

FOSTER, DORA M.

INTERVIEW

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Field Worker, W. T. Holland,
July 22, 1937.

Interview with Dora M. Foster,
2009 South Olympia,
West Tulsa.

I am one of the many who came into Oklahoma in a covered wagon. We lived in Illinois, where I was born November 7, 1869. My father, Sidney B. Moore, was a native of Illinois. The date of his birth was October 7, 1845.

My mother was Mary E. Riggs before her marriage, and while living in Illinois at the time of her marriage she was a native of middle Tennessee, where she was born April 7, 1847.

My mother was part Cherokee; however, Mother's family, not thinking of ever being able to get an allotment from the Government, had not enrolled or kept up their connection with the Indians but had lived solely with white people. Later on Mother did get up the necessary proof but when it was submitted, although it was not doubted, her claim was refused as having been brought in too late to qualify before the commission.

My maternal grandfather was a large slave owner but, of course, lost all during the Civil War, through which he served in the Confederate Army.

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Our trip took six weeks and in the whole trip we had rain only on one day, and that was only a shower. We left Illinois on October 9, 1879, and reached Arkansas, just over the line from the Choctaw Nation, November 24. We stopped with friends for a few days when we crossed over into Indian Territory, renting some land from a Choctaw Indian named Page.

We had very little with which to keep house as we brought only bedding, clothing and a few cooking utensils. This land had a log house on it, in which we lived for eight years. My father farmed, raised cotton and corn, giving as rental one-third of the corn and one-fourth of all cotton raised.

Life was pleasant there. The Indians were peaceable and good neighbors. My father could step out most any time and get what was needed in the way of fresh meat.

This house was on a hillside in the timber just on the edge of the prairie. I could see great distances from our door, out over the prairie.

Our first schools were subscription schools and were taught in the Fall and Winter months when there was nothing for the children to do on the farm. Going to school was just a part-time business when there was nothing else to do.

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However we learned to read and write and cipher a little but didn't have time to learn a great deal else, but it wasn't considered so important then to get an education. Our first school was at Pecola.

My father was very good with a cradle and was hired by neighbors to cut their wheat and oats. Cradles were the only means of harvesting grain for some time after we came here. Then came the reaper; it cut and dropped the grain in bunches, then men came along, gathered the grain and tied it into bundles with some of the straw.

We left the Choctaw Nation in 1887, going up into the Cherokee Nation into the Flint District. It was here that I was wooed and won by a young man named George Johnson, a Cherokee.

Our marriage was performed according to the custom of the Cherokees. We were married by the clerk at Tablequash. No license was required and I don't know whether a permanent record was kept of such things.

We had one child.

As to records, such as these, my brother has the family Bible which belonged to my grandmother and which contains

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records of births and marriages for a hundred or more years back. My brother Ira Moore lives in a place between Collinsville and Claremore.

In my young womanhood and after I was married, I didn't attend many Indian dances and festivals. Not that the Indians were not orderly and well behaved, for they were, and I can say that most of the trouble in the early days was caused by the "white trash," usually fugitives from justice from other states who came here to escape just punishment. These men caused most of the trouble.

Naturally there would be some disturbances among the Indians, especially when they got hold of some whiskey.

I recall one instance in which Steve Darnell, a Choctaw, shot and killed Jim Fulson, son of Willis Fulson, a highly respected and beloved Baptist preacher. This was indirectly due to a feud of long standing between the Fulson and Darnell families, but as far as the Reverend Mr. Fulson was concerned it had been dropped.

However, Jim Fulson and Steve Darnell were out together and both were drinking when Darnell stopped at his home, got his gun and deliberately shot and killed Jim Fulson.

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Darnell was arrested and tried at the capital of the Choctaw Nation and convicted of first degree murder. The mode of execution then was by shooting. He was taken out of the courthouse, placed in the wagon and compelled to ride to the place of his execution on his own coffin.

When the place of execution was reached, a piece of paper was placed directly over Darnell's heart and the executioner shot him while he sat in his coffin, each arm extended and held by a man on each side of him.

The courthouse was at Scullyville.

The Reverend Mr. Fulson, even though Darnell had killed his son in cold blood, spent the last two days of Darnell's life with him in jail, talking, teaching and singing and praying with him. Mr. Fulson stayed with Darnell night and day. Mr. Fulson was truly a good man. He was a Choctaw, fairly well educated and spoke English well. He was one preacher who could draw larger crowds at home than could visiting preachers.

Aunt Winnie Fulson, wife of the Reverend Mr. Fulson, was well educated and a good and very useful woman. She

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could speak the language of each of the Five Civilized Tribes and was an interpreter. She said Cherokee was hardest for her to learn.

Women rode to church on horseback often, and sidesaddles were used then, together with the riding skirt which was an extra skirt worn over other skirts which came down over one's feet.

Our home life, while simple, was happy. We cooked on the fire in the early days and my mother made our clothes by hand.

After the death of Mr. Johnson, I later met and was married to Tom Foster, also a Cherokee, and to this union four sons and one daughter were born.

During most of our married life, Mr. Foster and I lived near Claremore where we reared our family. We lived at Verdigris Switch. Now at this place lives John Chambers, cousin of my husband and grandson of John Chambers, all early and prominent Cherokee citizens of the Claremore community in the early days.

The home at Verdigris, a double log house in which we used to live and which we built about a hundred years ago, is probably the oldest or at least one of the oldest houses in this section of the state.

One of the oldest burial grounds I know of is near this
mestead.