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Chickasaw Nation
Pickens County
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ARTHUR, PETER B.

INTERVIEW.

8597

FIELD WORKER SELFRIDGE, JENNIE
Indian-Pioneer History S-149
September 22, 1937.

INTERVIEW WITH PETER B. ARTHUR
Leon, Oklahoma.
Born April 29, 1856, Hunnington West va.

Peter B. Arthur came to Pickens County, Chickasaw
Nation Indian Territory, in 1876, from Missouri.

The old Ike Cloud ranch southwest of Leon was
established prior to the Civil War, and was shown on
the map of the Chickasaw Nation when the first Govern-
ment survey was made. Ike Cloud was killed at Gains-
ville, Texas, during the Civil War, and his wife died
a short time later. After their death the ranch was
taken over by Mrs. Cloud's brothers Jim, Bill and Joe
Dibrell.

Jim Dibrell and his wife lived in a double log
house, and they built five log cabins. They also put
out a large orchard which later furnished fruit for
the whole settlement. In 1874 they bought a fine
piano and hired an Irishman, Paddy Malone, to play it
for them. They invited all of the settlers and cowboys

for miles around to attend the party which was given when the piano arrived. That night at the party, Mrs. Dibrell announced that her nephew, Robert Thompson, who lived in the Choctaw Nation, was going to take out an allotment near her home. Robert Thompson was a stepson of Jefferson C. Johnson. The next year Patty Malone died and his coffin was made from the piano box.

A few years later Jefferson C. Johnson decided to establish a sawmill and gin at this location, and hired Captain Darling and his son, Lem, to move a sawmill from the Choctaw Nation to a site one-half mile south of the present town of Leon. Shortly afterward Lem Darling died and Captain Darling left the country.

Soon after this, James T. Ray put in the first General Merchandise store and was the first postmaster at Leon. No one seems to know why the town was named Leon.

Five gins have burned at the first location of the old gin; Johnson operated a sawmill there for years.

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The first cemetery in this locality was at the Dibrell ranch house and was started by Ike Cloud.

When Arthur first settled at this location it took seven days to go to market at Denison or Sherman, Texas; three days to go to market one day to stay and three days to return. The settlers would gang up and four or five wagons would go at a time. It was rather dangerous for one man to travel alone.

Wes Burney lived at Burneyville. He was a brother-in-law of J. J. McAlester of McAlester. McAlester and Arthur would attend sessions of the Masonic Grand Lodge together and McAlester would always ask if Wes Burney still lived in the little log house at Burneyville. Burney built a large frame house just before his death.

The Leon cemetery was started in 1883. One morning Peter Arthur was out real early hunting; looking through the brush he saw some men digging a grave. At first he hid behind a tree and watched them. It was the custom in those days when any one was found murdered to

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bury him in a grave near the place where the body had been found. This was done to avoid the long weeks of attending trials at Fort Smith, Arkansas. Arthur stood behind the tree for a little while and soon recognized all of the men who were digging the grave, so he walked out from his hiding place, and learned that a lady named Brumley had died during the night. She did not want to be buried in the Dibrell Cemetery, so they were starting a new cemetery at Leon.

Captain Miller was the last person to be buried in the Dibrell Cemetery. No one knew anything about him. He killed a man the first night he was in Leon, and several years later was killed by a man named Abels who lived at Leon.

Another problem of the early settlers around Leon was getting material from which to make coffins. When some one would die the men would all gather in and decide who had a new plank floor in their home. They would go get these planks and make the coffin, and the first person who went to Denison or Sherman would bring back lumber to replace what had been used.

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Courtney Flat was founded by Henry DeCortney.

The year Arthur came to the Leon settlement DeCortney was shot through the face. He was at the supper table eating supper, and someone fired from the kitchen window. The bullet went all the way through his face. He lived for twenty-five years after that and the wound never healed. His wife and three of the boys stayed at Fort Arbuckle. Arthur visited in the home at the Fort one time when he was trying to run down some horse thieves. He went by the way of the present town of Healdton. A family named Wilson lived at this location. The man had gone to Marysville, Texas, after supplies, had failed to return at the time he was supposed to, and the woman did not have anything to eat. Mr. DeCortney visited his family at Fort Arbuckle, and they visited him. Three of the Courtney boys later established a ranch west of the Fort.

Mr. Arthur is the oldest living Past Grand Master of the Masonic Lodge in the State of Oklahoma. He was elected Junior Grand Warden of the Masons of Indian

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Territory in 1888, and Grand Master of Masons of Indian Territory in 1899. He also served as grand Patron of the Eastern Star Lodge in 1903-1904. He has been a member of the Masonic Lodge for fifty-four years, and has served as Secretary of the Leon Masonic Lodge for over fifty years.

Dr. James A. Ryan of Oklahoma City is the oldest member of the Leon Masonic Lodge. He was the first Doctor at Jimtown which is located four miles from Leon.

Louis C. Slaughter, who now lives at Ardmore founded Jimtown. He put in the first store and gin at that location.

For several years Mr. Arthur had charge of the Grand and Petit juries at Ardmore. He served at every session for years after the Federal Court was moved to Ardmore, and always tried to avoid all of the little cases possible, while the Grand jury was in session. At one session he sent the jury home at the end of the first week when they had all come prepared to stay for a month.