

## INDEX CARDS

Railroads--Missouri, Kansas and Texas  
Fort Gibson  
Carpenters--Cherokee Nation  
Carpenters--Creek Nation  
North Fork Town  
Hotels--Creek Nation  
Eufaula  
Stidham, G. W.  
Mercantile establishments--Creek Nation  
Schools--Creek Nation  
Churches--Creek Nation  
Brewer, T. F.  
Okmulgee  
Capitol--Creek  
Checote, Samuel  
Robertson, Alice  
Food--Creek  
Game--Creek Nation  
Intoxicants--Creek Nation  
Arbeka  
Perryman, J. M.  
Thop-thoc-co  
Wetumka  
Transportation--Creek Nation  
Ewing, Peter  
Stidham, George  
Small pox--Creek Nation  
Law enforcement--Creek

# Finigan, Minnie Fryer. Interview.

(Interview given by Mrs. Minnie Fryer Finigan, to Miss Ella Robinson, field worker, February 4, 1937)

5  
40

## EXPERIENCES OF A PIONEER TEACHER -

Mrs. Minnie Fryer Finigan  
215 South Seventh  
Muskogee, Oklahoma.

I was born in New Boston Illinois, 1865. My parents were William Gage, and Elizabeth Fryer. When I was a very small child, we moved to Kansas, making the trip by wagon. We lived there until 1872, when my father, who was a skilled mechanic, came to the Indian Territory. The M. K. & T. railroad, was building through the territory at that time and my father was sure of securing a large portion of the work required. He built the station house, at Gibson station, Indian Territory. From there he went to North Fork Town, on the Canadian river. There he took charge of a saw mill where the lumber was sawed for all buildings in that part of the country. He lived there for some time, boarding with a full blood Indian woman, known as Aunt Polly. It was a very small village, had two stores, a post-office, and a half a dozen houses. He sent for his family and we went there to live. At that time Eufaula was beginning to build. He was given a contract for several good buildings which were all built of native stone, among them, was the store building of Judge G. W. Stidham and Captain Grayson. I attended a private school there, taught by Rev. McGee, a Presbyterian Minister. Rev. T.F. Brewer was Superintendent of Asbury Mission. a Manual Training School. just north of Eufaula

-2-

about two miles. We often went up there to church. That<sup>41</sup> was my first acquaintance with Rev. Brewer, and our friendship lasted through our entire life. When I was twelve years old, we moved to Okmulgee, where my father had a contract to erect the Creek Council House there, which is now standing. Sam Checote was Chief of the Creeks at that time. As it was the law, that no white man could be employed in the Indian Territory, without a permit from the Creek Government, but Chief Checote extended my father the privilege of bringing in white laborers to work on the building, without securing the permit, as there were no skilled laborers among the Indians at that time and that was quite necessary.

We children attended school there with the Indian children, my father paying tuition for us. After two years, I went to Parsons, Kansas and attended High School. My brother George lived there and I boarded with <sup>him</sup> and his wife. I then returned to Eufaula and took a special course in higher subjects, given by Prof. McIntyre. Captain Grayson, seeing the need of special school work in Eufaula at that time, secured this teacher in the East. It was from him that I got my first inspiration to teach. I then went to Okmulgee and attended the Teachers Institute during the summer and applied for a school. The Teachers had to pass an examination which was given orally. I remember Miss Alice Robertson was there and sat just in front of me and I will say here, that she passed a 100% perfect examination. Had it not been for the encouragement she gave me, I perhaps would have failed just through fright; however, I passed and was assigned a

school. I had just passed my 20th year. My first 42 school was in the country, eight miles north of Wetumka. It was in a full-blood neighborhood and the family with whom I boarded, could not speak a word of English. I began teaching the children through object lessons and in that way, they learned English words. We had only Indian food, sofka and blue-dumplings and corn bread. Had it not been for the wild game, I would have gone hungrier than I did, but we had Venison, Quail, Wild Turkey and occasionally they killed a hog. The way in which the food was cooked, worried me most. My mother would send me a cake when it was possible. I received \$40 per month salary and was paid every two and a half months. You can imagine with what joy I received my first hundred dollars. I paid eight dollars a month for board, which was the usual price. I roomed with one of the girls in the family. Occasionally the young Indian boys would come by when they had been drinking and scare us almost to death. One night, we all got so frightened, that we left the house and stayed in the field all night. I only taught there one year. The next year I was sent to Arbeka, which was not a town, but a community. I boarded with a good Christian family, named Morrison. They were much more inviting and I had a pleasant time for two years. J. M. Perrymen, was Superintendent of schools at that time. As he seemed to think I was the one to do pioneering school work in isolated districts and as I was always willing to try anything once, he sent me to a place forty miles west of

Eufaula, called Thop-thoo-co. That was also a community<sup>43</sup> and not a post-office, as we had to get our mail at Wetumka and only received it every two or three weeks. That was the hardest place I ever stayed. The family where I boarded were full-bloods and I nearly went crazy for someone with whom I could talk English. I again had to room with one of the girls and when company came, they would put them in our room too. One morning I awoke and saw a pair of mens boots sitting under the other bed. We covered up our heads and kept still. It proved to be the husband of a friend of mine, who was passing through the country. While I was staying there, one Saturday, a white boy driving an ox team, came from across the creek and said that his mother wanted me to go over and spend the day. As I was so lonely for someone that I could talk English with, I decided to go, although he was anything but an attractive person. On the way over, a storm came on and he swore at the oxen and prodded them with a stick. I was thoroughly frightened but could do nothing but go on. His family was about the most degraded white folks I have ever seen but I made the best of it. It rained so much, that the creek got past fording and I had to stay for three days. Then the woman loaned me a cotton checked dress and I tied my clothing around my neck and with the boy, started on horseback to my boarding place. The woman told me that if I would put a little stick between my teeth, my head wouldn't feel dizzy when we crossed the creek. As bad as my boarding house was, I was glad to get

home. At the end of the term, when I went to Okmulgee to attend the Institute, Mr. Perryman was surprised to see <sup>44</sup> me looking so badly. He said he would give me a better place and assigned me to a school, three miles west of Eufaula. I boarded in town and rode horseback each day. That was a fine community and the people were of the highest type of Indians. In all the places I taught, the school houses were log structures and not at all comfortable and I had to walk a mile and a half and two miles. I often had to get my own wood. After teaching that school for a year, they sent me to Coweta Boarding School, where Peter Ewing was Superintendent. I filled the place as Matron and assisted in many other ways, helping with the programs. As I was able to play the piano, I was never at a loss for something to do, as the Indian children, were very fond of music. Sunday afternoons were taken up in singing and I always played for them. In 1895 I was transferred to the Eufaula Boarding School. George Stidham was the Superintendent at that time. On June 25, 1896 I was married to Charles H. Finigan, where he lived and where he died in 1921. Since death I was employed in Social Service work.

Looking over my past work in the territory, it stands out distinctly in my mind that even in the most uncomfortable circumstances, I had the feeling of not being afraid of anything, with the exceptions of a few drunken boys occasionally. I often walked alone to my school, a distance of perhaps two miles, with no thought of danger, something I would not think of doing now. When we lived in Okmulgee,

a terrible small pox epidemic swept through the Creek Nation, many people dying, as it was in the worst form and all my family had it. A lasting impression was made on my childish by seeing those accused of stealing, whipped, which was the punishment imposed by the Creek Government. For the first offense, they were given twenty five lashes on their bare back. For the second offense they were given fifty lashes and for the third offense, they faced firing squad and were shot. The old whipping post stood in the Council House yard.

As I look back, I recall with pleasure, many things connected with my various experiences and all in all, it was a happy time.