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BOWLIN, CHARLIE INTERVIEW

#7608

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L. W. Wilson, Interviewer
September 21, 1937

Interview with Charlie Bowlin,
Hulbert, Oklahoma

Charlie Bowlin states that he is a negro and was born in 1861, near the present town of Muldrow, Oklahoma. He does not know who his parents were. He was reared by the Cherokee Indians and some white people. He has been compelled to work ever since he can remember.

During the Civil War, Bowlin along with other negroes and a white man, named Captain Dunn, were taken to Texas. Captain Dunn operated a ferry across the Arkansas River near the present town of Fort Smith, Arkansas, and lived on the Indian Territory side of the river. He controlled many acres of farming land near and around the ferry.

He returned to Indian Territory after the close of the War when he was about seven years old. A man by the name of Joe Bowers took him. Mr. Bowers

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operated what was known as the "Nine Mile Road House" on the old Military Road which went from Fort Smith, Arkansas, to Fort Gibson. He lived here until almost grown.

Military Road, Ft. Smith, Arkansas,
to
Ft. Gibson, Oklahoma.

This Military Road was used during the Civil War, and for many years after. Soldiers were stationed both at Ft. Smith and Ft. Gibson, and this road was used extensively by the soldiers in transporting supplies and men between the two forts.

The road was also used by people who lived along it and immigrants coming into the territory.

The Military Road crossed the Arkansas River by a ferry, owned at different times by Captain Dunn, Gabe Payne, and Frank Morgan. It ran almost due west, and when nine miles out, which was near the present

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town of Muldrow, one came to the "Nine Mile Road House". This place caught more people going east to Ft. Smith than it did those who were westward bound, who wanted a place to keep their horses and for meals and lodging. Usually people stayed here all night. At early daylight the horses were fed, breakfast served. They would hitch up their teams and reach Ft. Smith by dinner time the same day. Those westward bound usually fed their teams, ate dinner and continued westward.

It might be fitting to say the ferry at Ft. Smith was first a pole, and then a steam ferry.

Continuing west from the Nine Mile Road House, one crossed several creeks, the largest of which was Sallisaw Creek. Creeks were always forded. At a point up on little Vian Creek, about nine miles northeast of the present town of Vian, was

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the John Drew home. An inn was operated here where people camped and stayed all night. There was a large spring and a camp ground at this inn. Many times people would camp there and rest for days before continuing their journey, either east or west. During the Civil War the soldiers used to camp there and the people later called the spring, "The Government Spring".

John Drew stayed there for quite awhile, and left for the other side of the Arkansas River over at Peppers Falls. It has been said that he went over there to start a salt works on Dirty Creek.

After he left, the Inn changed hands many times.

I never traveled the road farther west than to John Drew's.

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In later years a town was started near the inn called "Evening Shade". It was quite a little village and had a post office. The last time Mr. Bowlin was over that way the town had passed away but the old post office was still standing.

After they stopped using the old Military Road so much, a man put in a stage stand known as Childer's Station. This stand was located near the present town of Sallisaw, but to be more exact it was between Vian and Drake Prairie. Drake Prairie is located between Vian and Sallisaw.

On Drake Prairie, some four or five miles on the stage road, a man named Drake operated a big farm about ten miles square and extending all the way south to the Arkansas River. He had a large merchandise store and worked many white, colored and Indian families on his farm. He raised lots of cotton and cattle.

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Railroads.

The St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern Railroad built through Indian Territory in 1887 and the Kansas City Southern through in 1894.

The Kansas City Southern Railroad surveyed its right-of-way through some of Mr. Gabe Payne's land and he objected, but they continued to build anyway. Mr. Payne was much irred and brought suit against the railroad for ten thousand dollars. He lost the suit.

Steamboats.

Steamboats started coming up the river to Skulleyville, Webber Falls and Ft. Gibson a little later. By that I mean some two or three years. Immediately after the War there were not many steamboats on the river.

The first boat to leave from Ft. Smith for Ft. Gibson after the War was built at Ft. Smith, near the ferry then owned by Gabe Payne. They named the boat

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"Ft. Smith". This was a boat of light draught and was built so it could travel the river all the way to Ft. Gibson. Other boats of the same make that followed were the Ozark, Ft. Gibson, and the Dardanelle.

Heavier steamboats were the Border City, Mary D., Memphis Packet, and the William Drew.

The steamboats carried all kinds of merchandise, passengers, and some carried the mail. The principal landings were Pheasant Bluff, Skulleyville, Tamaha and Webbers Falls. They could never get up the river farther than Ft. Gibson.

Forts.

There were Ft. Gibson, Ft. Coffey of Indian Territory, and Ft. Smith, Arkansas.