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Effie S. Jackson,  
Journalist,  
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Interview With C. S. Fenwick,  
203-4 Wright Building,  
Tulsa, Oklahoma.

A PIONEER HUNTER AND TRAPPER.

My father, H. S. Fenwick, rode a pony from Arrow Rock, Missouri, to McKinley, Texas, in 1870. I have often heard him tell of his trip, maybe that is what gave me a spirit of adventure. He was two weeks making the trip.

I was born in Wise County, Texas, forty-one years ago and when I was just a youngster my father took me on my first trip to the Territory for grapes. I remember that we went in a covered wagon filled with camping supplies, and we crossed Red River at a large spring. I have been to that spring many times since. It is just off the main highway today, running from Gainesville to Ardmore. This spring is still gushing and so cold that the man who has a refreshment stand there has built a concrete vat and in the summer time keeps his melons in its cold waters. There were only native Indians and a few whites in that vicinity and Thackerville

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was the only trading post. The man at the spring said if we went "up country" we would need water, so we borrowed a barrel from him and filled it with spring water. We made a half day's drive into the woods and saw many Indians, Chickasaws, in their peaceful cabins surrounded by the Tom Fuller patches. This was a variety of corn which they made into hominy then mixed the hominy with hickory nut kernels; they called it Tom Fuller and it certainly tasted good. Game, fish and wild fruit were abundant, the most luxuriant were the wild mustang grapes. Never have I seen such an abundant growth, they were so thick we could gather a barrel full from one vine, very sweet, too. Only in Arkansas have I even found anything like them since.

That trip made a lasting impression on me. My one dream was to have a gun, some hound dogs and live among the Indians. As I grew up in Texas I had a good literary schooling, but I wished to study law and in those days that meant to read it and pass a Bar examination. So I prepared to do three things in keeping with pioneer life and my own desire; I assembled my guns, four hound dogs, fishing, hunting and camping equipment, also my beloved law books. My plan was

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to go into the Chickasaw country and by fishing, hunting and trapping to make my own living while I was studying. That was in 1904. So for seven years I was a hunter and trapper among the Chickasaws and Choctaws and was in daily association with these full blood Chickasaws and Choctaws, lived their life, spoke their language. Instead of wild in their nativity I found them to be the most peaceful, contented, home-loving people I have ever known. That is, they were until the white man furnished them with rotten whiskey.

Always some Indian would tell me of some trapper's paradise just a few miles beyond where I was, so I decided to penetrate the territory bordering the Arkansas "wilds". I took my hunting and trapping outfits, and went by train down in the southern part of what is today McCurtain County to a small station, Garvin, near the Little River. With the help of a boy we packed (carried) my camping and trapping outfit to this river. It was the middle of January. In my trapping "outfit" were seventy steel traps, bought from a Chicago mail-order house. I was as strong and hardy as the Indians with whom I had lived. When I got to the Little

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River its channel was one hundred yards wide; I hoped to find a skiff or boat of some kind and there across the channel I saw an old skiff left by high water. The boy with me had been sick so it was up to me to get it, so I threw off my clothes, swam across that icy water and paddled the boat back with my hands.

We went on down Little River, trapping on the way until we reached the point where Mountain Fork came down from the north. We had repaired the skiff, loaded it with our equipment and one hound dog; we were seven days reaching the Mountain Fork and there began our real trapping--coon, mink, opossum and skunk were plentiful and bear, panther and wild cats abounded in the mountainous region. It was sometimes agony to hear the mountain wolves howl. The country was thinly settled, a hunter's paradise, the swamps filled with duck, quail, squirrels, all kinds of wild meat.

We went up Mountain Fork as far as we could with our boat until the water became too swift and there we trapped as we packed our outfit forty miles up-stream. On the way we saw deer in bunches and as many as fifty or sixty wild

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turkeys in a drove. The only settlements were two small trading posts, old Eagletown and about twenty miles north of that a Choctaw town, Hochatown; these were our only sources of supplies. From Eagletown to Hochatown was a dim trail, not a house in the region. We hunted and trapped all winter, trapped animals, took pelts, stretched and cured the pelts and then shipped the furs to St. Louis; a good mink or coon skin was worth \$4.00 or \$5.00. So you see how my early years were spent, making enough money in the winter to be free to study in the summer, except when fishing, always a source of income and recreation.

Maybe it was because my mind was so clear and unbiased by living next to Nature that the Bar examination was simple for me. I was admitted to the Bar very young and became the second judge of Johnston County, the youngest judge in the state at that time. I served for four years (1912-1916) and had 2600 Indian estates under my jurisdiction in probate at one time. Grafters were as thick as fleas, each one trying to chisel and rob the Indian of his land. I dealt with the whites with a firm hand; all of my sympathy was with the

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Indians, for I had lived with them so long that I had their confidence and the Indians came to me in droves telling me of their needs, of their oppression by the whites. I adopted one policy toward the Indians, that was to allow them to sell enough of their land or holdings to place the necessary improvements on the remainder and in this way much of their land is still conserved today, furnishing a good home for them and their children.

I am not an old man now, just in the prime of my life, and yet see what I have witnessed in just a little more than a generation. I saw the rough days of the Territory, not much peace and little law and order, with murder rampant and daily infractions of the law too numerous to mention. I have seen the cowboys ride in and get fired up with "mean" whiskey and literally ride their horses into stores and shoot out the lights. After Statehood and regulation of county government times took a sudden change for law enforcement, and there was building of schools and churches for the uplift of the states' citizenry.

I later served as prosecuting attorney and always the picture moved before me, as I had changed from boyhood to

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manhood so had the land changed from barbarism to civilization; the wild flower gardens of the Territory became fields of ripening grain; the wild grapes and fruits were supplanted by tame orchards; the cabin of the Indian became a modern house with fit living conditions; the old, crooked winding trails, discarded, became streamlined hard-topped highways built along section lines. I saw illiteracy wiped out in half a generation due to influence of church and the school. I saw population increase from a few sparse native settlements to thickly populated centers of cosmopolitan people who came here from every state and brought the best with them.

With the coming of Statehood and law-enforcement and the moral influence of church and school, the scalawag, outlaw and scoundrel who could not get into the melting pot and become a lawabiding citizen, had to move on "west" and his place was filled by the better element who came from the old settled states. They sought a new home and made Oklahoma a fit place to raise their children.

If I had to go through hell and high water I would just say, "Give me an old Chickasaw full blood and a hound dog .



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and I will have faithful followers through all the hardships." That's what I think of the "real" Indians.