

GARDNER, ELBA COLBERT SHARP.

INTERVIEW.

13495.

Hazel B. Greene
Journalist,
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An Interview With Elba Colbert Sharp
Gardner, Antlers, Oklahoma.
200 West Adams St

I was born in 1867 at Hickory Grove farm, one mile south of Nelson in the Choctaw Nation in Indian Territory. My father, George W. Colbert was born in Mississippi and is buried in the city cemetery at Antlers. My mother, Elizabeth Sorrels-Colbert, was born in Fort Smith, Arkansas and is buried about five miles west of Nelson in the old cemetery of the Samuel A. Colbert family.

My father was about eight years old when he came with his parents to the Indian Territory, but he never did tell us anything about their trip. I have often wondered about that since I have been grown, and thought perhaps it was because he was so young that he had just dismissed it from his mind. Neither did my grandparents ever talk about the trip to us children. I don't know exactly how much Indian I am, but I imagine about an eighth. And it is a mixture of Chickasaw and Choctaw. I am enrolled as a Choctaw and my sister is enrolled as a Chickasaw. But I have never known just what degree of each blood we have.

GARDNER, ELBA COLBERT SHARP.

INTERVIEW.

13495.

-2-

My grandfather, Samuel A. Colbert settled about five miles west of what is now known as Nelson. Nelson was then called Caffery Station and was on the stage route from Fort Smith, Arkansas, through the Indian Territory and on South, I don't know how far. But there must not have been a post office there, because we got our mail at Goodland, which was several miles southeast of our place, and we were just a mile south of Caffery Station. Still it looks like there should have been a post office at a stage coach station, yet the way I remember it, Nelson was established as a post office about 1880 and named for Colonel Coleman Nelson who owned a home and store at that place, and I believe too, that the Goodland post office was at Governor LeFlore's place before it was ever at the home of Silas Bacon, because Silas Bacon was such a young man then. He was born about 1862. I used to see him when I would go with my father to District Court at Goodland, when I was a little girl, around twelve or thirteen years old. I would go with my father to make coffee for him. He would take his lunch and he wanted hot coffee. I would make it, and serve it to

GARDNER, ELBA COLBERT SHARP.

INTERVIEW.

13495.

-3-

crowds of the Choctaws who were there, and they would talk about me in Choctaw all the time I was making and serving the coffee and I could not understand a word they said. Pa could speak Choctaw, but he was grown before he learned it. His parents would talk Choctaw when they didn't want the children to know what they were talking about, but would not teach it to their children. They wanted them to speak only English. I never listened to the court at Goodland, it was not interesting to me, I just sat out in the hack and waited for Pa to get ready to go home. I never saw an execution or a whipping; I never wanted to see any. Pa said he saw one man whipped and never wanted to see another.

Our old home one mile south of Nelson was built before I was born. Pa bought it from a man of the name of Ormsby. He might have had it built, and it may be seventy five years old. I understand that it is standing. I remember the big chimneys at either end, made of native stone. People named their homes then and we named ours "Hickory Grove". Pa farmed and raised stock and didn't

GARDNER, ELBA COLBERT SHARP.

INTERVIEW.

13495.

-4-

try to run the affairs of the Nation. Of course he was interested in tribal affairs, but not to the extent of taking an active part in them. Our place was on the stage route, and I can remember seeing covered wagons going past on the route, then about the time I was grown Pa fenced across it and travel was turned another way.

I never went to dances, we sometimes went to play parties and I played "Weavley Wheat" a few times until Mother found it out, then she put a stop to my going to play parties. "Weavely Wheat" was just a figure of the square dance, and Mother was very religious. No playing cards were ever allowed in our home.

My mother came to the Indian Territory from up near Fort Smith, Arkansas, with some missionaries of the name of McAlister. She and another young lady named Ellen Steele. I guess they were both in their twenties. They were white girls and came out here to teach in the Indian schools. Mother said that they came in a two horse buggy or hack. That was in about 1854 or '56. There were a good many outlaws here then, and the young ladies came down through the mountains some place close to Tishomingo.

GARDNER, ELBA COLBERT SHARP.

INTERVIEW.

13495.

-5-

called "The Narrows". It was a beautiful place and they stopped for lunch and were all stirring around there admiring the scenery, and when they got ready to start again they made the discovery that their suitcases, or at least their luggage had been stolen. It had been tied on the back of the buggies with ropes. And none of them had seen it done, yet it was done right there in the Narrows. They were told afterward that it was quite common for travelers to be held up and robbed right there and that they were lucky not to have been robbed of their money. I think my mother really made history, because of the good that she did. She was truly a Christian woman. She was a splendid seamstress and she sewed and taught in the primary department of a boys' school at Tishomingo. It was a Boys' Manual Training School. I believe it was called the Chickasaw Manual Training School for Boys. Mother could make anything, even nice suits for men and boys.

In those days, the wealthy Chickasaws and Choctaws employed governesses for their children. They usually

GARDNER, ELBA COLBERT SHARP.

INTERVIEW.

13495.

-6-

went to the Government schools and made their selections. So my grandfather, Samuel A. Colbert, went to that school at Tishomingo and selected Mother for a governess for a while for his children. He built a little log school house out close to his and named it The Colbert Institute. Of course he paid Mother a regular salary and I imagine others who attended paid her something too. Many who became notables or the parents of notables went to school to her. One pupil I recall was the mother of Judge Thomas Hunter. Her name was Tennessee Hisner. They had Sunday School and church in that tiny building on Sunday. My father was then going to school in Holly Springs, Mississippi, and when he returned from there, I imagine was the time when the romance began and George W. Colbert and Elizabeth Sorrels who later became my parents got married and Pa bought the place where I have told you I was born.

Mother taught only at home after she married. She taught me to the Second Reader before we went to Atoka to school. It was forty miles to Atoka, so she just

GARDNER, ELBA COLBERT SHARP.

INTERVIEW.

13495.

-7-

took us girls and went over there and stayed with us while we attended two terms, then she went home and left us there to board the next year. Then she sent us to Paris, Texas, to common school for a year. It was forty miles to Paris too, from our place. I attended Mrs. Witherspoon's Private School for girls awhile, then attended Rock Academy at Wapanucka three terms. Mrs. Robert L. Owen was my first music teacher. She was Miss Daisy Hester then in 1883. We used to have spelling matches. I was a good speller, and reader, but never knew much else. I was nearly grown before I knew that Mother was a Presbyterian. She taught in the Methodist Sunday School at Nelson and in the absence of the regular Superintendent, she acted as Superintendent. We used to go to Nelson Chapel to church and Sunday School. It was about a half a mile west of the present depot at Antlers. Colonel Nelson bought and paid for that building and then turned it over to the Methodists, Conference was held in 1886. I was there. We always attended camp meetings all over the country, and always went with well filled baskets.

GARDNER, ELBA COLBERT SHARP.

INTERVIEW.

13495.

-8-

We fed many preachers too. We had a big place and people made it a point to stop at our house where they were welcome. Of course we fed many other folks too. I remember one old minister name Myat. When he would baptize a Choctaw baby and it had no name he would name it Myat. Grandfather Colbert had a maiden sister named Malcie Colbert. She was a physician. She was probably educated in the schools of Mississippi. After she died there was no doctor within forty miles. There were some doctors at Atoka, and at Paris, Texas, and Dr. J. H. Miller came to this country and married one of the Roebuck girls and located on Roebuck Lake. We used to send for Dr. Hooks at Paris before Dr. Miller came here. Spencer Academy was only a mile and a half away from us and we used to go over there to church. O. P. Stark was the first Superintendent whom I knew. He had a daughter named Helen who became Mrs. R. J. Murphy of Paris, Texas. Then Mr. Skimmerhorn was the next one I knew.

The railroad through here from Fort Smith to Paris, Texas, was completed in June 1887 and the town of Antlers

GARDNER, ELBA COLBERT SHARP.

INTERVIEW.

13495.

-9-

was started and we moved here. We built a big frame house on the block where the post office is now; we had the entire block at first and many big oak trees around in our big yard, so we named our place Oak Hall. We never dreamed that we would be crowded and could not have the entire block always, until the town kept growing and growing, then people began wanting to board with us, and we took them in. I remember a friend of ours spent the night there once and he was fussing about the Choctaw girls not doing any public work as he thought they should. That friend of ours was named George Harkins, and I believe he represented the Choctaw people in Congress. Any way he had a lot of influence and he suggested that he have me appointed postmistress for the new town. I told him that Pa would never let me serve and that it would be useless to get the appointment for me but he did get the appointment for me. I received it in July or August 1887 and my father would never let me serve. He compelled me to resign in favor of William Gardner. And here is one thing I want corrected. Some time ago I saw an article in the Chronicles of Oklahoma in which they said I was the

GARDNER, ELBA COLBERT SHARP.

INTERVIEW.

13495.

-10-

postmistress at Antlers, but they had my name as Ella Colbert, when in reality it is Elba.

After we moved to Antlers Mother's health got bad and she went up to Mansfield, Arkansas, to Dr. Sorrels who was a cousin of hers, thinking that maybe he could help her, but she died in a few weeks after going up there and was brought back to the old Colbert home and laid away in the family burial ground five miles west of Nelson. The houses were burned long ago and there is nothing there now except the tombstones in the cemetery, to show that there had ever been any body living around there. That was the only trip she made back home after she came out here, a girl, as a missionary among the Indians. Grandfather Colbert's old papers were packed in a trunk and brought to Antlers and I don't know what ever became of them.