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INDEX CARDS

Illinois Station

Cora

Churches--Cherokee Nation

Permits--Cherokee

Game--Cherokee Nation

Payments--Cherokee

Garfield

Fort Gibson

Webbers Falls

Mercantile establishments--Cherokee Nation

Freightings--Indian Territory

Ferries--Arkansas River

Steamboats--Arkansas River

Ranching--Cherokee Nation

Outlaws--Cherokee Nation

Outlaws--Cook Gang

Law enforcement--Cherokee

INTERVIEW WITH ALBERT KING BERRY
505 North "E" Street, Muskogee
by
Harry L. Runyan, Field Worker

Mr. Albert King Berry was born at Huntsville, Arkansas, March 25, 1871.

His father, Albert K. Berry, was born at Huntsville, Arkansas, March 23, 1844.

His mother, Surian Jay, was born at Huntsville, Arkansas, March 12, 1849.

His mother's parents were immigrants from Tennessee.

We moved to Fort Smith, Arkansas, in 1880. We moved in wagons and it took us three days to make the trip.

While crossing the Boston Mountains, we stopped at a log house to spend the night. The man who lived there was a trapper. We had all the bear and deer meat we wanted for supper and for breakfast we had wild turkey.

After we settled at Fort Smith I attended the Bell Point School.

Father went to work for the Iron Mountain Railroad.

Later I went to Cabin Creek, Arkansas, and learned the printing business. I worked for a Printing Office at Huntsville, Arkansas, for five years. I was paid \$5.00 per month salary and was given my board and room.

We moved to Illinois Station, which is now known as Gore, Oklahoma, in 1887. At the time we moved to Illinois Station my father was a missionary. He brought two cars of lumber to that place and built the first church, which was the Methodist. The church was finished in 1888 and he was made pastor.

I forded the Arkansas River to Webbers Falls on January 1, 1888 and went to work for R. E. Blackstone.

This business was later moved to Illinois Station and was known as Blackstone and Hays.

Other business buildings at Webbers Falls at this time were McDaniel Hotel, Lincoln and Campbell Mercantile and the Blackstone Grist Mill.

From Illinois Station to the Illinois River was at that time solid timber. I have shot deer and turkey where the depot now stands.

Our main store bought hides and fur. I bought ten otter and four beaver hides from Sam Jumper. They were the last otter and beaver hides sold at Illinois Station. I gave Mr. Jumper five dollars for each hide and sold them for ten dollars each to Sam Sandonhiver [Sandheimer]?, who was buying hides for his father who shipped them to Germany.

During the fall and winter we handled fresh deer meat; this sold for \$1.25 a quarter, Wild turkeys, dressed, sold for twenty-five cents.

I have seen as many as forty deer in a herd many times, and it was nothing unusual to see three hundred turkeys in a drove. I have gone hunting a lot of times on Black Gum Mountain, which was then known as the hunters paradise.

At this time if a white man wanted to work he had to pay the Cherokee Nation \$1.25 each quarter. This fee was charged a white man to work in the Cherokee Nation.

Just before the Cherokee Strip payment Blackstone and Hays let the Indians have \$50,000 credit on the strength of the payment.

I came to Muskogee and was made a Notary Public. Blackstone and Hays then sent me to Garfield in 1890 to attend the payment and collect from the Indians the amount due them. Each Indian recieved \$13.90; I think that was the gross payment.

Before I left Garfield there were about one hundred men standing around mother Alberty's boarding house and most of them wore six shooters. Just to play a joke on the U. S. Marshal one of the boys fired his gun. In order to find

the guilty party the marshal had to smell of each gun for fresh burned powder. He at last found the one who fired the shot and for punishment he took the gun away from him and would not allow him to wear it again.

While at Garfield I had collected a large sum of money. I was afraid of being fobbed on my way back to Gore, so I placed all the big bills in my socks and boots. I had the silver in a canvas sack and had the sack in a leather satchel; I then hooked the satchel over my saddle horn.

I had company to the mountains and Beaver Bend and another friend accompanied me to the Illinois River. On my way from the river to Illinois Station, two men on horses took after me. It was at night and I could not identify the men. During the chase my money sack in the satchel burst. It was quite funny; the silver money rattled so loudly it sounded like cow bells ringing; however, I beat the robbers to town and delivered the money safely.

The payment was made by Kale Starr, who was Treasurer, and Guy Ebberts, who was deputy. There was about six million dollars in currency. It was hauled from place to place in small iron safes. The safes were transported in wagons and guarded by one hundred men. In this payment each member

of the family drew \$265.70.

Blackstone and Hays had been accumulating bills on the Indians for three years. I assisted Blackstone in collecting the money and also assisted in the payment at Fort Gibson. The payment was made in the old stone barracks. We stayed at the old hospital operated by Dick Walker; we stayed in one room and slept two to the bed. We placed beds against the doors so that no one could break in and rob us. Blackstone and Hays sold several car loads of mules while there.

I later covered all the territory between Little Green Leaf Creek and Big Vian Creek, collecting from the Indians. Money was plentiful at that time; almost every one carried \$100.00 bills around in his pockets. Blackstone and Hays also sold several car loads of mules and wagons in that section. Fort Gibson was headquarters for Illinois district and Webbers Falls was headquarters for the Canadian district. Blackstone and Hays had \$50,000 on the books and collected \$49,500.

Hays later moved back to Webbers Falls in 1895 and opened the largest mercantile store in this country. It was owned by O. L. and J. E. Hays. They employed sixteen clerks.

All goods that came by rail was unloaded at Gore and hauled by wagon to Webbers Falls. They crossed the Arkansas River by ferry. The ferry was woned and operated by Lynch and Campbell. Lynch owned the west side and Campbell owned the east side. The ferry at that time was pushed across the river by using long poles; they then ran it on a cable; and later it was operated by steam.

During the summer the river was fordable. In the winter and spring when there was plenty of water, most of the merchandise was transported by water aboard the Mary D, piloted by Captain Blackely. Another boat that hauled freight was the Jennie Mae. The boats at that time loaded and unloaded freight just behind where the jail is now located in Webbers Falls. The boats on their return trip to Fort Smith hauled such freight as cotton, corn and seeds. A boat was loaded at Webbers Falls with 5,000 bushels of corn. When she started under the turn of draw bridge at Van Buren, in some way she hit the pier, breaking in two and sank with the corn.

When the river got low the boats landed at the mouth of Illinois river and the merchandise was then hauled on to Webbers Falls by wagon.

I stayed with Hays until I got married, September 2, 1900.

Married Florence Burke, daughter of D. H. and Fannie Burke of Webbers Falls, Oklahoma. Mrs. Burke came over the Trail of Tears from Tennessee; made the trip horse back. Uncle Henry Ebbert and Margaret Ebbert attended our wedding. They brought two candle-sticks that were used by Governor Sam Sevier, first Governor from Tennessee. The family used the candles at each marriage and death. Our children were named: George E. Berry, now pastor of Methodist Church at Clayton, New Mexico; and Albert K., Jr., Violet, Florence, Lucile, Susian, Vorgan, Helen, and Kathrin, all of Muskogee.

When allotments were made we located near McClain, Oklahoma. We had three allotments. We did very little farming; our main business was raising cattle. We stacked and baled lots of hay each fall. My father-in-law had several large stacks of hay to feed his cattle during the winter months. Some one was stealing his hay. He placed a hired man on watch and the night of January 29, 1902, the guard reported two wagons going toward the hay stacks. My father-in-law, Dr. Burke, tow hired man and myself saddled our horses and by making a wide circle and riding fast we beat them to the hay stack. We hid our horses and ourselves. When they reached the hay the man got out. When they got out we ordered them

to throw up their hands. Instead they started firing at us and running. A half-breed Mexican by the name of Jim McDonald ran across the meadow and dropped down on a knoll. I followed and we both began firing at the same time. We were both shot during the fight. He died in a short while. About the same time I brought him down, a 45 slug from his pistol went through my neck. I then walked back to where Dr. Burke stood and said, "Dr. Burke I am shot," and then collapsed. Before the battle with McDonald, I fired ten or twelve shots at a man who was getting in one of the wagons. The sign of blood showed I must have hit him several times.

There was an organization of about one hundred members known as the A.H.T.A. (Anti-Horse Thief Association)

The members organized and picked up the trail which was very easily followed by blood stains. They trailed them as far as Red River; there they had to give up the chase. After the chase was waded, members of the A.H.T.A. returned and burned the homes, furniture, and what other property the thieves owned. Dave Adams, U. S. marshal at Muskogee, Oklahoma, came out and seemed to be well pleased with the way things were handled.

In 1890, a white man who was a relative of the Governor

of Georgia, (would not give his name) was arrested by the Cherokee Indian Police and charged with stealing hogs. He was later tried, found guilty, and started to prison at Tahlequah. A short time later he escaped. He had no clothing except the stripes that he was wearing when he escaped. He found an old brown duck coat, discarding the prison stripes; he wore the coat by using the sleeves for pants legs, and wrapping the coat around his body. He walked from Tahlequah to Illinois Station. He arrived at night. His shoes were almost worn off his feet. He had been walking in the snow most of the night. Knowing his family as I did, and not thinking him guilty of the charge, I took him to the Hays store, gave him some heavy underwear, shoes, socks, hat, jumper suit and a jacket, then bade him good bye and good luck. At that time the Bill Cook gang were robbing trains, and the U. S. marshals and special agents on Railroads were trying to locate them. They thought they were hiding on the Illinois River. The next day about sun-up two men entered the Hays store and bought five or six boxes of 45 and 44 shells. About three that evening a special agent informed us an attempt had been made to rob the town of Braggs and that five of the bandits had been killed. I went to

Briggs on the evening train. When I arrived at Briggs, the dead men were lying on the station platform. The first two I saw were the men I had sold the ammunition to that morning. The only one I personally knew was Sam McWilliams, known as the Verdigris Kid.

When Uncle Bud went to Tahlequah to capture the Christy boys they came through Illinois Station and stopped at the Hays store. They were driving two wagons. There were twenty men in the posse, most of whom were horse back. I sold Uncle Bud corn and hay for the horses, also sold him the dynamite he used to blow up the Cook boys' stronghold.