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GRANT FOREMAN, DIRECTOR
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211 Federal Bldg.
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Interview with
Mr. and Mrs. John Falling,
Claremore, Oklahoma.

Mary Stockton, Field worker.

" My grandfather, William Merrell, was an old settler Cherokee, born in Georgia, where he spent his boyhood days. Arriving at manhood's estate he came west with his people nearly a hundred years ago and was a soldier in the War between the States--1861-1865.

"He suffered from exposure and other deplorable conditions of that unfortunate conflict from which he developed consumption which caused his death.

"For many years he lived in Vinita where he was employed by the Frisco Railroad Company and was an earnest and consistent member of the Baptist Church. His employment by the railroads began when the road was built in 1882.

"My father was a typical Indian--not a so-called 'Wild Indian' he was a Cherokee and the Cherokees have been a "civilized tribe" ever since they were first contacted by European people. But he observed many customs peculiar to the oldtime Cherokee, especially in the mater of dress. Instead of a coat he wore a 'hunting jacket' made from pretty striped cloth and decorated with fringe around the edges, especially the bottom, which extended to a point near the hips--about the modern 'business coat' of to-day. I recall the yellow, black and blue colors distinctly. His

trousers were usually of tan color. The tan color of the trousers was obtained by boiling the cloth which they were made in a strong decoction from the bark of a walnut tree-- other colors were obtained in the same way ("store dyes") being unknown to the Cherokees in those days.

"Shoe strings were made by cutting long strips from the tanned hide of an animal, usually a deer, and were called 'buckskin thongs'.

"My mother's maiden name was Rachel Hicks, a native of Greenleaf mountain country--now called the "Cookson hills"-- near Fort Gibson, Cherokee Nation Indian Territory. She was a faithful member of the Methodist church and compelled, or at least insisted upon regular family attendance. Preachers were often entertained, (we didn't call it "entertained" we simply called it coming to our home to eat, talk and sleep). She made it the principal part of her religion to train up her children 'in the way they should go'--- she setting an example which has long been my guide through the viscisitudes and turmoils of life.

"My right name is Delilah but I am usually called 'Aunt Tom'---just how I acquired that cognomen would be hard to explain and be of little interest to you. I was first sent to school at the age of seven, at the Bayou School between Tahlequah and Fort Gibson. I walked two miles each way going to and from school.

James Ballantine, a grand and good man now gone to his reward, was my first teacher. Ida May Collins, now Mrs. Goodale of Tulsa, was one of my teachers and May McSpadden, niece of Will Rogers, another. I progressed nicely until I reached the age of 16, at which time I was married to John Falling. I had just finisher the 7th grade. I had enrolled for attendance in the Cherokee Female Seminary now Eastern Oklahoma Teachers' College, at Tahlequah, but fell in love and was married woman when the term opened the following September--- such is life.

My wedding occurred on April 10, 1897--- ten years before my beloved Cherokee Nation became a part of the great state of Oklahoma. My former teacher, Miss Collins happened to see me on my wedding day and smilingly remarked; 'Delilah, you are certainly a lovely bride and I wish you all the joy in the world'. In this connection I might tell you something about my wedding day and my wedding dress; although I am a Cherokee Indian I was married according to the customs of the white folks--licenses being obtained from the clerk of my district and the ceremony performed by an ordained minister. I was certainly delighted with the many compliments on my wedding gown, which was made at home out of rather expensive materials

for that time. Mother was a fine seamstress and had taken much mains in making it-- her taste was wonderful and the blending of colors marvelous; the dress, proper being of gray serge, trimmed in rose color satin. It was made with what she called a tight-fitting basque with many small golden buttons and a very full skirt, long enough to form a slight train behind and fully reaching my shoe tops in front. I wore a sailor hat which was very stylish and much in vogue in those days. All in keeping with my mother's southern refinement and dignity, acquired from her Georgia ancestors.

"Memories of my home-life ( in girlhood days) are still bright in my mind. Father would hitch a team of horses or mules to a 'thimble skein wagon'--now commonly called a lumber wagon on Sunday mornings and all members of the family would climb in, he and mother on the spring seat in front and the children were seated on chairs of seats of some kind in the back, and away we would go to church. Sometimes to a camp meeting, (for which old time Methodists were famous). The camp meetings were held at regular camp grounds, equipped with cabins in which the women and children slept. Cooking ovens were built of native stone nearby. On these, cooking was done and the meeting would often last for two or three weeks. Good old Methodist preaching, shouting and singing were the order of the

day, while the 'inner man' was not neglected, much food being provided and consumed 'free for all' by those present, and the crowds were large and attentive. Occasionally some fellow would "get smart" and create a disturbance, but he was promptly taken care of-- men would grab him, lead him away into the woods and tie him to a tree where he was compelled to remain until he "sobered up" or decided to "be good" - after which he was forgiven and well treated.

"I remember, distinctly, how my mother used to tell us about my brave aunt---Margaret Bracket--- she was my father's sister, a spy for the Southern Armies during the Civil War and an accomplished horse-back rider and adept in the use of a gun. Mounted of her fleet Indian pony she had ridden may miles, securing information of use to the Confederate soldiers and conveying it to them. She was all alone and she and her pony were very tired. Suddenly she saw a covered wagon coming toward her. There were six men in the wagon, guarding the precious water they were taking to the Northern soldiers. When she asked them for a drink her request was refused. She begged and pleaded for water for herself and her tired, thirsty pony. The hearts of these rough men were touched by the pleading of the enchanting Indian maiden and gave her a gallon of water--- she allowed the pony to drink first. This so delighted them that they proposed to take her along with them and when she

refused to accompany them they became insistent and said they were going to take her, anyway. But when she produced a loaded pistol from beneath her outer garments and pointed it straight at them they immediately surrendered. She ordered them to stack arms and form a line some distance away. With their hands reaching toward the heavens, she whipped her pony into action and galloped away in triumph. A few hours later this water-train and the guards were 'surprised' and captured by Confederates. Here the story ends but the reader may read between the lines. Those who know something of war-fare, and brave girls, will understand.

"I remember", said she, "many interesting episodes of old Fort Gibson, a very interesting place, rich in history and romance. It used to be a 'tough' place, infested with out-laws, fortune hunters and the riff-raff of all creation. They were brought there by steamboats, pioneer railroads and the army post. We used to go there often and I was entranced with the river; the old fort and the barracks, as well as the cosmopolitan peoples who came and went with the winds.