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INDEX CARDS

Tribe - Choctaw  
Trail of Tears  
Civil War  
Ranch - T. L. Griggs  
Game - Deer, turkey  
Devil's Shoe String  
Tom Fuller  
Choctaw Cry  
Paints and Dyes

Interview with Mr. Tom Ashford.  
By - Hazel B. Greene, Field Worker.

199

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Seventy year old Tom Ashford, of Soper, Oklahoma, was a brother of Jim Ashford, the Deputy U. S. Marshal who was killed by Shub Locke at Antlers about 1891, because, according to Tom Ashford, Jim had driven Shub away from a church where Shub was disturbing public worship. Shub shot him next day and he just lived a week.

The father of the Ashford boys was King Ashford, and the mother was Elizabeth Griggs, a half-blood Choctaw Indian. Tom Ashford says that his father died when he was so young that he remembers very little about him, except that he died and was buried just over in Arkansas, close to where they lived. That was in the time of the Civil War and the Arkansas line was farther west than it is now. Later they moved about one mile south of Antlers right where there is now a chicken ranch on the highway. His mother and her various husbands reared all the children there, except Tom. His grandfather, a white man from Mississippi, and Elizabeth Jane Griggs, a full-blood Choctaw Indian, came over the "Trail of Tears". They were already married.

When Tom's father died, an uncle, T. L. Griggs, "brought him up on the prairie and raised him in the saddle." He says that "at one time T. L. Griggs owned 15,000 head of white-faced Hereford vattle. He had so many that they had to ride after them all the time, and especially in the spring time when they would calve. Had to look after them more to keep their bags from spoiling. They were so wild we'd rope and tie them and milk them wherever we found them. Sometimes we'd have to throw them and tie them. Of course we would gentle and break a few of them for milk cows and always had plenty of milk and butter, though the majority of fullblood Indians did not care for milk and butter nor did they keep or milk cows."

Forty-five years ago, Tom Ashford married Mary Owens, a white woman, who was reared right around where Seper is now. She is sixty-three years old and they both read the newspapers without the aid of glasses. They say they lived up on the hill that overlooks Seper on the south side of town the first year they were married. All over, for miles as far as they could see across the prairie the grass was knee-high and each morning and evening large herds of wild cattle, deer and turkey would come out on

the prairie to graze and prairie chickens were so numerous that the noise they made early in the morning was almost deafening sometimes there were so many together. "There was plenty of game, but the greedy white man ate it up and destroyed it together," says Mr. Ashford. "I never killed a deer in my life, but I have killed turkey, squirrels, and plenty of other game, and caught lots of fish. No matter how far it was, we had to go fishing every so often. We'd have the biggest fishfrys. Several families would get together and go up on Beggy or some other stream, and take food and camping outfit (if we wanted to stay all night), skillets and plenty of grease. Each man would dig ten bunches of "devil's shoe string", and get him a block of wood and set it at the edge of the water, and go to pounding that stuff with a little mallet, and swishing the wood in the water. Waders and swimmers would go out in the water and stir up the water, which by that time would be looking milky. The fish would get drunk on that juice and pretty soon the heads of fish would begin to pop up and we would shoot them with the bows and arrows". Every man, woman and child would have his or

her face blacked with charcoal or something, not completely black but spotted. They said that the fish would not rise if their faces were not blacked.

Tom Ashford looks like a white man, yet he talks and acts like an Indian, and likes his old time Indian feed. He says: "The weman not able to pound Tom Fuller like she used to do. Se den't have much Pashefa any mere." He said these were the days when they really enjoyed life. Go five miles in an ex-wagen to church, take a camping outfit and stay until the meeting was over, if it was a week or two weeks. People took their religion more seriously than they do now. When we went to church, if it was close enough to go home to dinner we took anywhere from one to a dozen home with us, But nowadays they seem to go just to show their finery. We wore hickery shirts, ducking pants and the women wore calico dresses, if it suited us to do so, and home knit stockings. Now it seems like every fellow grabs his hat and tries to see how quick he can get away. "Why, they wouldn't notice an old fellow like me in my old straw hat tied on with a shoe string."

Mr. Ashford says, "We had Indian crys too! The Cheetaws usually buried their dead at home, out close to the house, and sometimes in the yard or garden. After they had been buried for sometime, a date was set for the funeral, I think they called it a "cry" cause everybody cries, and when the name of the dead was mentioned they she' cried. An arber was usually built at the home of the one buried there. If it was summer time; lets of food was prepared, especially meat (it was cooked in a big wash pot, usually); friends were invited to this funeral, and sometimes white people were invited. This was sometimes called by the Indians "Big Kat". They would have services, then all would proceed to the grave of the departed, and kneel down and pray and cry, and everybody would cry. Then services again and returned to the grave to cry again. Then go home." At the funeral "cry" one man was usually appointed to escort the white people to the table. He would get a stick and approach the guest and touch him with the stick and that signified that he was to accompany him to the table. Sometimes this was done silently, sometimes he would say "Kat" in Cheetaw. No two white people

were seated side by side, and men and their wives were widely separated. And nobody went away hungry.

Sometimes the pioneers would secure unbleached domestic, or flour sacks and dye them the desired color. Red Oak bark made a beautiful brown; copperas was used to "set" the color. Copperas made a pretty yellow. Another shade of brown was obtained by dyeing with dry walnut hulls, another by using green walnut hulls, still another by the boiled walnut bark; with copperas. It varied the tints.

We had lots of ways of making lots of things that we needed. We made work hats for the men out of oat straw, and perfectly beautiful ones for women out of corn shucks. Nice enough to wear to church, for the younger ones. Older ones were slat bennets. If we were to tell all about how we lived, we would be laughed at. But we were raised that way and can't get away from it. We just wouldn't know how to wear fine clothes.

We wish this country was like it used to be in the Territory days. If we wanted to go anywhere, we just "lit" out in the direction we wanted to go and if there was a mudhole in the road we simply went around it. If a tree had fallen across the road, we did the



same thing. Nothing was fenced and plenty of  
grass for all the stock one wanted to raise.

Mr. Ashford is planning an Indian Ball  
game at Seper, July 4th.

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