

**McKINNEY, MARY JANE**

**INTERVIEW**

**#6706**

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Marvin G. Rowley,  
Interviewer,  
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Interview with Mary Jane McKinney  
South Front Street  
Poteau, Oklahoma

My name is Mary Jane McKinney. I was born in December, 1861, at the former site of New Hope College, about one mile north of Spiro.

My father was James McKinney and was born in North Carolina. He was the superintendent of the New Hope College, a minister of the Methodist church and was a Captain in the Confederate Army. He died in 1871 and is buried in Arkansas. New Hope College was a school for Choctaw Indians.

After I was about eleven or twelve years old, we moved to a farm about where Rock Island is now. I went to school here and my first teacher was named Swisher. I do not remember his first name. This was a subscription school at one dollar per month. Mr. Swisher was the son-in-law of Jerry Hackett, a Major in the Confederate Army. The school house was of logs and the "chinked and daubed" type. It had split logs with legs driven into them which we used for seats. No glasses in the windows, just wooden shutters, plank floors, and clapboards to cover the roof.

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We lived here at this one place until I was grown. I then met and married Davis James, who was about three-quarters Indian of the Choctaw and Chickasaw Tribes. He was born in 1855 and was educated at Hackett, Arkansas. He could speak the Choctaw and Chickasaw Indian languages. Mr. James used to serve on the jury at the Skullyville Court House. He served every time, it seemed to me, that court was in session and everytime it meant that he would be gone about a month.

Mr. James used to play Indian ball. He was a very good player, too. It was against the rules to drink when the players were in the game but some of them did drink anyway, and then the game took on a very exciting appearance.

In 1878, a traveling salesman, from Fort Smith, came to our neighborhood and got some of the Indians to agree to go to Kansas City, Missouri, to play Indian ball. My husband, Mr. Davis James; Elias Tarby; Willy Simpson; Albert Gambles and about ten more players whose names I do not remember but who were all full bloods, except my husband, went. They got all their expenses paid and twenty-five dollars each for the trip. They were gone about

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three days. I remember that Davis James told me of a little stunt that Albert Gambles pulled. After the game, they all got off of the street car and the people on the streets looked at them very curiously, since they had never seen any Indians before. The traveling salesman who took them up there bought some red blankets for them to wear on the trip. He told them to speak just in Choctaw as he wished to impress the local inhabitants of Kansas City as to the importance of the group. So, when the group of Indians got off of the street car, and the white people were all staring at them, Albert Gambles looked around him and said, "My goodness, just look at the white people." The people who heard him were greatly surprised as they thought the Indians were just a bunch of ignorant savages, at whom they could stare. They did not know that these Indians had just as good an education as they, and could very likely speak English as well, if not better, than they. Of course, this remark that Gambles made caused lots of laughter among the group of Indians. When they played ball they wore breech clouts, and in the winter they wore red flannel shirts.

Davis James worked with the Choctaw Indian Militia

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at the time the white settlers were moved out because they did not have permits to remain in the country. Davis James died in 1877.

I married Buck Davis in 1880. He ran a ferry boat across Poteau River at the present location of the river bridge northeast of Poteau about a mile. This is along the Frisco Railroad at the point where it crosses the Poteau River. After we married we moved out on Tarby Prairie, and there my four children, by Davis James, got allotments of land. I had six children by Buck Davis. He died in 1901, and is buried on Maxey Hill at the cemetery there.

#### DYE

Boil four or five gallons of Sumac berries, then put in two or three tablespoons full of copperas to make it set. Use dye while hot, and it makes a brown color.

#### MEDICINE

Take the dry scales of scaly bark hickory trees, which grow in the river bottom lands, and boil the scales to make a strong red tea. Drink about one-half of a cup of this tea as hot as a person can stand, once an hour. This makes the perspiration come out on the skin, and is good for coughs, colds and pneumonia.