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BREEDEN, JIM (Mrs.) INTERVIEW

#6528

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INDEX CARDS

Cherokee Nation
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Field Worker, Mary J. Stockton,
6-28-37
Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Jim Breeden,
Claremore, Okla.

Born Knoxville, Tennessee,
November 26, 1882.

Parents Shade Preston Epperson, Tenn.
(Mrs. Breeden) Nancy Maria Epperson, Tenn.

Grand parents Rodman and Martha Herrell, Tenn.

My great grandmother, Martha Cardful, lived to be 104 years old and was buried in Tennessee. Up to her death she was still weaving and spinning. She made pretty rugs, and bedspreads. I have some of the bedspreads now which were handed down to me by my mother. My great-grandfather would make the looms and spinning wheels for her. They raised their own cotton and wool with which to make thread and yarn.

My parents came from Tennessee in 1889 at the request of their sister who told them about the new country opening up in the Cherokee Nation. We were six weeks on the way. We stopped in Missouri and visited my aunt, because my mother became ill. When she was able to travel, we came straight to Chelsea

in Coonescoowee District in Indian Territory. We farmed at Bushyhead, Foyil, Sequoyah and Chelsea. When I married we were living at Bushyhead.

My parents had about a thousand head of sheep that grazed on the grassy slopes of the farm. They always had plenty of meat in the smoke house, because of many hogs, cattle, and deer which were plentiful. They raised wheat, oats, corn, cotton, hay, and many vegetables. They fished in the rivers and creeks and caught many fish. They made their own lye soap, having saved up all the meat skins and cracklings after rendering out many gallons of lard. They put up preserves in stone jars, and made their own vinegar. Game was plentiful and my father always brought in squirrel, rabbit, and prairie chickens, and he brought in many bears, which would be skinned and the skin used on the floors for rugs. Some places were uninhabited and wholly inaccessible and this formed a secure retreat for the bears. Father killed most of the bears and deer when the huckleberries were getting ripe on the foothills. We had many pet cubs and young bears which we would raise.

My husband, Jim Breedon, was born January 23, 1872, three miles east of Boonville, Missouri, in Cooper county. He is now sixty-five years old. His father was Layton Breedon who was born and reared in Missouri. His mother was also reared in Missouri. Her name before she was married was Maximby Sawyer. They married and had a son, Jim. When Jim was seven years old his parents moved to the Indian Territory. At that time Claremore was a trading post. It was located just at the foot of a mound. When he was sixteen years old he worked for the Clem Rogers Ranch. He loved to work for Clem Rogers because he was such a kind, good-hearted man. Clem always helped folks who would stop by his place while traveling through. Jim was a cow-hand for Clem. He helped round up cattle and branded them. He drove them up to Vinita to ship because there was no railroad around there. While he worked there, he was trusted to keep the ranch for weeks by Clem. He stayed there with Clem's son, Will Rogers, many times. May and Sally Rogers were home then, too.

In later years, Jim worked on the Charlie McClellan ranch seven miles north of Claremore. The Frisco train ran through here then. He would drive the cattle to the stock yard in Claremore and ship them. He almost got killed in a stampede once when a wind storm blew up.

Jim attended school for a while in the Cooweescoowee District at a dwelling house. The Indians taught it. He had to give them a dollar per month to go there. Everything was run by the Cherokees, and his parents had to give them five dollars a year for the land his family leased. They lived at some places where they had to pay grain rent. Jim has lived in this same district for over fifty-five years.

CAMP AT CONNERS FORD ON VERDICRIS RIVER

The Connors ford lies directly between Bushyhead and Oologah in Rogers County, Oklahoma. This ford was a very wide one, and the only one in that part of the country.

In those early days my husband and I were looking for a place to locate and settle. We wanted a permanent home, in this fine newly opened country, where there were

thousands of acres of fine prairie land and meadows, lots of timber on the river bottoms, and lots of wild game, plenty of fish, especially catfish, carp, and perch. There were bears and deer roaming in the river bottoms and most wooded sections. The prairie chickens were thick, and pigeons and wild turkey were to be seen everywhere.

For a while we lived in Bushyhead which was a wide spot in the road with a store. There was a section house and a switch, as the railroad had been in only a short time. Cattle were shipped from here, and as it was in the center of the great cattle ranges you could see herds grazing for miles. One range just merged right into the other so one hardly knew how much was his range or how many cattle he owned. They had great round-ups and branded their stock with their special brands. If the other fellow's cattle happened to be there on their range and not branded, it would be branded with its owner's brand. There was quite a bit of stealing and rustling going on.

My husband and I had traveled all day and we came to the Conners Ford in

the late evening, so we stopped here to make camp. We had two wagons which had all our belongings loaded in them. One contained the hay and grain for the horses and was driven by our hired hand; my husband drove the other team. The men folks gathered sticks and brush and built a camp fire, and I prepared our evening meal, which was called supper in those days. This was about six o'clock in November, 1898, and we went to bed early as we were so tired. Just as we went off to sleep one of the most terrible storms suddenly came up. We had no warning of the approaching storm at all, as we were sleeping in the bottom of the wagon beds on the hay. I can't recall another such terrible night as that. The dark threatening clouds, the lightning flashing, the thunder roaring, the rain pouring down, made me very frightened. The lightning struck a big tree near by and our horses were frightened because they knew that we were in danger, and it was pitch dark. An Indian came up on a pretty pony and tried to tell us that the river would rise and drown us. He made signs by pointing at the sky and then at the river meaning that it would rise. He

helped us harness our horses and led us across the ford and out of the bottoms. He followed him as he carried our lantern for if we had stayed over night in the river bottom, we would all have drowned. The next morning the river was out of its banks and over the bottoms.

Many people were drowned in the Verdigris in the early days because they didn't know where it was safe to ford, as there were no bridges then.

That beautiful location for a camping spot is something that will always linger in my mind. The cold shallow water of the river, big shady elms, oaks, walnut trees. There were grape vines loaded with wild grapes; fish were jumping up in the river, and squirrels were running up and down trees close to our camp.

But we were thankful to the Cherokee Indian who saved us from drowning, and I have always liked the Indians since.

My husband and I settled in Claremore, Indian Territory, Cooweescoowee District, and have lived here ever since. We had two children, but both died and later we adopted a little Indian baby by the name of "Chi-u-kee", and later we christened her Mable. She is almost a full-blood Cherokee and now works in the Indian Hospital in Claremore, Oklahoma.

We have been married forty years and have a good home in Claremore, and both are in good health except I am losing my eyesight.

OLD TIMERS

Old friends of ours were Clam Rogers, Charlie McClellen, Teecy Chambers, Henrys, Edward Sunday, and Ed Sanders. They were all here when we came. John Duck was a fullblood who could interpret for the Indian preachers.

PREACHERS AND CHURCHES.

The preachers were all Indians here in the early days. We attended many Indian meetings out east of Royil. Our adopted daughter's uncle, Lewis Wolf, would preach and another man named Rope would sing and preach in Indian and John Duck would tell us what they said. Then we would sing after them in the English language. There were lots of Baptists among the Cherokees. The Methodists near Chelsea met under brush arbors then. There was a Holiness preacher named Sanders, who held meetings. We attended Indian camp meetings in Washington District for weeks.

Cemetery at Claremore

The old McClaim and Sullivan Cemetery is almost surrounded by the Claremore Lake and members of the Sullivan

family were first buried there. The McClains Family were also buried there. My husband's brother, Layton Breeden, was buried there in 1901, and Floyd Breeden was buried there in 1899.

The cemetery is located four miles northeast of Claremore, on the road going around the Claremore, Oklahoma lake.

COMMENTS

I am now fifty-five years old and my husband is sixty-five years old. We live in Claremore and were glad to give this information to the writer. We have lived in this district a long time and want the information to go to the Indian Historical Society Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.