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INDEX CARDS

Choctaw Nation  
Tribe-Choctaw  
Civil War  
Preacher-Presbyterian  
Atoka  
Choctaw Customs  
Government

Pete W. Cole,  
Field Worker.  
June 17, 1937

140

An Interview with Melvina Franklin Brown, a Choctaw woman, who is now 78 years, who lives fifteen miles north of Atoka, Oklahoma.

My father's name in Indian was Illa Hemma or Harris Franklin and my mother was Bessie but I do not know her surname, but she and my father were married in the territorial days the year (unknown) and lived on the Boggy River bottom near the Old Hekeyabee place as it was known in those days. There were six of us sisters and brothers, three having died in infancy and three grown to maturity. I am the only one of the family now living.

According to the Final Roll of the Choctaw and Chickasaw tribes, I was born in 1858. I barely remember the time of the Civil War and do not remember of any incident that happened during the War. My father was a small boy when his parents and other members of the family migrated to Indian Territory from Mississippi. I was born in Indian Territory and am a native of Oklahoma.

My father was a minister of the Gospel of the Cumberland Presbyterian Faith and used to ride on horseback to his appointments, as there were no railroad or other means of transportation in those days. The last place where he lived and died was near the present town of Atoka, Oklahoma. He first lived in a two room log house and later moved to a new location where he constructed another log

house and a frame building annex where we lived. When the town of Atoka was first started, there were only three stores but I have forgotten the names of the parties that first operated these stores.

I do not know how far advanced my father was in education but he was a member of the Senate or rather a Senator from this district in the Territorial days, and held different offices for several years. He was not a man of finance but had enough to live on, not, however, owning many heads of cattle or horses or a large farm or ranch.

During the enrollment and allotment of lands to the Choctaws and the Chickasaws, my father was enrolled but did not live to receive his allotment. The exact date of his death is unknown.

I remember in my childhood days, when this country was wild, there were no towns, railroads, highways, bridges, telephone system, or other modern equipment as we have today. The people settled on any piece of land that they cared to, built a log house, cleared a small patch of tomfulla ground, and the women used to do the work while men went about hunting and fishing. There was no need of any one killing himself by working trying to make a living, but every year a garden or crop of corn

was planted and properly worked. The winters were not severe although the snow usually was from ankle to knee deep and on several occasions I have seen persons wade around in the snow bare-footed. It was unnecessary for one to put up feed or hay for the stock as the grass and cane remained green throughout the year and the stock would go to the creek bottom in winter and were kept fat on grass and cane, which usually was from waist high to over a man's head.

The land was held in common. Any one who desired to move to a new location had that privilege. He could make improvements on the place and when ready to move, he could sell the improvements but he could not sell the land as it was considered that the land did not belong to anyone individual but it belonged to any and all who cared to live on it. That is one reason several well-known Choctaws were against Indian Territory becoming a state. The Choctaws never lived under the State Laws and did not know what it was to pay personal or real estate taxes for the upkeep of the government.

When the Choctaws were living under their own laws, they had to pay taxes to run their government. Their laws were strictly enforced, equal justice to all and special privileges to none was their motto and that was a good law

in those days. It did not matter if the person convicted of some charge was found guilty, <sup>he</sup> had to suffer the penalty and there was no such thing as parole or pardon after one was convicted of first degree murder but to take his punishment. I have been under the impression under our state laws that WE HAVE TOO MANY LAWS AND NONE ENFORCED AS LAWS WERE IN OUR TERRITORIAL DAYS.

I am getting along in years and now I am living peacefully in my own home, living a quiet life, enjoy living in a quiet place, and I do not care to live in a congested place or have any desire to live in any town.