became buddy of Finnie Chisholm, maker of the "Chisholm Trail". One night he and Chisholm went across the Illinois River to a dance. Both were riding the same animal, a jack. They had a jug of whiskey and on their return, their mount stubbed his toe, and they lost their jug which was broken in the fall. Father knew Sam Houston well.

After father and mother were married they settled on Shoal Creek near Baxter Springs, Kansas, in the Neutral Strip not far from David Harlan. Later he opened a trading station at Little-Town, now Oswego, Kansas, to trade with the Osages. At this time they had two small children and Dad had an Osage Indian for a guard for mother and the children. At night, this Osage would lie down across the door of the room where they slept.

Mother was a good rider and could ride the wildest horses. She would even take the children, one in her lap and one behind her on the unbroken horses.

The stage, by boat, or on horseback was their means of travel then, except for carrying the ox cart. The Military Road from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Gibson was the only road in this section. At the Pooler Ferry,

southeast of Miami, before Poolers had it, the ferry was run for a while by Jack McClain who always wore a shawl over his head. One day some Indians jerked the shawl from his head and found that what they thought was true, he was part negro. He left after this happened.

When the discussion of the northern boundary of the original Cherokee Nation came up and it was most certain that Kansas would get a strip across the northern end, my father and a neighbor by the name of Pool with their families moved down to the south part of the then Grand Prairie (mother said all the country north of the Grand River was then called the Grand Prairie), and father settled at the place where I was born, four miles east of Fairland on Highway 60 between here and Wyandotte.

Mr. Pool settled just east of father where the Grand, the Neosho and Lost Creek came together. This place is now a part of the Fred Victor farm. The well dug by Pool is still in use. At present there is quite a bit of timber around these farms but then there was not, though the brush and young sprouts were about as high as your head.

Both men began to build log homes and clear and put the land in cultivation. My father's first house was a frame with board windows, doors and floors. Other improvements were two log cabins for the darkies, a cave built for the fruit, and father had a large young orchard set out, barns, corn cribs, etc. The men made our rails and fenced our fields. The main line of the Arisco crosses the place just south of the house. A young Osage by the name of Matthews and a young man who was blind came with the family when they moved here and remained with the family during the war.

My father's brother Bob returned from Michigan and came one day to the field where my father was plowing. Father did not know him. He remained with us and married Ruth Copeland, an Indian, my mother's niece.

Speaking of "drouths" before the war one year my father saw the Neosho River dry from the Connor Bridge northeast of Fairland, to its mouth and the weather was so warm and dry that when people went out of doors they wore cloths over their faces with eyeholes cut in the cloth to keep the sun from blistering their faces.

CIVIL WAR PERIOD

We remained at home in the Civil War period as long as possible but were forced to leave quickly and the party contained my father and his family, Uncle Bob and his wife, William Howell, later of Oseuma, Matthews,

the Osage, the blind man, George Myers, who made his home with us, the Thomas family and a few others. They gathered together just a few things not realizing that it would be years before they could return. I still treasure a framed looking glass that my mother took with her to the Red River in Texas and back. Each time that they were compelled to move on she would wrap it up in a feather bed. After we left, Matthews came back and rounded up fifty cattle and twenty-three head of horses belonging to father and started after us with them. By the time he reached Arkansas where he overtook us, he had two head of horses left.

The folks, after crossing the state line, thinking that here they would have protection, tried to make a crop.

Uncle Bob, his wife and William Howell started to return home and were arrested by the Union Forces and were made to work and carried through Kansas and around north and finally to Michigan where they were kept till after the war. While here his wife died and later he married a woman from Boston.

At Skullyville my father saw the blacksmith, Benges, shot while at work at his anvil and saw him fall forward on the hot anvil. Often the party would have to get up at night and move to keep out of danger. They had to keep watch all the time. They did not go all the way to Texas at once but sometimes only

a short distance and stay in the new locality till danger threatened again and then move quickly again. At the Kiamichi River. Matthews took Mrs. Thomas and a couple of the other women and crossed into the hills on the other side where they were caught in a hailstorm, the steers ran away and I have heard father say that the women both screamed and prayed.

It was a very hard problem to secure any thing to eat and the wild game made a large part of their food, and the hides furnished the leather for their shoes. The farther they went the worse off they became so they were almost destitute when they reached Texas, where they had protection till after the close of the war.

THE RETURN HOME

When my parents reached our home place they had two yolk of cattle, steers, three milk cows, two goats, two sheep, a one-eyed pony and two dogs that they had raised to chase the pony when they wanted to catch him. Our house had been burned and on'y two one-room log cabins built for the darkies, remained. Fences had been destroyed, fields grown up in sprouts and persimmons, but the young orchard that my father had set out was left and was old enough to bear, which meant so much those first hard years.

We returned in the fall of 1866 and first the men built one log room, the north room of the two west rooms of the present house, and repaired the fruit cave and the two cabins.

Father heard of a drove of wild hogs near where Blue-jacket now is, so he and some of the other men went there and father killed two-one male and one sow. This was our winter's meat.

Before leaving we had nice valley fields and on our return father found his fields a mass of young trees, sprouts and brush and not a rail left of the fences.

The first year, we had a corn field just west of the present Grand River Bridge, west of Wyandotte, but we had nothing to work with. We hoed corn and had corn-bread and onions for lunch. We made our hay with a homemade wooden pitch-fork and rake. The first year we raised only corn and pumpkins. Next year we had a squash and a cotton patch. During the winter evenings we sat round the fire-place with the cotton piled in front of the fire to warm it and picked the cotton seeds out by hand from the cotton for mother and my sisters to make into thread and cloth for our clothes. The cotton separates much easier from the seed if it is warm. If a spark from the fire should set the cotton afire, our work for the evening was over. One day in the spring mother sent my sister and me up the ravine north of the house to gather wild onions for dinner. George Myers, the blind man, was with us and we grew alarmed at a noise we heard which we took for fighting wild cattle. When we returned without the onions mother was angry, as the onions were needed for dinner.

A black wolf killed, in the daytime, one of our sheep and one of the goats.

Mother and the Oage took one of the ox teams and drove to Redding Mill south of Joplin, Missouri, and when she returned she brought with her, two hog jowls. We thought we had the finest meal ever. The trip took four days.

One night one of our ox teams disappeared and we found them a week later at White Jim Duncan's at Osceola.

Duth Billy who was a bugler during the war was a friend of father's and one day after the war, he with Bob Lundy came by home with a jug of whiskey on their return from Southwest City, Missouri. Father asked him if he would like to be bugler again and he replied that he was glad to be out of it.

The second year father added the south room of the two west rooms of the present house which is still standing and my son lives in it today. This house is a four-room log house standing in a beautiful valley four miles east of Fairland on Highway 60 and is said to be the oldest house in this county, just as I am said to be the oldest Cherokee living who was born in this county.

Another incident happened about this time that had a great influence in the later life of Mr. Audrain. A negro came by one day after the war riding a mare in foal and my father traded him our one-eyed pony for this mare. The colt later turned out to be speedy, being of a racing strain and this was the start of the

Audrian Stables, though my father had raised race horses before the war.

We had a straight track of 800 yards east of our house. We have owned many good horses; among them Dolly V, the colt obtained in the trade with the negro which we traced back to a quarter horse. I have owned as many as six racers at one time. Among them, Ceraldine, Audrey A, Ashland, Nona and many others. It is only in the last few years that I have ceased to be actively engaged in racing and the raising of racers.

MY EARLY LIFE

I first attended school, which was a neighborhood affair, at a small log building which stood near the Overacre Spring and I didn't quite learn my abc's the first term. Among the pupils there were my sister, Frank Connor, Alfred Eudeater, and Mathias Eudeater. Next we went to school not so far from home, just east of Ogeechee taught by a man named Peppers. In 1876 mother moved to Vinita to send us to school. Later I went to St. Louis to stay at my uncle's and there I attended school four months. When I returned home I was sent to Tahlequah to the Male Seminary where I remained through February, March and April when I had pneumonia. My school days ended at Seneca, Missouri,

10

when I was twenty years old. Just before school ended, one day I met J. P. McNaughton there who told me of a dance to be held that night at Peter Labadie's three miles north of Miami, where North Miami now is, and we decided to go. I had a horse at school that I rode home weekends. Late that evening something prevented his going so I set out alone for the dance, nearly twenty-five miles distant over a roadless country, and not knowing whether I could find it or not. But I did and I met there most of the young people I knew. Charlie Williams had brought his three sisters, one of them afterwards my wife, good dancers. George Finley did the calling. He always kept time with his foot while calling and played the Jew's Harp much of the time.

MARRIAGE

At the Joplin Hotel, then a brick building, now the Connor Hotel of Joplin, on May 30, 1886, I married Melissa Williams, the daughter of Richard Melton Williams, who had settled three miles southwest of Miami in 1869. My wife was born in Jackson County, Kansas, October 23, 1863, and had come to this country with her father and his family in 1869. She attended school first at Mud Creek and later at Vánita.

Her father's home was considered the half-way house on the Chetopa-Mayesville Road, and in the fall a constant stream of fruit wagons containing apples, cider and peaches passed on their way to the Kansas markets. Many would camp near, as Coal Creek furnished a convenient camping place and the campers would burn her father's rails.

We traded at Seneca, Missouri, but took our wheat to the water mill at Chetopa.

We lived one year at father's and then moved to our home on the prairie one mile north of Fairland in 1887 where we lived till eight years ago, when we moved here to Fairland. We had nine children; Ettie, Inez, Frank, Esther, Rubin, Ralph, Robert, Anna, Maymie and Maggie, all of whom are living except Ettie Inez, Frank and Esther.

MISCELLANEOUS

Father put in the first ferry after the war. It was just above the bridge on Grand River. The first one was pulled by oars. We would have to row above where we wanted to land and row down and across the river. Later we established a cable which was of two-inch hemp rope which we stretched with steers. This was replaced with a wire cable.

The Gilstrap Ferry below was a feeder from Missouri for the Military Road.

On my way to Tahlequah one day on Cloud Creek, I killed a rattlesnake that had 23 rattles.

At the Joseph Pate place just southeast of Narcissa, on that mound, we built a guide post. It was built of big loose rocks. Having so few roads in those days we used the large mounds on the prairie for observation points.

Many mornings I have ridden to the top of the mound just southeast of Fairland and looked over the prairie to locate my cattle.

Yes, we had some trouble with cattle rustlers. Once my father-in-law, Richard Williams, had about 500 head and one night the thieves cut out a whole carload, about twenty-five, and drove them away, but they were overtaken and the cattle recovered.

We had no laws in those days only covering the citizens, so the men banded themselves together as "Vigilance Committee" for mutual protection. Johnson Thompson, who built the first stone house in Vinita, with the consent of the others, offered Alfred Barker ammunition to supply the members for use.

Doc. Goddard was hung for harboring these cattle thieves.

Once I helped father cross twenty head of cattle on the ice at the mouth of the Neosho and Spring Rivers.

13

In December of 1895 was the highest water I have ever seen. The water was all over my father's farm and ran into the east rooms.

The Nez Perces being brought to this country did not help for they were gamblers and taught the Modocs to gamble, and whiskey was easy to get from Seneca. They had Indian Police but they were not always patient with the Indian.

Once I saw a Modoc bet his vest and, on losing the wager, he turned his vest over to the officer; afterwards remembering that he had a box of caps in his vest, he approached the officer saying "Caps, want caps." He kept insisting for his caps and the officer not understanding what he wanted, shot him.

CONCLUSION.

Mr. Audrain, who is 1/16 Cherokee and his wife who is 1/4 Shawnee, are both in good health and recall with ease the early days. At the time of the writer's visit, Mr. Audrain was working in his garden.

The home where Mr. Audrain was reared is still occupied by his son and his family and is an excellent state of preservation and is one of the historic spots of northeast Oklahoma. In the front yard stands a huge walnut tree. Passing the front

14.

door is Highway 60 on which every hour in the day pass the high powered motor cars, reminder of the present day, and from the rear of the open entry between the two parts of the house you look south over a beautiful valley in which, about two hundred yards from the house, are some of the oldest graves that are marked in this county.