

INDEX CARDS

Negroes--Cherokee Nation  
Farming--Cherokee Nation  
Food--Cherokee  
Household manufactures--Cherokee  
Game--Cherokee Nation  
Fort Gibson  
Cane brakes  
Social gatherings--Cherokee Nation  
Churches--Cherokee Nation  
Schools--Cherokee Nation  
Civil War--Fort Davis  
Civil War--Fort Gibson  
Fruits--Wild  
Trails  
Ferries--Arkansas River  
Fords--Arkansas River  
Cattle--trail drives  
Isparhechar  
Steamboats--Arkansas River  
Davis, Jefferson  
Intoxicants--Cherokee Nation  
Freighting  
Outlaws--Cherokee Nation

INTERVIEW WITH ELLEN SHANNON MAGEE

By L. W. Wilson,  
Field Worker.  
1-18-37

Ellen was born on a plantation, near the Indian Territory line, Northwest the present town of Westville, Oklahoma in Arkansas near the present town of Cincinnati, Arkansas. She states she is one hundred and seventeen years old, being born in 1820. She is bent double with age, eyesight gone, hearing good, and a memory more than one could expect. She has two living daughters, born and reared in Ft. Gibson, Oklahoma, ages 53 and 60 years respectively with whom she lives. Her oldest daughter is dead and it was <sup>her</sup> who came with her to Ft. Gibson, Oklahoma when six years old. If this oldest daughter was living, she recalled, she would be 88 years old. Ellen has been out of the state once by train since she came to Ft. Gibson, Oklahoma in 1853.

HUSBAND- Jack Magee. She stated Jack was a son of someone by the name of Tilly.

GRANDFATHER- Uncle Nat, no other name known.

GRANDMOTHER- Aunt Sally, no other name known.

SLAVE AT CINCINNATI, ARKANSAS

Old Master- Jake Funkhouser owned me.

Old Miss-Eliza Crittendon was my old Miss.

Mr. Call Shores-was Master Jake's slave buyer. He bought all the slaves and likewise sold slaves for old Master Jake.

Old Master Jake had Mr. Shores sell my mammy on the <sup>lock</sup> ~~clock~~ when I was a little girl. They auctioned her off to the highest bidder just like they do stock now. Mammy was a good worker, Master Jake got a lot of money for mammy. I don't know the man

2

that bought her. He took her away and I never saw her any more.

Master Jake was good to me, and old Miss Eliza would let me help in the house with the older slaves. I picked cotton in the fields some, but not much. Old Miss made them let me learn to cook and when I got big enough she let me run the kitchen.

Master Jake had lots of slaves and a large plantation. I don't know how many acres. I would have liked to of stayed with Master Jake.

#### HER REMOVAL TO INDIAN TERRITORY

Scouts came one night, got Jack, myself, and my little girl; they stole us from Master Jake and old Miss Eliza. This was seven years before the War (Civil War). We drove all one night and the next morning we came to a little town that they called Evansville. I don't know if it was in Arkansas or Indian Territory or if it is there yet or not. One of them got sick in the night, was the reason we stopped there. The next day we started out again, we crossed Barren Fork Creek and the Illinois river; yes, they forded these streams, and finally we came to the Nations Capitol, Tahlequah, then they brought me on to Ft. Gibson, Indian Territory and stayed there.

3

They told me I was no more a slave, and I was free to work and do as I pleased. I just didn't know what to do. Jack and I just pitched in and went to work and did the best we could. Then the war come on.

LIFE AND CUSTOMS BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR

I was a slave in Arkansas and old Master furnished good cabins, good grub, good bedding and old Master was a Doctor and took care of all of us. In Indian Territory when I came the poor negroes and Indians didn't fare so good. They lived in log cabins, had schools, cabin churches, raised cotton in cleared spots, corn, had lots of horses, mules, cattle, hogs, wild game and fish, all-in-all they got along pretty well. I know I did and they were as smart as I cause I never went to school or church. White folks had everything good.

Bread: The Indians would have pestle bowls and mortar to grind corn. Just beat it up fine as they could then sift it through a ladle and by this means the portion that did not go through was called hominy corn and the remainder or the part that went through the ladle was put through a riddle and this was their meal. They would then take the meal, together with

## 4

canuchi, salt water or water and add salt they get from the white men, mix it up, roll it out, lay it on a board and bake until brown on the other side. They called this kind of bread, canahanie bread.

Bean bread was same. Cook beans well done (dry beans) and add them to the canahanie dough and cook same way. Sometimes would bake it in oven built outside made of rock.

Pumpkin bread: Cook pumpkins into a butter, add molasses and mix in to canahanie dough and bake same way.

Ladle: Ladles were made by taking a small hickory limb and bend it to make a circle or hoop. Take pieces of tender young cane stripping the outside of it into fine strings and weave like a chair bottom, leaving a large mesh.

Riddle- Riddles were made same as ladles only the cane was woven closer ( the ladles and riddles were used as sieves).

Canuchi: Canuchi was made out of hickory nut kernels crushed in the pestle bowls and run through the riddle. They used it for shortening, butter and cream for coffee if they had coffee.

They could get green coffee at Ft. Gibson every since I can remember. Roast it themselves and grind it in the pestle bowls like the corn. Incidentally the soldiers used eagle

5

brand milk at the Fort, but I had to parch the green coffee there and grind it with a hand-mill.

There was lots of game and wild fowl for food. Wild pigeons, squirrel, rabbit, turkeys, geese, ducks, deer, coon, o'possum and sometimes bear. Bears were scarce.

There was fox, coyotes, muskrats, minks, skunks and panthers that they would shoot and trap for furs and skins.

Ever since I can remember there was plenty of wild hogs, cattle, and horses in the cane breaks. The cane breaks were just as thick along the river as stubble is thick in a wheat field except little trails that let in out and through the breaks.

There was horse racing, ball games, dances, and the like for the white folks and Indians. Negroes didn't do that very much, especially the women. We would go to sewing-bees, barbecues, threshing parties and shucking-bees.

They would cut their wheat and oats with a scythe, cradle attached. They would gather it up, store it and when dry we would go and stay three or four days and frail out the grain with poles and sticks. You would just scatter out the grain on a floor or most usually on the ground and beat it separating the grain from the straw.

6

In the fall of the year we would go and stay the same way and everybody would shuck corn.

Barbecues: We would go and stay sometimes a whole week and have a good time. We would barbecue all kinds of fowls, deer, hogs and cattle as well as make bread. I usually kept the fire going.

We used to all gather and run the spinning wheel, reels and looms and make thread and cloth. Yes, we made both cotton and wool but not very much wool cloth.

Yes, we would color the cloth, dye it. Our coloring was made by taking sumac and copperas and boil it in water, of course, making a strong liquid and rinse our cloth in it. This makes a good brown. We would take green walnut hulls, boil in water to a desired strength of liquid and this would make a tan. We used indigo that we purchased and this would make all shades of blue. In the spring we would gather poke berries, boil them down and with the solution we could make any shade of red or pink.

We made shoes on the plantation. I mean Master Jake's slaves would take the hair off of a cow-hide with hot water and ashes that was saved from the fire-place. They, in some

7

way tanned the hide with bark. When I had nothing else to do old Miss would make me whittle out shoe pegs to put on the soles. We had no shoe tacks. The Indians make moccasins out of skins and hides. They had no soles. I guess you have seen them.

We made soap on the plantation. Saved the ashes all winter from the fire-place. Stored them in a big log bin and at butchering time all of the old cracklins, burned meats and any old grease that was around was thrown into the ashes and would leave it all there together until spring. Then we would take them out, pour water on them and cook it all down to soap. They used to kill 25 or 30 hogs at a time. I don 't know how the Indians made soap.

On the plantation we had carts and wagons made stronger and better by the slaves than did the Indians for they had regular work shops to make them. The Indians would cut off of a log the size of a wheel they wanted, take off the bark, make them round as possible and put a hole through the middle. Axles were cut the right length or length desired from small logs. A shoulder was cut on



each end of the axle far enough back so as to take care of the wheel and to fit a peg in a hole in the end of the axle. Of course, from the shoulder to the end of the axle they made it round and smooth as they possibly could. The rest of the cart and wagon was made from split limbs. The Indians used canuchi to grease their wagons. They had wagons at the Fort with spokes, hubs, fellows and wide tires.

#### CHURCHES AND SCHOOL HOUSES

The school houses were used for both church and school. They were simply log cabins chinked up. Some had stick and some had rock fireplaces, punchin floors and used split logs for seat. Indians had arbors in the summer time. They would take post, limbs and brush and build a place that would make a shade for the preacher and it was usually built where there was lots of trees and the Indians would sit on the ground under these trees and listen to the sermons.

I never went to school and don 't know what language they taught. I never went to church until I got to be an old woman. I always had to work while the white folks went to church and school.

CIVIL WAR

The rebel soldiers used to be at Ft. Gibson, Oklahoma up at the Fort for a long time but they moved out in 1862. I think it was along in July, at any rate it was in the middle of the summer. In the fall maybe it was in October, General James Blunt came with the Yankee soldiers and stayed there until the War was over.

The rebels built themselves a Fort across the Arkansas river. It was up the river and on the south bank of the river about three miles due West of the Fort at Ft. Gibson and they called it Fort Davis. General Cooper, General Steel, General Stan Wadie and Col. Pike was all over at Fort Davis.

These rebel generals used to come over to Ft. Gibson and visit with the Yankee Colonels, Generals, Lieutenants and other officers. Some of the Yankee Generals was General Blunt, Colonel Phillips, Captain Anderson, Lieutenant Porter and others.

I used to cook for the officers. I cooked in the home of Mrs. Lieutenant Porter, Mrs. Capt. Anderson and Mrs. Dr. Hill and Mrs. Dr. Stewart and lots of the others.

These doctors they were the ones that doctored the soldiers at the Fort. Lord, God! They never did give them anything but Blue Mass pills made out of Button Snake roots.

Yes, sir, we always had plenty of everything to eat. Venison we had in some form nearly every meal. I got tired lookin at it. Had lots of wild turkey, geese, ducks, squirrel and all kinds of wild game. Them officers sure did like the wild pigeons I fixed every morning for their breakfast. I laughed then and laugh yet when I think of those officers Mrs. They would let me pick the wild turkeys, geese, ducks and draw them but would not eat them the same day. They would make me hang them out all night and freeze them and then cook them so as to rid the wild taste from them. Sometimes I cooked some for myself cause I would rather have them right when they killed them. They would dress the venison and other wild animals and draw them and hang up to freeze or keep them in the ice-house and then cook them. Yes, Sir, we had pies, cakes and everything and course we had light-bread, biscuits and cornbread. The

11

flour though was more like shorts. It was not fine and pretty and white like it is now. We had sugar, coffee, eagle brand milk, potatoes, sweet potatoes. Yes, Sir, them officers and wives and children had everything they wanted.

The soldiers down at the barracks had their own cooks. They didn't eat goot stuff like the officers. They ate beans, cornbread, salt-meat, that come in barrels, black coffee. The Captain of each Company would issue instructions that the cooks would have to make biscuits for them every Sunday morning. Yes, they had some wild game to eat too but they would always have to get the consent of the officers before they could cook them.

Early one night I heard the bugle call down at the Quarters for all the soldiers to get ready and go to fight. I guess the wives of the officers knew where they were going but I did not. They hurriedly got their equipment which consisted of their masks, cannon, amunition wagons and everything ready but the grub wagons. I didn't know then why they left them at the barracks; of course, I do now. They went on into the woods as far as I could see. All their wives waved good-bye and I watched them too. Next

12

morning when I was getting breakfast I looked toward the way they went and I saw Fort Davis and it was all afire. That was in the summer of 1863 along in the afternoon of that day the soldiers came back. I don't know if the rebels killed any of the men or not but there was not an officer missing. Then again that summer General Blunt and all the soldiers and officers left. They marched right by where I am living now and their wives said that they were going down on Elk Creek and whip the rebels. They said when they got back they whipped General Cooper and General Steel and laughed about it. I heard them telling their wives all about it. All the officers came back again but there was lots of the men missing. They were killed down there in the woods some place. That is about all I know about any battles, of course, they were detachments out more or less all the time protecting wagon trains and keeping down uprisings among the Indians and white folks. I might tell you some of the names of the ones who were on the freight wagons, there was: John Fields, Robert Hicks, Arch Carter and John Chase. They kept the most of their

13

freight wagons in camp over by Four Mile Creek. There was not enough room at the barracks to take care of all the soldiers and freight wagons.

The soldiers' uniforms were navy blue pants and blouse with brass buttons. The shirts were grey flannel and they had little brass buttons. They wore caps sometimes that were navy blue with little crosses on the front of them above the bill of the cap. These caps just mashed down and was flat, and they had hats with broad brims on them like the cow-boys used to wear. Their equipment consisted of the musket, powder horn, tomahawk. Officers had old Sabers and carried cap and ball pistols. They had guns that they called their old caribbean and of course they had water jugs that held about a quart of water which was wrapped in cloth that they tied on a string and carried across their shoulder. The cannon was mounted on large wheels and the wheels and axles were built about like our present day wagons. And when it came time to move them they were readily attached to what they called the running-gears. These cannons were drawn by six miles well harnessed with a man seated on each left mule. The grub wagons and amunition wagons were built in about the same manner other

14

than that they would have boxes on them to carry their provisions, powder, cannon balls and log chain. They would shoot these log chains sometimes instead of the cannon balls. The way they fired the cannon was by inserting a fuse through a hole in the back part of the barrell of the cannon then tip the nozzle of the cannon up, pour powder in the barrell, then pound down paper on top of the powder with a long ramrod then roll in the cannon-ball, then stuff in paper and punch it down, then pull the cannon around into position, detach from running-gear, drive the mules to safety, go back and light the fuse, firing the cannon. Their cap and ball pistols and old muskets were loaded in the same manner other than a cap replaced the fuse, there was a little protection on the back of the barrell that was hollowed on which they placed the cap, and when the trigger was pulled the cap bursted which caused the shot. They had to be particular to see that these caps did not get wet and they carried them in a little round tin box. Other notables that came around the Fort was Cherokee Chief, Bill Ross and his brother Dan Ross.

15

BURIAL GROUNDS

Of course everybody knows where the National Cemetery is here in Ft. Gibson, Oklahoma. There used to be one South of the Fort down along the ravine a long time ago. Lots of old soldiers was buried down there. I can't recall at this time any of their names but I believe there was one of the Generals buried there. There was a tombstone at his grave the last time I was down there. I don't know if it is there yet or not for I can't get around and see any more. When we used to have heavy rains and this branch came up, it would wash up the bones of some of these who were buried and lots of times the little boys, both colored and white, would find the little cross-guns that they had worn on their hats and caps, and they would pick them up and bring them up to the fort and the officers at the fort would give them 25 cents apiece for them.

LIFE AND CUSTOMS AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

After the war things were in a more or less dilapidated condition, lots of the cabins, schools, were burned, and the people set about to rehabilitate their homes and their farms.

They raised cotton, corn and some live stock. A few undertook and did raise wheat and oats.



16

They went about in about the same manner of grinding their meal, making their bread, clothes, ox carts, and tilling the soil in about the manner as I have previously explained under the heading of "Life and Customs before the war."

There were lots of wild fruit and berries, blackberries, dewberries, strawberries, grapes, and plums. It was about 1885 before they began to set out fruit trees. I well remember that there was a man that came to Ft. Gibson (Oklahoma) who sold peach trees, apple trees of different varieties which were from one to three years old. The three-year-old trees sold for thirty cents apiece, and the younger ones at fifteen and twenty cents apiece. Of course these were only to be had during the proper seasons of the year.

There were lots of nuts, hazelnuts, hickorynuts, walnuts, and chincapins.

From the hickorynuts the Indians would make canuchi as I have told you the way they made it before the war. Ofcourse later on here at Ft. Gibson the boats would bring up the river, from Ft. Smith, Arkansas, Little Rock, Arkansas and Memphis, Tennessee, lard in barrels. The Indians, however, continued to make their canuchi. We just continued living, working gradually into our present day.

17

OLD ROADS AND TRAILS

I don't know much about the old roads and trails. I could see the soldiers leave the Ft. and they would cross the ferry at about the present Missouri-Pacific R.R. bridge, northwest of Ft. Gibson, and they said that they would travel from this point, south on the Texas road. That they would follow the old military road to Gibson, Oklahoma. They said Gibson, Oklahoma was at the end of the railroad (M.K.T.R.R.). Before the M.K.&T.R.R. was built the wagon trains and freight wagons would come in from the north of the fort along east bank of the Grand River. There was an old trail or military road that ran east from fort which they traveled to Tahlequah. Then the soldiers used to travel in a southeastern direction, over the hills, and said that they were going to Ft. Coffey.

I don't know of any bridges, except the Iron Mountain R.R. bridge. I used to watch them work and build it in 1887.

FERRIES AND FORDS

The ferry that the soldiers used before, during, and after the war was down near the present Missouri-Pacific R.R. bridge. It was in 1889 that the soldiers all left the fort and never came back again, and this ferry was then run by Tom French, J. B. Vest, and the Brady boys.

18

The Nevins ferry was owned by Mose and Julia <sup>Nevins</sup> ~~Evans~~.

This ferry, a flat-boat, had its landing on the east bank of the Arkansas river, at the mouth at Grand River and the landing on the west bank of the river was over by Nip Blackstone store and commissary. My girls tell me now that Muskogee has a pump station where this ferry boat used to land. This ferry was used by all travel east, west, and south. The old stage coaches always used this ferry to carry the mail and passengers, if they had any.

The Rogers ferry (Frozen Rock Ferry). This ferry was owned by Connell, Hugh, and Elick Rogers. It ran down the river from the Nevins ferry about two miles. I used to go down in the years that it ran and fish by the ferry. This ferry was not long ago, compared with the Nevins and soldiers ferry.

About where the Frisco R.R. bridge crossed Grand River at the present time there was ford they called "Rabbit Ford." This was a very dangerous ford at all times. I remember one time there was two girls in a wagon that tried to ford at this place but they got in deepwater and the two drowned.

19

The horses swam out and brought the wagon with them. They were white people and do not know or did know of them. I heard their names but have forgotten them.

When the river was low the cattle men used to drive the cattle across the Arkansas River at the upper end, that is the north end, of Hyde Park. Mr. Bill Harris that used to live up by old Camp Davis, drove more cattle across the river at this place than all the rest of the cowpunchers. He was Red Bird Harris' boy. Yes, I knew Red Bird Harris. They tell me that Red Bird died about twenty-five years ago.

#### FORTS-POSTS-AND CAMPS

I don't know much about any forts, except Ft. Gibson and Ft. Davis, that I could see over across the rivers.

Chief Isparechar of the Creek Indians had a camp northeast of Fort Gibson about two miles. The Choctaws and the Chickasaw was in camp with the Creeks. This camp was on Dr. Fuller's place, and the last I heard Mrs. Rosa Fuller owned the place and lived in Ft. Gibson, Oklahoma.

In about 1875 there was a freight wagon camp just outside of the fort. They hauled freight for the soldiers.

20

They were camped there a long time, I told you about that being also a camp for freight wagons before the war.

#### MISCELLANEOUS

There were a number of steamboats that came up the river, and I used to watch them load and unload. They brought molasses, sugar, coffee, flour, drygoods, shoes, and all kinds of merchandise.

Some of these boats, if Grand River was up, would land at the government ferry. If Grand River was down they would land over on the west landing of the Nevins Ferry, and then freight wagons would haul it into town. (Ft. Gibson, Oklahoma) I can't remember the names of all the boats, but there were at least a dozen different ones that would land. There was the Border City, The Lucy B, The Memphis Packet, and I guess that is all that I can name. I didn't know any of the captains of the boats.

Jeff Davis, the rebel that I guess was the president of the confederacy, used to live about four blocks from here, if I could see I would show you that old big, two-story, log house that was put together with wooden pins. My girl Minnie, can show you right where it was.

Yes, we had ice when I worked for the Mrs. up at the fort. I have seen the soldiers drive a six-mule team across

21

Grand River on the ice. Soldiers used to cut ice and haul it up to the ice-house and bury it in saw-dust and it would keep it all year. If I could see, I would take you up there and show you where the ice-house used to be. I don't know where they got the saw dust, but the soldiers hauled it in there a long time before I ever came to Ft. Gibson. They would save it and keep using it over. I guess it has all rotted now.

Some of the old timers were: Ellis Rattlingord, Pen Rattlingord, David Post, Cory Post, Sis Hendrickson, Lady Duck, and lots more that I can't think of. These were all Cherokees, Creeks, and just mixed-up. Lady Duck used to live on the trail, and she served meals to passers-by; and they told me that she had barrels of fire-water buried in the wood and that she sold fire-water too. I used to see and talk to them, when they came to Ft. Gibson to do their trading.

We used to, after the war, some years, grind our meal with hand-graters. I can't remember the first grist mill in Ft. Gibson; I remember it all right, but can't tell you any thing about it.

We didn't have any cotton gins. We would lay the cotton before the fire, get it good and dry and pick out the seeds by hand, and then spin it, card it, and weave it.

22

Some of the negroes, they called them Cherokee Freedman. The Government gave them forty acres of land, but I did not get any. I tried to get on the rolls for I felt I was a freedman, but there was so much betting around going on they butted me off.

One thing I want forget, that when I got to Ft. Gibson the first day there was a big tin fish stuck upon a pole down by the river, west of the fort and a fullblood sold fish down there. I never bought any fish from him because the soldiers and officers always had plenty of fish, and before I went to work for them I would catch them for myself. I always drew rations from the commissary up at the fort every time the soldiers drew their rations, and the officers would let me take the rations home to my family.

During my time I have seen different kinds of money, first, confederate money, then United States money and at one time they gave us a little, old, short, green piece of paper with a dog's head on it and every body called it F.H. Nash dog heads. F. H. Nash had a sister-in-law named Mrs. Tookah Nash. I think she is living now with Mr. Lagy, up-town, (Ft. Gibson, Okla.)

When the white people came to the territory they had to be of some particular use to the town and the community. They

23

would not allow "dead beats" and "scalawags" to stay here, and the United States Marshals would chase them out. The ones that did stay had to pay one dollar a month permit for a while, then fifty cents, and finally nothing.

The fullbloods were usually building log cabins, splitting rails, and trying to raise something to eat as they went along. I remember about forty years ago, when they were trying to make Ft. Gibson the biggest town in Oklahoma and hoped it to be the territory capitol, Mr. Sharp gave lots away free to all desirables.

I was around forty years ago that they discovered three miles, north of town, a white sand with which they could make glass, and every body thought that Ft. Gibson would grow faster on this account.

Around forty years ago, Chief Buffington and Frank Boudinot went to Washington and had a big dispute about some kind of a deal, and Frank Boudinot and some of the Cherokees, said that Chief Buffington did not have the right to act for the Cherokees in signing a treaty or something of that kind.

In about 1900, the Missouri-Pacific R.R. began to take gravel out of Grand River.

In 1900 F. H. Nash sold over 1600 bushels of corn here at Ft. Gibson for 25¢ per bushel to cattle-men to be fed out near his place.



All of the cow-punchers and Indians had been warned by a circular from Tahlequah, and was posted on all of the trees, that anyone found removing, or defacing marks, corner-stones, and blazes would be found guilty and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Lots of the old markers had been destroyed by fire in the woods.

John F. Wilson used to haul freight and run a hack line between Ft. Gibson and Tahlequah. They started doing this about 1890. It must of been a few years before statehood when they quit. Kirks' hack-line was running the same time between Muskogee and Ft. Gibson. They had a nice enclosed wagonette that met every train at Ft. Gibson and at Muskogee; they charged a dollar for a round-trip or fifty cents, one way.

In 1898, U. S. Deputy Dobson from Muskogee captured Bill Nails in the Green Leaf mountains, and the windchester he carried had cut on the side of the stock, Cherokee Bill, 1894. It was a 45-80 caliber. It was not the gun given to Edd Reed, that killed the two Crittendens at Wagoner. It was the gun that Bill Vann owned, and sold to shoot Star. Cherokee Bill's gun, with the word Dolly cut on the side of the stock was given to Edd Reed, and was bought by Deputy U.S. Marshal Ike Rogers. This was the same gun that Ike Rogers carried when he made payments to the freedmen at Ft. Gibson in 1897. Cherokee Bill shot Ike Rogers, in 1898 on the depot platform at Ft. Gibson. The gun "Dolly" finally fell into the hands of Mr. Clarence Goldsby.

25

COMMENT

This very old negro woman told me that if there was any information that she could give about anything during her life time as to history, that the young folks didn't know about, she would be glad to do it and for me to come back anytime that she would like to always talk about as she had very few people that cared to talk to her any more.