

FONDREN, JOHN J.

INTERVIEW

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Charline M. Culbertson,
Interviewer.
September 20, 1937.

Interview with John J. Fondren,
Kiowa, Oklahoma.

I was born at Dover, Arkansas, the year of 1860. I came to the Indian Territory, Chickasaw Nation, in 1885 and located five miles east of Colbert on what was called the Joe Potts' place; Joe Potts was a Chickasaw Indian.

My parents were Greenbear and Livennie Fondren. Father was in the Civil War and he was in the Elk Horn and Pea Ridge fight. Father was buried at Dover, Arkansas, while Mother was buried at Kiowa.

I brought my family from Texas to the Territory, where we had been living. Our trip was made in a covered wagon. We didn't travel with other groups but only my immediate family.

I am in possession of an old bread tray and a safe that were brought on this trip. I would say these articles are about seventy years old.

We farmed forty acres of land for two years at the Potts place. Our close neighbors were Joe Potts and

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Taylor Potts, both Chickasaw Indians.

The only school near Colbert was twelve miles away and was called the Bloomfield Academy, a free school for the Indian children. The frame structure building burned down some years ago. There was a Methodist Church at Colbert as well as two or three little stores; also a blacksmith shop where I once let the blacksmith have a wild hog for a bill I owed him.

Our first home in the Territory was a double log house with porch in front; it had shutters, a plank door and the floors were of hewed logs.

We raised lots of geese. I recall having forty-seven at one time.

We sold our cotton at Denison, Texas, making the trip there in a day. Most of our supplies were bought there. We paid a dollar for ten or twelve pounds of sugar, a dollar and a half for a forty-eight pound sack of flour and would buy eight or nine pounds of coffee at a time. Most of our food was what we would raise and we dried lots of fruits. We killed wild turkey, deer and lots

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of squirrel. We bought a few hogs from the Indians. They always sold by age instead of weight.

There was a ferry across Red River called the Colbert Ferry operated by a man of the same name. A few years later a bridge was built there.

Charley Colbert also had a big ranch near the town of Colbert.

The year of 1873 I hauled freight in the Territory before I moved here with my family. I hauled from Fort Smith, Arkansas, to Fort Gibson, which would take about a week. I peddled flour and goods for hides; then sold the hides to a man by the name of Bear.

When I moved from Colbert we bought out a lease at McGie and stayed there one year; then located at Kiowa where I have been ever since. We rented from a Choctaw Indian called Aunt Martha Thompson. The place was located where the Sherrill and Vaughn gin is located today. There were three stores and a drug store here at that time. The stores were operated by Ward & Rowley, Dock

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Haynes and E. A. Robinson; G. E. Culbertson, Sr., was collector. The drug store was operated by Gip Railey. There was a Presbyterian Church where the present Presbyterian Church is today; however, it is not the same building. School was at the church and R. E. Davis and Emma Gill were the school teachers.

We had our Methodist camp meetings at Godfrey Spring. I helped dig the spring out and wall it up. Our minister was Stigall. Few Indians attended. We would camp there for two weeks, some having tents. Each family cooked and ate to themselves. Someone would always bring in fresh meat and divide it about the camp.

I remember a little trouble the Snake Indians had at Brushy at a picnic and had to be settled by some United States marshals. One Indian woman stuck a knife in a white man and killed him. The reason for this trouble was this clan wanted to drive the white man out of the Territory.