

FOSTER, TOM

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W. T. Holland,
Interviewer,
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An Interview with Tom Foster,
Cherokee Indian,
1711 South Olympia, West Tulsa.

I was born near Claremore, July 25, 1875, the son of Jim Foster, almost a full-blood Cherokee, and Louise Chambers Foster, Cherokee.

My grandfather on my mother's side was John Chambers of the same locality. My grandfather was active in the affairs of the Cherokee Nation, serving as councilman and member of the Senate of the Cherokee Nation for years. His home was always open, not only to the Cherokee Indians, but ^{also} to the Delaware and Shawnees. They came to him for advice on legal matters, and used him to effect compromises in matters affecting individuals as well as the nation.

The Osage Tribe, right after the Civil War, caused no little trouble to the Cherokees who were, it seemed, more peaceably inclined. The Osages would travel in bands and raid Cherokee settlements and farms and drive

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off cattle and steal horses. If they were opposed, they would attack the Cherokees. In one of the raids they were fired on by the Cherokees, and some of them killed. So Mother got to such a point that something had to be done. The Osages agreed to a meeting to try to reach some sort of an agreement, and my grandfather was selected to go and meet the Osages before their Chief. Grandpa could speak Osage, Delaware, Shawnee, Choctaw, and of course, Cherokee, so he was the logical one to send.

They met up in the Osage Nation, and discussed matters pro and con, when John Chambers, my grandfather, offered as a peace offering to give the Osage Indians so many cattle and horses. They were short on both, compared with the Cherokees, but this angered the Osage Chief, as he considered it as a payment for the Osages which the Cherokee had recently killed. Of course, the Cherokee didn't intend it that way at all, but the Chief was very angry, and said he considered it

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an insult for the Cherokees to place the same value on the Osages as on cattle and horses, and confusion reigned. The Cherokees beat a hasty retreat before the tom toms began to beat, and blood to flow. However, later on an agreement was reached and the raids ceased.

My Grandma Chambers was a Foreman. My maternal grandma was a Sanders. Grandpa Chambers had several brothers, Henry, Joe, Jimmy, and William, also a sister. Uncle Joe Chambers established the first trading post in that section. That was immediately after the Civil War, and before Claremore was thought of. This store was located at his home about four miles south of where Claremore now is. He got his goods from Chetopa, Kansas, hauled it in a wagon. After the Frisco Railroad came through, Uncle Joe moved his store to Claremore. Uncle Joe's ^{son,} Teece Chambers, opened the first drug store in Claremore. At this time we lived at Verdigris Switch. This was the location of the first school in that section. This was about 1883 or 1884.

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The section boss on the railroad had a cousin in Kansas who was a teacher. He suggested her to our people as a teacher, so communicated with her and she agreed to come. Her name was Mrs. Bass. She had an average of thirty pupils, and received one dollar per month per pupil. She taught terms of five months each year, for about three years. This was a subscription school with tuition paid by the patrons. This school was taught in the section house of the railroad and was at Verdigris Switch, west of Claremore on the Frisco road.

The first court house in that section was located at Kephart Spring six miles northeast of where Claremore now is. The first judge I think was Dempsey Koker. Another early judge was Charley Rogers, and his son Bill Rogers was the last Chief of the Cherokees. He was chief when the allotments were made and signed all deeds allotting the land to various Indians.

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The Cherokee laws were pretty strict and usually enforced. There were two rather noted horse thieves in that section, Cherokee, named Lookback and Cochran. They were captured the first time and given one hundred lashes and turned loose with the proper admonition, but they soon forgot this experience. They stole some more horses and were again caught and this time, one hundred and fifty lashes were administered. It seemed this should have been enough, as they knew the third time meant death, if caught. They, however, pursued their usual course and were again caught. They were brought to this court house at Kephart Spring, duly tried and sentenced to death by hanging. On the day of execution they had to ride to their doom on their coffins. They were hanged to a tree not far from the court house. My grandfather, Jack Foster, served in the Union Army, during the Civil War, as did my Uncle, Ben Foster. Both died from wounds received in action. My grandfather Foster, before entering the army, was a Methodist Cir-

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cuit rider. He first started in this work as an interpreter for Methodist Missionaries sent to the Cherokees, and later took up the work himself, serving until he joined the army.

In that early day each family had its own burial ground. I don't know of any general or public graveyards.