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BARBER, J. W.

INTERVIEW

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Field Worker, Nannie Lee Burns,
April 14, 1939.

Interview with J. W. Barbee,
Afton, Oklahoma.

My father was William Barbee, by birth a Shawnee , who was born in Ohio and came with his tribe to Kansas when a young man. He was educated in the mission schools in Kansas. After he was grown, he and some other young Shawnees made up a wagon train and went as far south and west as Santa Fe, New Mexico. After his return he married and by the time that the Civil War broke out he had three girls. Father joined the Union Army and left his wife and three small daughters with their people. During the War, they were subject to guerilla attacks but it was not until after an attack by the men under Price that they were driven from their homes and then they went to Fort Leavenworth where they remained until the war closed and my father rejoined his family.

They had lost everything and had been fed and cared for at the Fort but when they returned to their home they

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found that their house was still standing so they began over again and here in the home of the Shawnees I was born November 23, 1867.

Mother died when I was but a very small boy and is buried in the old Indian cemetery at Kansas City. I was about four years old my father came with other Shawnees to the Cherokee Nation and settled on Grand River east of Ketchum. After we came here my father married a white woman and we children grew up in a small box house near the river. My life here was that of the average boy of that day. We lived in the woods and I liked to be out of doors, to fish, hunt, and to watch the birds and everything around me. We fished with hook and line but sometimes when several people would get together we would get a big seine and then when we brought the seine out, we would pick out the fish that we wanted and take the gars and crack their necks and then we would throw the rest back into the river. In the early morning you could hear the wild turkeys and they were easy to kill. I have seen wild deer, as many as twenty-five in a bunch, here south of Afton. One day, a cousin and I were hunt-

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ing and we both shot at the same deer at the same time and killed the deer but I do not know whose shot killed it. In the summer we went barefoot and our clothes were bought.

My father purchased the ferry near us from Mr. Landrum and while he ran it it was called the Barbee Ferry. He did not have a cable but the ferry ran with oars and poles with hooks on the end of the poles. These hooks allowed the men to catch hold of things and to hold the boat. It never got away as they were able to catch to trees and things with these hooks. Father sold the ferry to Joe Bolen who sold it to Tom Brown and after Brown bought the ferry he was bringing a load of spikes from Vinita to build a new ferry boat and drove on the boat with the load and forgot to drop the neck yoke of his team which grew frightened and in the middle of the river they plunged off the boat with the load of spikes and both of the horses were drowned.

I was started to school when about six years old, to a day school (furnished by the Cherokee Nation) which was a little box building, one and a half miles west

of where Ketchum is now. Later I was sent to the Quapaw Mission to the boarding school east of Quapaw and this was out on the prairie and we had to stay here and some of us grew homesick and decided to run away and go home.

We were middle-sized boys and they dressed us in brown duck trimmed with brass buttons. The larger boys had blue clothes with a red strip down the outside of the leg of the trousers which were made something like the uniforms worn by the soldiers who had been stationed near there. My job was that of bell-ringer and we boys, two of us who had decided to leave, arranged that we would stay at the barn until after I had rung the bell that evening or rather night and then we were to start. We started out south and we had gone but a little way when we saw a light coming over the hill so we went into the nearby corn field and hid in a shock of corn until the light passed. This light was from a lantern carried in a wagon. After that we traveled by night and hid during the day time. Later, my father sent me to Chilocco and here again I ran away and made it home in four days, traveling at night. I last attended school at Willow Springs, one mile east of Ketchum.

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Vinita was our trading point and here we went for our things that we bought. The trip was made in a wagon and to make the trip in a day you had to start early. The smaller children were not always taken when the folks went but maybe they would take us three or four times a year. They would go every three or four weeks. After I was grown, I worked for Mr. Stephenson for seven years. I liked, when I was in Vinita, to sit on my horse and watch the train go by and then I would come on home.

After the seven years I decided that I would go West so another man and I started and we got as far as Tulsa and stayed here a while and then I decided that I had gone far enough and so I returned home. I have never done much traveling outside of our state but once I did go back to visit our old home in Kansas, the place where they said I was born, and my mother's grave in Kansas City. She was a Wyandotte. I was gone six months this time.

We did not have nice buggies then and when we went anywhere it was in the wagon or horseback. I would

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go to Spavinaw to the mill. I would take a sack of shelled corn on the horse with me and take it to mill, often on Saturday. There were always others waiting to get their corn ground and then we could talk while they were grinding our corn and we had to wait and take our turn so if we were late in getting there sometimes it would be late in the day before we would get our meal but there was another thing that was as important as the meal and that was that we would buy our Star tobacco. I liked, while watching and waiting for my meal, to look at and watch the machinery and would sometimes go up-stairs and look at it. The machinery was mostly made of wood. When the mill was first built they ground flour but in later years they ground only meal and in the Fall ginned some cotton.

In the days when I was working for Singleton we would turn our horses out to graze and there were few fences, and those were rail fences around the fields, so the horses could get quite a way from home during the night. So, soon after daylight, I would ride up on a high bluff south of Ketchum and from there try

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to locate my horses.

In those days the trains were running through Vinita but people were still traveling the old Military Road. There were no bridges but ferries and fords. They did not work the road and when it would get too bad to travel they would just start another roadway by the side of the first road. Most, if not all, of the travel along the Military Road then was done by people traveling through the country and most of them in those days were going to Texas but during the late summer and fall you would see a few wagons headed north, those who had been to Texas and were going back north. Usually there were several wagons together as they felt safer traveling through our wild Indian country in this way. They seemed to expect to find us still dangerous. The green fly was so bad in the summer that sometimes we could not hoe but had to plough at night as the green flies would kill the horses, however, these flies were not ^{as} bad along the river as they were on the prairie.

The land on this side of Grand River was prairie country and there the blue stem grew as high as a one

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story house and in the Fall, when the grass would be dry, was a dangerous time for the people as prairie fires were numerous and almost impossible to check and we tried to protect our homes and fields by ploughing around them. But if a fire did get started the only way to check it before it would reach a stream was to back-fire against it.

I never tried to learn to speak the Cherokee language but when I was young, I could understand the Cherokees and could talk to them and can even yet understand what they are talking about. I have attended their churches and was raised among them but I have never attended a Stomp Dance. We had our picnics and singings, etc.

When we came to this country there were two brick houses both built just alike, which had five rooms each, with a brick kitchen in the rear that was not attached to the main house. The houses were both one story and were built one on either side of the river, facing each other on Grand River below Ketchum. I never knew who built these houses or anything about them but I have passed them many times and wondered about them and to

me the strange thing was that both of them were destroyed at the same time by a cyclone, just after noon one Sunday in May in 1904.

In 1891 I married Della Boyd, a white woman, and we settled eight miles west of Afton on Cabin Creek where we raised our family of three boys and a girl. In 1918, feeling the need of higher schools, we moved to Afton to give the children the advantage of the High School, and here some years ago my wife died. Since then I make my home with my children here.