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L. W. Wilson
Journalist
February 24,
1938.

An Interview with Mrs. Mary J. Baker,
Sallisaw, Oklahoma.

My grandparents on my father's side were Western Cherokees and settled in what is now Oklahoma in 1828. My parents were of the Eastern Cherokees, members of the Anti-Treaty Party, and they made the journey from Georgia over the Trail of Tears in 1838. My father's name was Jay Hicks and Mother's was Katharine Levy - Hicks. They were both full-blood Cherokees, born and married in the State of Georgia.

I am enrolled as a full-blood Cherokee, having been born April 13, 1853, in the Flint District of the Cherokee Nation, Indian Territory.

Life and Customs after the Civil War.

The Civil War had left the Indians in the Indian

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country in a deplorable condition. Many of them had been killed and many had died from cold and exposure and many children had found their way to the Cherokee Orphan Schools.

My parents died of natural causes in 1871 and I, too, found my way to one of these schools though I had attained the age of sixteen years.

Immediately after the War the Cherokees began to clear ground once again for cultivation, all the fields having grown up with brush, briars and sprouts. Log cabins were built and rails split for fences to enclose their little clearings. In due time the Cherokees had again established themselves.

They raised corn and some cotton. Many nights I sat around the fire picking seeds out of cotton for there were no cotton gins. Few sheep were raised and the sheep were sheared, the wool washed and hung on rocks to dry.

I have helped to card both cotton and wool, spin it into thread and yarn on the spinning wheel and then

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into cloth with the loom. Our clothing was mostly all home spun.

Pretty red hunting coats with fringe on the bottom were made for the men and in most instances these coats were made of wool and shirts were made of cotton cloth. The trousers were made of a material which we called cotton jeans. Women wore no hats, but wore large shawls and blankets. The shawls were made at home. The blankets in nearly every case were purchased or traded for from peddlers coming through the country in wagons laden with blankets, beads and jewelry of all kinds. Hides and furs were traded for the wares of this peddler. Fort Gibson, Webbers Falls and Fort Smith were trading places. Hides and furs came near being a medium of exchange for all kinds of merchandise.

Besides raising corn, nearly all Indians raised beans, pumpkins and other vegetables and melons.

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The usual bread Comahaney was corn bread, pumpkin bread and bean bread. Salt for the bread, obtained either from salt water, from salt water springs, or barrel salt which had been traded for or purchased at the stores, was used.

In nearly every home there was wild honey, secured by cutting trees in which the wild bees had stored their honey.

Some meals were cooked on open fires especially during the warm weather but most meals were cooked in pots, pans, and Dutch ovens in fire-places.

At every meal could be found Canuchi or hickory nut butter. This was used in place of butter and for seasoning of foods. Canuchi was used by some as cream for their coffee. Coffee was replaced many times with a drink made from perched corn. Canuchi is a delicacy until this day with the Cherokees. It is made by picking the kernels from hickory nuts and then heating the kernels in the mortar to a butter.

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The thread and cloth were dyed in a solution made from different barks and berries. Sumac berries made a beautiful purple, indigo made all shades of blue, walnut hulls made brown, beige or yellow. Red was made from poke berries. In preparing these solutions if pieces of old iron could be found they were boiled with the dye-solution, if no copperas was at hand, for the iron kept the colors from fading. Alum was sometimes used instead of iron or copperas. The alum came from a cave.

The Indians doctored themselves and were doctored by Medicine Men. Doctors as we know them in the present day were very few. Stomach trouble was cured by Oak Bark tea. Chills were cured with cherry bark and bone set tea. Pneumonia with butte fly root. Coughs and colds with mullein. Mullein leaves were wrapped around the parts affected by all kinds of swellings. Each spring many Indians would take considerable Sassafras tea as a blood purifier. Small babies were fed catnip tea for most all ailments.

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The Indians were artistic. They made bows and arrows and wove baskets out of buck bushes and cane stalks. From clay they made pots, cups, saucers, pans and miniature statues of birds and animals.

Indians painted their faces with solutions of dyes and penciled their brows with soft stones, such as slate and clay or shale.

I remember the first cook stove I ever saw; it was in the Cherokee Orphanage which was sometimes called the Mayes Seminary at Tahlequah in 1871.

The first grist mill was a water mill on Little Lees Creek run by a man named Briswell. It was near the present town of Nicut.

The first gin was at the place where Muldrow is now. It was operated by a small steam engine.

Schools and Churches

Throughout the Flint and Sequoyah District, in my girlhood days, most all school buildings were log cabins. Church was held in the schools. There were no regular services.

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The missionaries or preachers were called Circuit Riders. The Circuit Riders made the rounds as regularly as possible in their territory, maybe once a month.

I went to the Cherokee Orphanage at Tahlequah in 1871 and remained there for three years. The superintendent was a Cherokee named Watt Duncan. Other teachers were white men and some of them were Mr. Norwood, Mr. Spough and Mr. Mason. At the end of three years I secured what they termed a \$40.00 certificate, which meant that I could start teaching school at a salary not to exceed \$40.00 per month.

My first school was the Pegg's Prairie School near the present town of Peggs. I taught this school for two years at \$35.00 per month. My pupils were all full-blood Cherokees.

In 1876 I started teaching at the Swimmer School near the present town of Nicut. This school was also in a Full-blood district and my pupils were all Full-bloods at first and finally a few half breeds and whites drifted into the community. I taught this school for six years.

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In 1882 I started teaching at the Bellford School way down on Little Lees Creek and taught here for fourteen years at \$40.00 per month. I was now forty years old and being married I resigned and quit my career as a teacher.

Indians Chief's of the Cherokees

I have met personally every Cherokee Chief who ever lived in the Cherokee Nation from Chief John Ross who came over the Trail of Tears to Frank Buffington who died at Vinita, a short time ago.

Allotments and Annuities

I could dwell at considerable length on the act that caused the Dawes Commission to be formed upon the acts of the Dawes Commission; its manner of enrollment and making of allotments. I wish to say that some Indians received lands who should not and some who should have received lands never did. Many times this was the fault of the Full-bloods because they did not enroll, but they did not approve of the enrollment and could not be made to understand it and did not believe that it would ever be done. I blame a great part of this trouble on the Principal Chief for

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not leading the Full-bloods to know and understand about the enrollment.

As to myself, I enrolled ^{and} / received my allotment of eighty acres of land here in Sequoyah County. I have received a few dollars at times which came from pasture fees, called by some "bread money". I secured, by sale of the Cherokee Strip to the Government of the United States, my pro rata part of this money. I also received what was called Emigrant money from annuities due my parents long before they ever left the state of Georgia.

All in all, besides the payments such as I received, the Cherokees never got anything except money to build the Female Seminary and the Boys Seminary at Park Hill.

Roads and Trails

I cannot tell much of roads and trails as my travels were limited because I was confined by my teaching.

I recall the Childers Stage Stand, however, near the present town of Sallisaw, run by John and Nancy Childers.

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The Drake Stage Stand was southwest of Sallisaw and south of the present town of McKey on what we called Drake Prairie. The "Nine Mile Road House" was nine miles from Fort Smith and was run by a man named Bowers. These places were on the old stage road that ran from Fort Smith to Muskogee and Webbers Falls.

Caves and Mounds

There are in Sequoyah County, in the vicinity of Akins, Long, Maple and Nicot, a few mounds.

I will tell you of the cave from which alum was taken in the early days and used in the dyes of the Cherokees to keep the goods from fading and alum was used for sores and for other purposes.

This cave is located about one mile from the mouth of Pole Cat Creek, on what is known as the Josiah Sebolt place.

To reach this cave you travel twelve miles east of Sallisaw, jog north five miles, thence east four miles, thus reaching the Sebolt place. The children in my

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school used to play around in this cave a great deal. In order to secure a lump of alum all they would have to do would be to blow away the dust from the top of the strata of alum and with their fingers pick up the alum. They would eat this alum and get a lot of "kick" out of laughing at each other trying to whistle. The alum would pucker up their mouths far worse than green persimmons would.