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Interview with Mr. J. R. Fields  
born at Ft. Gibson, Okla., in 1873  
and will soon be 64 yrs. old.  
Lived in Oklahoma all his life and  
now lives in Muskogee, Oklahoma.

Mr. Fields states the following:-

Father- William Fields. Born in Alabama in 1828 and died and was buried at McLain, Okla., in 1883, in family cemetery. He was of Cherokee Indian descent.

Mother- Charlotte Kennedy-Fields. Born at and near the present town of Stillwell, Okla., in 1835 and died and was buried at Webber Falls, Okla., in 1923. She was of Cherokee Indian descent.

I was born and lived in the present town of Ft. Gibson, Okla., until I was about seven years old. I then moved along with my parents to Webber Falls, Okla. this being in 1880. The route taken was over the mountains and through the valleys to the south and east along about the present highway road to the present town of Gore, Okla. There was no town of Gore, Oklahoma at that time and no railroad between Ft. Gibson and Gore, Oklahoma or Webber Falls, Oklahoma. It was either by road or down the river by boat.

We crossed the river at the north bank of the Arkansas river just across from Webber Falls, Oklahoma on the south bank by ferry and settled in Webber Falls, Oklahoma. I came from there to Muskogee, Oklahoma in late years.

#### LIFE & CUSTOMS

I use to hear them talk of what a hard time the Indians had in coming to this country. The civil war etc. The older ones still had some hatred in their hearts. At this particular time though the younger ones, like myself gave it only

a passing thought and we were perfectly reconciled. I really did not know any better.

There was lots of game; coon o'possum, deer, squirrel, rabbits, pheasants, minks, muskrats, etc.

We boys use to sell our furs and hides to the buyers that use to come up on the boats.

We had lots of cattle, horses, mules, oxen, hogs, and some sheep. Most of these ran on the open range.

We raised corn, melons and some cotton and of course hay. Our fruits consisted mostly of berries, (all kinds of wild berries) wild plums, grapes and would cut a bee tree for our honey. (wild bees)

We also fished and had those for food along with our game.

#### SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

We would, I guess, say we lived a simple life and our social affairs were very meager. Just visit friends and relatives, go to church.

We boys and girls use to have an old fashioned square <sup>dance</sup> occasionally.

Horse racing was the big thing with both old and young. We ran everything from a Pinto pony to the best we had in the country. We would wager anything from a 10 cents plug of store bought tobacco to \$5.00. It usually ran along though about \$5.00.

#### SCHOOLS AND CHURCHES

I went to school at Webber Falls, Oklahoma. The schools were of log cabin construction. Shake shingle roofs, and usually had large fireplaces built mostly out of rock.

The benches were of split logs with hole bored in them and sit on legs that were driven in to the log. The school houses were used mostly for church services.

We were taught the English language. I cannot recall any of my teachers names now. I do remember that some of the boys going to school were the Vann boys. I think one of their names was Bob Vann. He was son of Joe Vann the Steamboat Captain.

The school attendance consisted of fullblood Cherokees, Creeks, mixed bloods and what we called half breeds for they were crossed with the white man.

#### CIVIL WAR

My father fought in the Civil War back east. He did no fighting in Oklahoma.

#### TRIBAL LIFE TO STATEHOOD

The Capitol of the Cherokee Nation was at Tahlequah, Oklahoma and the Creek Capitol was at Okmulgee, Okla.

All tribes were run by Chiefs. These Chiefs had no connection with politics but were selected by their rank and file to represent them in all tribal matters.

Some of the Cherokee Chiefs were: John Ross, Chas. Thompson, Louis Downing, D. W. Bushyhead, Joel E. Mayes, C. J. Harris (brother of Red Bird Harris that lived over at the old Ft. Davis in the Creek Nation), Sam H. Mayes, Tom Buffington and W. C. Rogers. Some of these Chiefs I knew personally and I have at this time pictures of all of them.

Some of the Creek Chiefs were: Perryman, Childers, Porter and Ischarachee (not pronounced as spelled). I did not know so many or much of them or their first names.

Many white people had settled in the Nations. Railroads were built and the tribes (full bloods), half breeds and in fact all, it seemed, were ready for the transformation of tribal life to statehood.

Hon. C. N. Haskell was our first governor.

#### BURIAL GROUNDS

I know of quite a few but would be hard for me to locate them today. You know they just buried their dead most any place they could find a convenient spot but usually around some of their kin. I remember one in particular-6 miles south,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  mile east and 3-4 mile north from Webber Falls, Oklahoma. A young man named PRESTON MACKEY is buried there that was on the steamer "Lucy Walker" -- Boiler exploded and burned the boat and killed Preston. He was about twenty years old. I cannot remember the date this occurred but I do know that Joe Vann was Captain of the boat.

There use to be a burial ground in what we called old Ft. Gibson at about the present location. After hard rains and the water would recede in the branch the boys use to go down along the branch and find human skeletons that were Union Soldiers for the cross guns they had on their hats were around them and the boys hunted for these because they could sell them up at the fort for a nominal sum. I don't remember of them finding any Confederate cross-arms from Confederate soldiers' hats or others prior to the Civil War.

#### OLD ROADS AND TRAILS

I did not know how the Texas road left the Nevisn Ferry at the mouth of Grand River also the Ft. Arbuckle road that came into the

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Nevins Ferry. These were roads on the west side of the Arkansas river.

(Ferries are emntioned below)

There was a trail that left the Nevins Ferry at mouth of Grand River which ran up the Grand river a short ways thence a little east by the present Frisco RR depot at Ft. Gibson, Oklahoma thence cut a little north across Corral branch, thence northeast  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles thence east 1 mile, passed the old Government Spring (spring explained under water holes), cut north 2 miles coming out by Nathans Johnson's old place, thence east 6 miles to the old Gulagher place (w. M. (Clu) Gulagher's father, turn north and come out at the boy's seminary, near Tahlequah about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles and thence north to Tahlequah, Okla.

The boys' seminary burned on March 20th 1910.

This was a fairly good road and was the main road connecting with the Texas road, Ft. Arbuckle road and the Military Road north and west out of Ft. Gibson, Oklahoma to Gibson, Oklahoma on the M.K.T.RP.

#### BRIDGES

There was no bridges I can recall on the east side of the Arkansas River between Ft. Gibson, Oklahoma and Tahlequah to the east and Webber Falls, Oklahoma to the south and east down the Arkansas River.

#### FORDS & FERRIES

Nevins Ferry-Owned and operated by Mose Nevins and Julia Nevins at mouth of Grand River and Verdigris River and crossing to the west bank of the Arkansas River. The landings were about where the present city of Muskogee, Oklahoma.

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Pump station is located which is at the north end of Hyde Park and at the mouth of Grand River just at the point of the present sand bar.

The Government operated the upper ferry between Ft. Gibson, Oklahoma and Gibson, Oklahoma on the M.K.T.RR which was later run by a man named Tom French. This ferry was located about where the present RR bridge and the Highway bridge crosses the Grand River north and east of Ft. Gibson.

Rabbit Ford- This ford was used at low water time on the Arkansas River and was  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 miles down the river from the Nevins Ferry. This always was considered a very dangerous ford.

Ford- (No name) crossed the Arkansas River just below the Nevins Ferry and was used at low water time. They used this ford considerable in driving cattle across.

Frozen Rock Ferry- This owned and operated by the Roger Bros. Connell, Andrew and Hugh Rogers. It was located east of the present village of Riverside or possibly the Frozen Rock school of the present day. Well anyway it was along about the place of rabbit ford or a little south of same. This ferry was abandoned about the time the Frisco RR bridge at this point started a toll bridge. (See under steam boats for the ferry at Webber Falls, Oklahoma.)

I cannot say exactly when the Government or Tom French and the Nevins Ferry was discontinued but they were some time along in the early 1900's.

#### WATER HOLES

We had plenty of water in my part of the country at all times, River, creeks and springs.

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I do recall the old Government spring on the Tahlequah road as previously described. It is about two miles and a half northeast of Ft. Gibson, Oklahoma. A Mr. Schaffer now lives there. I understand that away back in 1824 the Government located this spring, cleaned it out the whole to a width of 6 feet and 8 feet in length and later was concreted up. This place on which same is located was called the old Beck Place prior to 1889 and then was called the Tombs Place.

#### STEAM BOATS AND STEAM FERRIES

Steamboats ran regularly as humanly possible between Ft. Smith, Arkansas and Ft. Gibson, Oklahoma. They would come up the river and dock at Skullville, Oklahoma. Pleasant Bluff, Oklahoma, Webber Falls, Oklahoma Nevins Ferry as explained as to location under ferried, and at Ft. Gibson, Okla. Their cargoes consisted of all kinds of merchandise, farm tools, mules, etc. They returned down the river with barges of logs, and handled some cotton and hay.

Skullville at that time was on the river (Ark. River) a short ways north of the present town of Spiro, Okla.

Pleasant Bluff is the present town of Tamaha, Okla.

Webbers Falls, Oklahoma at same location now as then.

Nevins Ferry (See under ferries for location)

Ft. Gibson, Oklahoma landing was just south of the Government or Tom French Ferry. (See under ferries for location)

Steamboats ran more regular between Webber Falls, Oklahoma than they did up the river at Nevins Ferry and Ft. Gibson, Okla. account of the rivers water depths.

Names of some of the boats and their Captains were as follows:



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Steamer- Border City- Captain Blakely.

Steamer- Jennie Mae- Captain Walter Huff.

Steamer-Lucy Walker- Captain Joe Vann.

Steamer\* The largest to ever come up the river was "John Matthews"  
I did not know the Captain.

The first three boats plied the river as early as 1880 to my knowledge. The latter made its maiden trip in 1892. I don't know when the first two were taken out of service. It must have been in the 90's.

The "Lucy Walker" exploded and burned in about 1885. Preston Mackey was killed as explained under burial grounds. I do not remember if other were killed or not or how many if any were injured.

The "John Matthews" a new large boat on the river as I have stated came up the river in 1892 "NO CARGO" Docked at Webber Fall, Oklahoma and loaded 7000 bushels of corn belonging to J. W. Hayes and Frank Vore of Webber Falls, Okla. I don't remember where the corn was billed too, but it was shelled corn. This boat ran into the draw bridge at Van Buren, Arkansas and the boat together with its entire cargo was sunk.

When I went to Webber Falls, Okla. In about 1879 or 1880 there was a ferry we cross on to Webber Falls. A flat boat concern, owned and operated by Lynch and Campbell. The boat landed on the north and south side of the Arkansas river about where the present highway crosses. This flat boat finally gave away to a steam ferry run by Captain-Dave Summers. Cannot recall the year it started and quit its operations.

RAILROADS AND NEW CITIES

The old ST.L.I.M.& S.RR now Mo. P RR came south out of Wagoner, Oklahoma throughout Ft. Gibson, Okla. on the north side of the Arkansas river at Webber Falls, Okla. Webber Falls was on the south side of the river in about 1887 or 1888 and continued to build until it reached Ft. Smith, Arkansas. The railroad camp across on the north side of the river from Webber Falls, Oklahoma is now the town of Gore, Okla. The present time of Vian as I recall was started about the year of 1888 also.

The town of Webber Falls, Oklahoma has no railroad to this day however there was a railroad built from Warner, Okla. to Webber Falls, Okla. in about 1911 by C. N. Haskell, Oscar Hayes and other local people in about 1921. Road never did pay and same was abandoned and sold for junk in late years.

GRIST MILLS AND COTTON GINS

The first cotton gin at Webber Falls, Okla. was owned and operated by Cobb & Hutton and was operated with horse power. Can't recall year started.

The first Grist Mill was owned and operated by a man named McDaniels. I don't know year it started operation.

L. W. Wilson,  
Field Worker.