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Interview with Mr. L. C. Jennings
512 Denison Street, Muskogee, Oklahoma
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By
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Mr. Jennings, one-quarter Cherokee, was born July 25, 1876 in Indian Territory, about four miles from Coffeyville, Kansas on the Verdigris River.

MOTHER: Maiden name was Carry Agnew, born in the Flint district, (don't remember date) and died July 1897.

FATHER: My father's name was Criden Jennings. He was born in Missouri (don't remember date) and died in 1878.

The cause of my father's death: At that time the country was rather wild. The majority of the people were Negroes and almost everyone carried a gun on his hip. On the Reservation, as a general rule, white people were regarded as trash and with disrespect. Everyone rode horseback in those days and quite frequently a group of Negroes would ride to Coffeyville, Kansas and get very drunk. They would then come back to the Indian Territory side. Every time they met a white man they would pull their six shooters and make the white get off his horse. Running the horse off, they would make the white man walk, at the same time firing their guns at his feet and doing many other things that entered their minds. My father carried a six shooter as everyone else did. He also "carried" a violent temper. One time he met a group of drunken Negroes returning from Coffeyville. Deciding to initiate my father, they started to pull their guns. He also pulled his gun and began shooting. When the smoke had cleared away, some of the Negroes lay on the ground wounded and the balance of them were leaving as fast as their horses would carry them. After that day my father was a marked man among the Negroes. About a year later a

Negro moved there and was called the famous bad man. This Negro picked a quarrel with my father which ended in a gun fight. He killed my father with a load of buckshot from a shotgun. The Negro was later caught, tried and sentenced to hang.

SCHOOLING

We moved from Coffeyville, Kansas to the Snake district when I was eighteen months old and lived with my grandmother a couple of years. We then moved to Haskell where we lived for two years. We moved from Haskell to Vinita into a home built by my step-father. All of these moves were made with wagon and teams. We lived in Vinita nine years. I attended school three years. At this time a representative of the Government was going over the Reservation gathering up Indian children that were eligible and sending them to Willie Hallsell College, located in Vinita, Oklahoma. I attended this college one year. I attended the Male Cherokee Seminary at Tahlequah four years, finishing in 1896. I was twenty years old at this time. While living in Vinita, I sold papers and did any kind of odd jobs I could find. I saved my money and bought hogs and calves. I soon had a small herd of cattle. While attending the Seminary, I washed dishes during the term for my board and room. During the summer months I worked in the fields. After leaving the Seminary I attended the Commercial Clark Business College in Vinita. I enrolled in typewriting, bookkeeping, accounting, and finished in four months. In 1897 I started teaching school. I taught at Chilocco, Beatty Prairie, and in the Salina district. I also taught in the Canadian district for three years. At one of the schools in the Canadian district where I taught, I had to walk four miles each morning and night. While in this district I decided to build a home. This home consisted of two rooms. I had just finished the frame work and was on top framing the roof when a group of men rode up to the house and told me to

get down or they would drag me down; said I was not going to build a house. I answered there must be some mistake that I was going to build it, but I climbed down and they told me that I was going to straddle a horse and go to Tahlequah and get the school to teach in that district. I told them that I would not as I had quit teaching school. At last I consented to go to Tahlequah. I got the job of teaching. When I got back they had finished building my house and had done a wonderful job of it.

BUSINESS

In 1900 I moved to Keefeton and went into the hardware business. Later, I bought cattle, hogs, and grain which I shipped to market. I was elected Justice of the Peace, serving one term. I refused to serve a second term.

I moved to Muskogee, Oklahoma in 1910 and my children were educated here. Their names are: Lucille, Clara, Carry, and Louie. Lucille graduated from Draughon's Business College. Two girls graduated from high school and my son, Louie, went to Terrell University. From there he went to Haskell Seminary and then to Shreveport, Louisiana. I think he went to Haskell just to play football.

I worked with the Indian Agency from 1913 until 1920. I left the Agency to enter the brokerage business for myself. Bought and sold cotton, corn, potatoes and most anything I could buy and sell. I was in business until my friends persuaded me to run for public office. I came out for County Assessor and served from 1933 to 1937.

MISCELLANEOUS

While living at Vinita, my mother had lost her citizenship and had to go to the capital at Tahlequah to be reinstated. We came to Muskogee by rail. Muskogee at that time was just a small place. The population was

about 1500. Leaving Muskogee we had to take a stage coach to Tahlequah. When we got to the Verdigris River we crossed on a ferry boat, owned and operated by Mr. Nevins. The river was up and out of its banks. Mr. Nevins was afraid for us to try to cross, but the coach carried the U. S. Mail and had to make the trip regardless of river conditions, so mother told Mr. Nevins that if the mail could cross, she could too. We started across and made it alright, landing about four miles down the river from the regular landing place. The stage driver drove off the ferry into water about three feet deep. We drove in water for about a half-mile.

STRIP PAYMENT

I was going to the Male Seminary at Tahlequah at the time when the strip money for strip-payment was hauled into Tahlequah. It was transported by wagon. There were five wagons, drawn by mules and ^{with} forty guards. These guards were picked for their bravery and being crack-shots. The guards were headed by the high sheriff of the Cherokee Nation. The high sheriff's name was Jess Cochgrass. His home was in Chelsea. Each guard was armed with a Winchester and a six shooter. The guards had the wagons entirely surrounded. We drew our strip payment at Saline. Our family drew \$2400. Saline was a rough hilly country and payment was made in what was known as Tent City. A very rough element of men were present at the payment. Lots of whom would rob and kill for a dollar. In order to get our money out of Tent City, mother decided to let me take it out as they would not suspect a boy of carrying such a large sum of money. I had a good pony and saddle. Mother split my saddle blanket and hid the money in it. I got out safely and took the money to Vinita and placed it in the bank.

One of the guards at Tent City got hold of some bad whiskey and tried to shoot up the town. He saw a Jew peddler, rode up to him and knocked him in the head with his six shooter. Then took his knife and ripped open the Jew's

bags. He claimed he was looking for whiskey as he had been told the peddler was selling whiskey. Someone found Jess Cochgrass, our high sheriff, and told him that one of the guards was drunk and on a rampage. When the sheriff arrived he stopped by my side. He told the guard to throw down his gun and get off his horse. The Indian guard answered by pulling his six shooter and leveling it on the high sheriff. The sheriff pulled his own six shooter and shot the horse from under the man. He then walked up and took the gun out of the guards hand and called for another guard to place the man in jail. What they called putting a man in jail was to tie him securely and put him under a tree. I asked the sheriff why he did not shoot the guard instead of the horse. He told me the guard was a good fellow, just crazy drunk and that there was no use to kill a good man.