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Field Worker: Hazel B. Greene
May 28, 1937.

Interview with W. N. John, M.D.

Born Galveston, Texas.

The burning of Spencer Academy and other happenings in Indian Territory, Choctaw Nation, as told by W. N. John, M.D.

First, I am all white, sixty-six years old, was born and reared at Galveston, Texas; graduated in medicine and surgery from the State University.

I was at Georgetown, Texas, engaged in private practice, when I heard that they were in need of a doctor at Spencer Academy, in the Choctaw Nation about one mile south of Nelson between Nelson and Atlas. I got in correspondence with the proper authorities and got the job. I landed at Goodland switch November 22, 1894, by train. J. B. Jeter was Superintendent at the Academy and W. W. Appleton was principal at that time, but later Mr. Butts was superintendent. I resided at the Academy, and Gabe Parker was my room-mate,

but I didn't happen to be there when it burned. I then had my office at Nelson. My horse happened to be saddled when I heard the alarm and saw the light, so I mounted my horse and ran over there about a mile and a half. The teachers and the Jeter girls roomed up stairs. They said that when they ran out in the hall they could see kerosene dripping on the stairs, and a kersoene container was found out in the yard where the ruins had fallen on it, after the fire. It was never proven who started that fire, in spite of all reports to the contrary. I was a man grown, the physician in charge, and know whereof I speak.

The front stairs were saturated with oil and fired; the back ones evidently were not. A few persons escaped by the small back stairs.

Professor Appleton lowered the Jeter girls and the teachers from the front porch roof with a small rope, and cut his hands to pieces.

The way I remember it there were six boys burned to death in that fire. Pat Springs, son of Joel Springs, at Goodland, died later, and perhaps some

others. I do not recall. The injured were brought to my office and laid on mattresses on the floor, where I administered aid.

I was house physician at Spencer one year, then I engaged in private practice at Poteau six months, but I liked Spencer Academy, and everybody in that community. Those were the good old days, when the family doctor was the family friend and the family was the doctor's friend. So I returned to Spencer and practiced for two more years, but did not office at the Academy. I married and boarded at the home of Cy Harris at Nelson. I paid ten dollars per month for board for myself. In those days a cow was always worth ten dollars and considered legal tender, and I nearly always gave them a cow at the end of the month for board. In those days everything was rough and tumble here, but those were the best people I ever met, and they always paid their doctor. It might be a cow or produce, but they always brought something.

Everybody knows of the remarkable success of Gabe E. Parker, a "Spencer" boy.

When I first came here I had to go horseback all the time; later I bought the second buggy to Nelson; I put in the first telephone in this country; "Central" was at my home at Nelson, after I married (I married a girl from Clarksville, Texas, Miss Otie Harris, a niece of Cy Harris.)

People would make long trips to my house at Nelson in order to get to hear someone talk over the telephone. I had four lines running out from my house to four different communities. That made things easier FOR EVERYBODY BUT THE DOCTOR. They did the talking and I did the hard riding. After the telephones were in, they nearly ran me to death. I owned the lines but each man who had a box in his house paid for that. No rent. Some of those old boxes are still out in that community. One line was to the Jeter farm, one to Atlas, one out northwest to George Thompson's; and one about half way to Antlers, a distance of about five miles. No switchboard. I remember the first telephone in Galveston, Texas. There was none at Goodland in 1895. There was only one store in Antlers when I came here. It, I believe, was old man Dick Locke's store (V. M. Locke, Sr).

I paid ten cents each for chickens, and always had plenty of them. Once when we had guests, we were so embarrassed because the chickens kept coming into the house. Insisting on trying to lay on and under beds, dressers, tables; just any place that an egg could be deposited. We had no screens then, and had to keep them shooed out. Eggs were five cents per dozen. I nearly always had bales of cotton in my yard, taken in on doctor bills. Turkeys were so plentiful, they killed the fryers as often as they would frying size chickens. That would look like an extravagance now.

We hauled our cotton to Paris, Texas, for ginning.

Our first house was a four room frame house that Dan Oakes built for us on his place, with a small yard and a rail fence around the yard; and the walls were papered. A very fine house for those days. Later I made a contract with an Indian for some land. Just as soon as it was allotted, he was to deed it over to me. I felt so sure that I would get it that I built a nice five room house on it, but when I had had it a year or two the Indian Agent decided differently for me, and ordered me to give possession

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of it in ten days. Well, within three days I had it sawed in two and moved on rollers, one half to Nelson and the other half to my farm close to Antlers. The Indian Agent kept sending men down there to get possession. I always sent word that if he wanted it to come and get it. He never came, and when I was having it moved I guarded it with a six shooter, just defending my home.

Later, I moved to Antlers and engaged in practice there for many years before coming to Hugo.

I have the desk that belonged to old Judge Parker, the "Hanging Judge" who lived at Fort Smith and had jurisdiction over the Indian Territory. They say that his record shows that he sentenced eighty-eight men to be hanged.

I found the fullblood Indians very appreciative of things done for them, but they would not take your medicine after you were gone. A doctor could go back next day and find that the stoppers had never been removed, but they would willingly take every dose you offered them while you were there. I went to see one old fullblood woman who had a frog tied to her toe to cure the rheumatism. But she took her medicine. (A live frog)